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Service STATION

In a 1920s house, J.E. Schram Architect transformed the historic service wing into a hardworking kitchen with a breakfast room and scullery.

By Kiley Jacques

Right A noteworthy detail is the use of glazed Norman brick as the backsplash on the exterior (brick) wall. The kitchen floor is finished in antique black and white marble squares.

AT A TIME when reconfiguring structural components to contemporize old houses is common practice, it is refreshing to see design born of constraint. Such is the case with this 1927 Federal Revival–style house in Baltimore's historic Kernewood neighborhood—one of architect Pleasants Pennington's (1889–1942) residential commissions. With original house plans in hand, architect Everett Schram set about modernizing the century-old servants' wing for homeowners who love to cook—with ample room for company in the kitchen.

BIG BARRIERS Schram faced a long-outdated wing that included a servants' kitchen, a butler's pantry, and a walk-in silver safe. The former staff dining room had been converted to a laundry, while another empty space would become the mudroom. A cold-storage room, with its concrete floor and concrete-block walls, retained the slate shelves and hefty brackets that once held ice blocks.

Three major structural elements had to remain in place. The red-brick chimney for the original cookstove vented a basement incinerator and furnace, as well as an antique linen steamer "as long as a Chevy Suburban," as Schram describes it. The flues serving each are inside the chimney, so it needed to stay. The walk-in silver safe was immovable and the servants' stair, which stands in the center of the wing, could not be relocated while continuing to serve all three floors. Together, these constraints dictated the new layout.

MOVES TO MODERNIZE The floor plan remained primarily intact, but a few key moves were made to create a new breakfast room. One wall of the cold-storage room was removed to open the space to the kitchen. The door connecting the cold-

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Above The kitchen connects through pocket doors to the butler's pantry, which leads into the dining room.
Opposite The former cold-storage room became a breakfast room, tied to the architecture with a groin-vault ceiling and a classical window.

storage room to the mudroom, through which ice would have been delivered, was closed off except for a shallow cavity housing a broom closet. The small, square room was given a plastered groin-vault ceiling to make it feel part of the original architecture. Schram reworked an east-facing bay to duplicate an existing aperture and paneling in the adjacent mudroom. In Federal style, symmetrical Palladian-inspired windows now feature prominently on the east elevation.

The door connecting the kitchen to the butler's pantry was moved to suit the cabinetry layout as well as block the long view of the working space from the dining room. The connection was relocated to the northeast corner, and Schram specified two doors with Harmon hinges, which enabled millworkers to build a pocketed opening to accept and hide the doors.

In the butler's pantry, located off the dining room, half of the original cabinetry was retained. To add modern amenities including wine storage, a beverage center with an ice maker, and a dishwasher, some original cabinets were replaced with exact replicas custom built to hide small appliances. Original hardware was removed, restored, and used on the new cabinets; the uppers were reconfigured.

The pantry's soapstone backsplash is a solid slab and integral to the sink. "I didn't want a change of plane from the backsplash into the sink," says Schram. "Much to the fabricator's chagrin, I wanted it done like it would have been in the 1920s. We really wanted the butler's pantry to look like it had never been touched, other than changing the paint color," he adds, noting Fenwick & Tilbrook's Aurora Sky on the cabinet exteriors and Red Squirrel on the interiors. For that reason, the original lighting in this room was refurbished. Elsewhere, new lighting was selected for its period appearance.

The unique kitchen is the result of details carefully designed for aesthetics and function. A slab of soapstone under the range and raised base cabinets subtly accommodate the owner's height; a mix of cabinet styles and a groin-vaulted ceiling tie the new spaces to existing elements of the 1927 house.

KITCHEN CONSTRUCTION To make the kitchen feel authentic, Schram specified an industrial-style range hood in stainless steel with unlacquered brass strapping and riveting to match the CornuFé stove from La Cornue. The hood is much larger than the range. According to Schram, the range and hood would have been built this way historically, though they would have been enameled black. The two-inch-thick slab of soapstone beneath the oven, along with the lower cabinets, were custom built to make the six-foot-eight homeowner comfortable. The dishwasher is built up the same way; flush toe kicks throughout disguise this accommodation.

The homeowners had grown fond of the existing range's built-in salamander, which provides intense, top-down radiant heat; they wanted that feature in the new stove. Because salamanders are no longer integrated into ranges, independent exhaust ventilation was required. The construction also needed to be fireproof. The range surround comprises three walls of solid Bardiglio marble. To satisfy code, the stone had to meet the base of the wood trim. "I didn't want to interrupt the millwork with the chunky edge of the stone," Schram explains. The stone's nosing bevels back into the millwork so the full thickness of the slab protects the wood; the two materials meet at a mitered edge with a 3/16-inch reveal at the stone. "Everyone collaborated to determine how

Above Recalling early-20th-century kitchen practices, an extra-wide hood accompanies the La Cornue range. The built-in salamander has its own venting. ***Below*** Slate shelves found in the original cold-storage room were used over the sink. ***Right*** The sink faucet in the butler's pantry is the refurbished original.

to meet code in the most beautiful, subtle way possible," Schram explains.

Glazed-clay Norman brick with mitered edges was used on the exterior wall. "It's like we glazed the backside of the brick cladding," says Schram of the effect. The kitchen floor is finished in antique black and white marble squares. The green-hued cabinets in Farrow & Ball French Grey mimic millwork elsewhere in the house. They are intended to look original, whereas the walnut cabinets and stainless steel are intentionally contemporary. Light is diffused through antique Holophane globes on the pendants.

HARDWORKING AND HIDDEN Originally the servants' dining room, the scullery had been converted to a laundry room. The room is a fixed rectangle; two of its wood-planked walls are masonry, one wall backs the basement and second floor stair, and the fourth backs the walk-in silver safe. The footprint could not change.

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Left The homeowners wanted a kitchen with more display cabinetry. The scullery became the place to store items they preferred to keep out of sight. ***Below*** In the mudroom, old tiles that were likely part of a 1990s renovation were removed and the concrete floor polished. All moldings, doors, and windows were retained.

The antique cupboard came out of the original kitchen. It was relocated to the scullery and built into the wall—electrical circuits were run through it. "It looks like furniture, but it is now cabinetry," Schram says, noting the warmth it brings to a space of otherwise all-white shelving.

Housing extra appliances and serving ware, the scullery is the back-of-house support room. With a brass sink and vases on open shelving, it's also a space for arranging flowers from the cutting garden. "There was no need to hide anything because the room itself is so hidden," Schram says of this room at the back of the house.

A NEW CHAPTER The owners of this early-20th-century home are the third family to occupy it. Two previous generations lived a lifestyle that included paid help. "They didn't use a kitchen the way people do now," Schram notes. Today's residents, on the other hand, occupy the storied wing in a manner that honors its past while positioning it firmly in the 21st century. FOR RESOURCES, SEE PAGE 118.

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