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RESIDENTIAL DESIGN

FOR ARCHITECTS AND BUILDERS
OF DISTINCTIVE HOMES

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Urban Code



Bridging the Past

SOUTHBORO, MASSACHUSETTS
FLAVIN ARCHITECTS

In looking for ideas about how to expand their classic New England farmhouse, these owners were charmed by examples they'd seen in some of Australia's urban neighborhoods. In Sydney and Melbourne, for example, historic preservation codes often require that a home's façade be preserved when planning a renovation, and an unmistakably modern volume is built behind it. Struck by the amount of innovation

and freedom this approach allowed, they hired Flavin Architects to design a two-story addition with its own presence and a quiet connection to the 1880s house. “We love when a client is open for the adventure of it,” says Colin Flavin, AIA. “If you do have a beautiful old home, respect it and don’t try to copy it.”

“They were very much design aficionados,” he adds. “They didn’t give us much direction architecturally, just to do something very creative.” The resulting design encompasses 878 square feet that includes a kitchen on the first floor and a primary suite above it. Not only was the existing house virtually unchanged, but so was the site. Raising the addition on two concrete piers allowed the contours of the slope to remain undisturbed while reinforcing the distinction between old and new. A short bridge between the two structures gives the impression that you could pull them apart and they could work on their own, Colin says.





Above: A new dining room claims space in the former kitchen/dining area. The shiplap walls are original to the 1880s house. Right: The bridge from old to new provides a view of the addition's exterior.

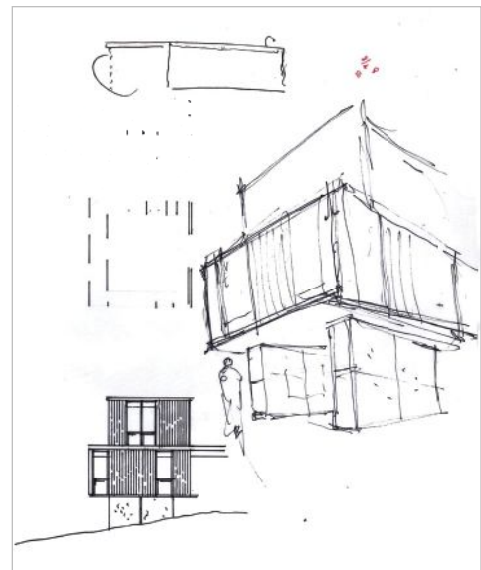


Slatted Wrap

Some deft reshuffling resulted in a flow that feels reassuringly intuitive. The bulk of the old kitchen had extended across the back wall, where the bridge now enters the house. After the cabinetry was removed, part of the old kitchen became a dining room that retains the original shiplap walls. The remaining space was transformed as an office with two new windows—the only change to the house's exterior.

Of course, the big advantage in creating a virtually standalone structure is the ability to get sunlight on all four sides. Perched atop the piers, the addition rests on two steel beams that taper at the ends as the loads decrease with the cantilever. To create a lightweight feeling, the second story steps in, as does the bridge, narrowing to fit under the eaves on the old home's gable end.

True to plan, the character of the farmhouse and addition couldn't be more different. The addition is wrapped in vertical, dark-stained mahogany slats—a riff on the farmhouse's horizontal board and batten siding. Colin applied the slats as a rainscreen system, providing a contrast to the dark gray, painted cement spandrel panels that





Walnut slats over glass on the kitchen island screen dishware from full view and reference the exterior rainscreen system. Back-painted spandrel glass backdrops the exhaust hood, whose linearity is mirrored in the island pendant.

extend the verticality of the windows. “It’s thematic,” he says. “We alternated the slats with windows for interest and to align with the functionality of the house. We have a spandrel panel above and below the windows, but the rainscreen runs full height, with copper flashing at the base.” The slats extend several feet past the corners at the rear, which has the effect of elongating the new volume and screening the interior from view of the road.

Upstairs, Downstairs

Similar themes show up inside. A view from the bridge underscores that cohesion. “There is a wonderful moment on the bridge where you are emerging from the old house and get an exterior view of the addition,” says Colin. “On



the western side, the screen starts to open up as you look straight on, almost dematerializing the building as it moves out into nature.” A paperbark maple planted near the bridge marks the nexus of old and new.

