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# LifeStyle

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## Cambridge historic landmark gets modern kitchen



PHOTOS BY ERIC ROTH

**By Jaci Conry** | GLOBE CORRESPONDENT APRIL 13, 2015

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For its architectural hallmarks of the German Bauhaus-inspired International Style, the Garrett Birkhoff House is a designated historic landmark. Built in 1940 for Harvard mathematics professor Garrett Birkhoff, the Cambridge home was designed by a fellow Harvard professor, architect Walter Boegner. Simple and concise, the two-story flat-

roofed structure is clad with red brick and salvaged fieldstone; prefabricated steel ribbon windows — placed with simple punched openings in the masonry — have no ornamentation. Rooms are modest, clean-lined, and flow into one another.

In keeping with the guidelines of the Cambridge Historical Commission, original architectural features must be preserved. “There couldn’t be any alteration to the exterior,” says Barney Maier, an architect with Feinmann, the design/build firm the current owners contacted after they moved in.

The kitchen was small and decades out of date. While the owners revered the home’s origins, a modern kitchen with an easy flow was important. “The idea was to modernize the kitchen by playing off Bauhaus basics,” says Maier. To add square footage to the small original kitchen, space was taken from an adjacent study that was awkward and poorly lit.

“We worked to preserve the home’s sense of horizontality, which is a hallmark of International Style,” says Maier, who repeated and emphasized the horizontal planes in the home’s architecture in the new kitchen with an innovative twist, from the horizontal stacked tile woodwork and muted color scheme to the hidden pocket door to the 21st-century espresso bar.

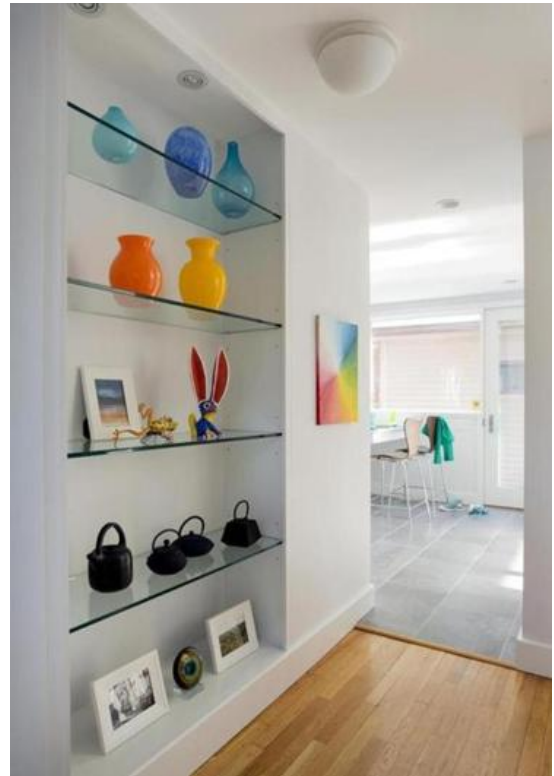
“A hallmark of Bauhaus was the stripping away of decorative motifs and the decadence of other cultures. Here, we tried to capture the spirit of plain un-adornment,” says Maier. While the space is spare and minimal it has a wonderfully inviting light-filled, fresh appeal.



**Broad view of kitchen** The backsplash, made of textured bright gray stone tiles, complements the sheen of the cabinetry and the large darker gray floor tiles. Counters are coarse Carrara Zodiaq quartz. Rather than go with a large central island, which would have made the room feel too crowded, Maier and the homeowners opted to install a custom peninsula that offers space for up to five people to dine.

**Kitchen detail** Since windows run along most of the kitchen's main wall, there was little opportunity for upper cabinets. An array of white drawer lower cabinets with stainless steel pulls provide most of the room's storage. The two upper cabinets reflect the horizontal drawers, utilizing upward pull doors. The large refrigerator and new espresso station are encased in dark wood, providing a striking, distinct appeal from the room's dominant white scheme.

**Shelf detail** When the study was removed to enlarge the kitchen, a hallway became available. Maier created a niche in the wall with glass shelves and lighting to showcase some of the homeowners' colorful vessels and other collectibles. "We could have put in a storage closet or a pantry," says Maier. "But since this is an area people walk past when they come through the formal entry on the way to the kitchen, it seemed like a nice opportunity to put in something appealing to look at."



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