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Prairie School influence

An architectural movement from early last century helped determine the design of this remodeled kitchen in a 1950s rambler-style house

Each decade is defined by particular design trends, and this applies to architecture as much as fashion. And for many new homes in North America in the '50s, it was rambler-style architecture that prevailed.

Influenced by the Prairie School of architects, the rambler style also referenced the work of renowned architect Frank Lloyd Wright.

Architect Tom Ellison,

the co-designer of this home remodeling project, says the style is characterized by its strong horizontality.

"Houses are typically long and low, with large overhangs," he says. "As this house was built to that style in the '50s, it made sense to ensure the remodeling was in keeping with the architecture."

Ellison says the owners wanted to extend their kitchen

and family living area and open these up to a landscaped yard at the rear of the house.

"The original house had little connection with the outdoors. Extending the room by five to six feet provided plenty of space for large glass doors and a new sitting area – a bird-watching nook, as the owners refer to it."

The owners' antique and heirloom dining table and

stools and a large ancestral Chinese painting were further design influences.

"These items had not been together in the original house," says Ellison. "The remodeling project provided an opportunity to put them all together and to really change the feel of the space."

Perimeter cabinets in clear-finished cherry are a similar color to the furniture. But their



style is a distinct nod to the Prairie School of architects.

"In terms of styling, it was a simple period, so we wanted to limit the ornamentation," says the architect. "We thought this was a more appropriate design response than introducing decorative elements from another period. There is already enough happening with the paneling."

A 4in-deep horizontal trim



Facing page: An heirloom Chinese dining table and stools and an antique Chinese painting create the focal point of this remodeled kitchen, which was designed by architects Tom Ellison and Andrea Swan.

Above: The clear-finished cherry cabinetry is reminiscent of the Prairie School of architecture, which was a design influence for the '50s house.

Left: There is a seamless flow between living and dining areas.



Above: A horizontal trim band wraps around the room just below the ceiling. The band helps to contain the room visually, creating a sense of intimacy. New stained-oak floorboards match the flooring in the rest of the house.

Facing page: To provide a highly functional kitchen, lower cabinets are equipped with the latest drawer technology. The Atlantis granite sink countertop incorporates a sink with an integral draining surface.

band wraps around the room above the cabinets, windows and doors.

"Frank Lloyd Wright said that a horizontal line was the hallmark of domesticity," says Ellison. "And there is no doubt it has a calming effect."

A long island features curved ends, which provide a furniture look when viewed through the doorway opposite. The curves also help to visually

soften the more angular lines of the perimeter cabinets.

As a key work area, the island is designed to ensure the owners can interact with family and friends while preparing meals.

"A galley-style kitchen is a simple arrangement, but it is very conducive to socializing," says Ellison.

The majority of the storage is provided by two narrow

pantries on one side of the kitchen, and by the lower cabinets. Ellison says there is a strong move away from upper cabinet storage.

"With the sophisticated, high-tech nature of modern drawer systems, lower cabinets can be much more user-friendly."

In this kitchen, the lower cabinets accommodate the heavy crockery items, pans and



ovenware, and incorporate a slide-out shelf for a mixer. The upper cabinets are reserved for glassware.

A shelf extends from the upper cabinets across the window. Ellison says this was designed to enhance the indoor-outdoor connection.

"The display shelf was a way to inject a little energy into the design – it helps to pull the windows into the kitchen."

The cabinetry is further defined by the Atlantis granite countertops and backsplash. The granite was chosen to complement the inset stone on the antique Chinese dining table. Its distinctive graining also creates a sense of movement, which helps to enliven the space.

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Architect: Tom Ellison AIA with Andrea Swan, TEA2 Architects (Minneapolis, MN)

Builder and kitchen manufacturer: J Kraemer & Sons

Cabinetry: Clear-finished cherry

Countertops and backsplash: Atlantis granite from Tab India

Flooring: Solid oak

Doors and windows: Marvin Windows

Wallcoverings: Cherry paneling

Sink: Elkay Avado

Faucets: Elkay

Oven, cooktop and ventilation: Wolf

Refrigeration: Sub-Zero

Microwave: Sharp

Dishwasher: Miele

Waste disposal: InSinkErator

Kitchen furniture: Chinese heirloom

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