That screen motif reappears on the kitchen island, a repository for dishware, where walnut slats over glass keep the dishes visible without being on full display. The cabinetry is also walnut; paired with 7-inch riftsawn and quartersawn white oak floors and

dark countertops made of sintered stone with a pebble finish, the material palette produces a crisp, warm feeling. “The clients wanted a super functional kitchen and were comfortable without having upper cabinets, which allows for clean lines and all this glass with views of the mixed forest,” says Colin. On the west side, the countertop drops to table height and turns the glassy corner. For these passionate cooks, “the idea was that people might sit in a chair, not up on stools,” he says.



The second-floor primary suite sits at tree level. Slanting light rakes across the shower wall tile, highlighting its thin strips.

Windows along the U-shaped workspaces come down to the countertops, which discreetly hold electrical outlets. Behind the cooktop, back-painted spandrel glass forms an opaque backdrop for a minimalist exhaust hood whose quiet, thin profile is echoed in the island pendant. Tucked behind the bridge on the east is a substantial pantry that absorbs the clutter of a busy kitchen.

Upstairs, entrance to the new primary suite is through a former bedroom reconfigured as a primary closet and sitting room. The couple's sleeping area overlooks the thicket of trees, and the bath benefits from a strategically placed window. Slanting light grazes the thin, vertical strips of wall tile, and a long bowl sink floats above walnut cabinetry.

“If you do have a beautiful old home, respect it and don't try to copy it.”

—Colin Flavin, AIA

Fit and Finish


Though the project was small in footprint, it pushed the boundaries on structural alignments. “It required connecting a home's most challenging spaces—kitchen, bathroom, laundry—to the original structure,” says project architect Heather Souza. “And it came through at a time when energy code became more stringent in Massachusetts. Without a traditional foundation,

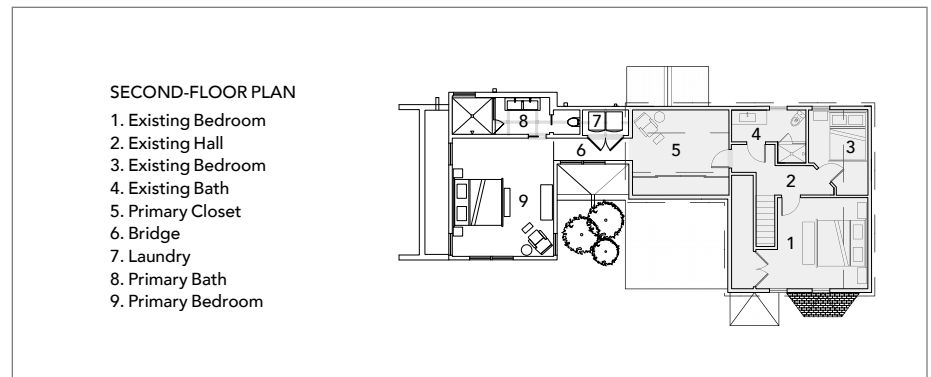
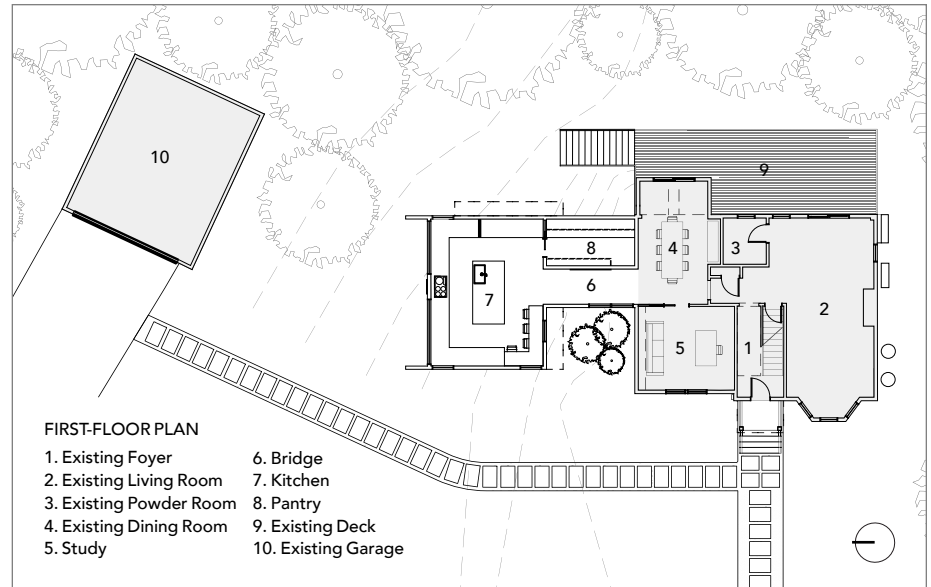
we needed to make sure a heavy insulation blanket wrapped underneath the building, so they're not feeling a strong [temperature] contrast while walking from the old part to the new. We used closed cell spray foam to get a high R value and ensured that drain and water lines connecting back to the main house were insulated from the cold.”

Builder Jim DePaolo handled additional hurdles. On the roof, “we lined up the roof slopes so everything would tie in and look like what Flavin drew,” he says. “None of it was easy.” Custom copper scuppers on the bridge direct rainwater to the Mexican pebbles spread under the addition, where it drains into a cistern.

Another challenge was executing the concrete piers. “Very rarely in New

England is concrete used as a finish architectural material,” Colin says. Jim adds: “We made precast panels with buttonholes for holding the forms together and carefully poured the concrete to avoid getting a lot of air in the forms, to get a really smooth wall.” His crew also custom-stained the mahogany siding to tone down its rust-colored cast.

If the modern volume became something of a curiosity in this neighborhood of traditional homes, at least the reception was positive. “We were hoping the neighbors would be happy and have only heard good things,” Colin says. “People wanted to learn more about it.” The clients, too, talk about how wonderful the kitchen is, as the piece that really improved their lives. He adds, “When they’re in the garden, they look up and notice things that bring interest to the exterior—details they never fully understood in the drawings.” 



Bridging the Past

Southborough, Massachusetts

ARCHITECT: Principal in charge: Colin Flavin, AIA; project architect: Heather Souza, AIA; designer: Katarina Wabrek, Assoc. AIA, Flavin Architects, Boston, Massachusetts

BUILDER: Jim DePaolo and Jack Marraffa, Denali Construction Corp., Wellesley, Massachusetts

STRUCTURAL ENGINEER: Dan Webb and Matt Buttiglieri, Webb Structural Services, Reading, Massachusetts

PROJECT SIZE: 878 square feet addition (original house is 1,600 square feet)

SITE SIZE: 0.64 acre

CONSTRUCTION COST: Withheld

PHOTOGRAPHY: Nat Rea Photography

KEY PRODUCTS

BEVERAGE CENTER: Sub-Zero

CABINETRY: Custom walnut

CABINETRY HARDWARE: Rejuvenation

CLADDING: Jeld-Wen Extira Panels

COOKING VENTILATION: Wolf

COOKTOP: Wolf induction

COUNTERTOPS: Neolith

EPDM ROOFING MEMBRANE: RubberGard

FAUCETS: Blanco Linus, Grohe

ICEMAKER: Sub-Zero

KITCHEN BACKSPLASH: Back-painted glass / Benjamin Moore Simply White

LIGHTING: Senginus Lighting (exterior uplights), Tech Lighting, Lightology, Grand Mirrors (interior)

LIGHTING CONTROL SYSTEMS: Lutron

Ovens: Wolf

PAINTS/STAINS: Benjamin Moore Espresso Bean (exterior) and Simply White (interior), Farrow & Ball, Arborcoat

PASSAGE DOORS / DOOR HARDWARE: Accurate Lock & Hardware

RAINSCREEN: Mahogany slats

REFRIGERATOR: Sub-Zero

ROOFING: ISOGARD HD Cover Board

SINKS: Franke

THERMAL AND MOISTURE BARRIERS: ZIP System

TILE: Tilebar / Bond Nimbus, Kenridge Ribbon Gray

TOILETS: Toto

TOWEL BAR AND RING, TOILET PAPER HOLDER: Grohe

UNDERLAYMENT, SHEATHING: Huber ZIP System

VANITIES AND PEDESTAL LAVS: Porcelanosa RAS (primary bath)

VENTILATION: Panasonic (bathroom)

WALLBOARD: Georgia Pacific gypsum board

WASHER/DRYER: LG

WINDOWS: Loewen