

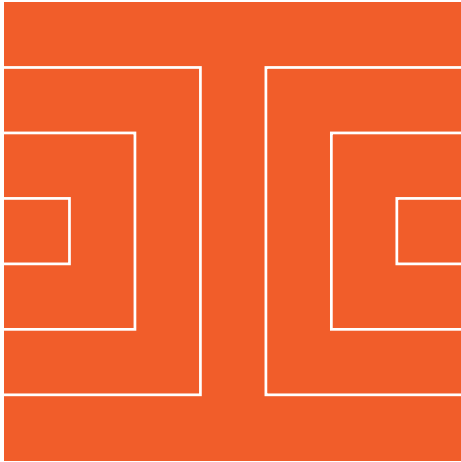
T H E G A R D E N W A L L



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THE STATE OF THE HOUSE WINTER 2006 - 07

Something new in kitchens, small, no dishwasher, no disposal, no fan, fewer cabinets and less countertop space, a single basin sink and archaic but handsome appliances. Oh right, and a picture window into the living room. You may call it historicist cuisine style. We call it the original Willey House kitchen.

THE 1934 KITCHEN

The kitchen renovation drafted by former Taliesin Fellow John Howe, January 24, 1974 for third owner Harvey Glanzer, was a beautiful and efficient post-Usonian design. It featured brass conical knobs and full length piano hinges on all the cabinets. But the problem with the Willey House kitchen is that it is behind glass like an diorama. Furthermore, the kitchen is not just on display, it happens to be the focal point of the living room. The south wall of kitchen cabinets are on the same plane as the back wall of the living room wardrobe closet. Together they create a continuous wooden wall which penetrates the glass screen separating living room from kitchen. For that continuity to be effective the material surfaces must be similar. The John Howe kitchen was constructed of birch plywood, particle board and pumpkin orange formica, a poor match to the rest of the house albeit logical for a 1970s remodel. The materials for the Howe kitchen were as much determined by budget as taste. Then as now Red Tidewater Cypress was difficult to find and much more expensive (there is a reoccurring theme if ever I've heard one). But the aesthetic differences between Tidewater Cypress and commercial birch plywood was jarring and hardly conveyed the sense of continuity that was intended.

BETTER VENEER

This past fall, Barber Lumber one of our wood vendors agreed to have veneer cut for us. We explained exactly what we were after. The Barber selected the 10 to 13" wide planks, sold it to us and shipped the wood directly to a third party who cut it into flitches. The recently acquired veneer has the rich tones of old-growth cypress and displays a wildly aquatic figuring. It is not identical but approaches the large and varied patterns of the original veneered doors and wardrobe. 



THE SUM OF MANY PARTS

Thanks to the last owner Harvey Glanzer and unbeknownst to anyone, a significant percent of the original kitchen was saved and preserved in the garage. The skeletons of the original cabinetry were at least good enough to recreate exactly as patterns if not outright reinstall. Between 40-50% of the original kitchen wood was reused in recreating the 1934 kitchen. Exposed shelves, frames, cutting boards, bases and shelves plus two drawers were resurrected and again pressed into service. The authenticity is palpable. 📍



Cabinet parts saved from the original kitchen and stored for nearly 30 years in the garage. A great defense for not cleaning out the garage.



Cabinets were built in a shop off-site and were all numerically marked with a job number on their unexposed sides.



Assembling the pieces in the shop painted a detailed picture of size, proportion and method of original construction.

Much of the original linoleum countertop was retained. Clearly the kitchen was in bad repair when the Howe renovation was done.



Although some of the stored pieces could not be reused, they provided an excellent historical document.



Original drawers were built in two different ways. At the island they were made without dovetailed faces, because drawer faces extend the entire width of the cabinet front. Side channels for guides are provided.

The drawers on the south wall of cabinets feature sides dovetailed to the faces and no guide channels.



Ghosts of the circular pan rack flange on a former banding strip and the ghost of a shelf in a cabinet side.



Suitable Red Tidewater Cypress was a long time in coming. Rough wood prior to planing.



The island and sink cabinets are assembled in the shop.



Solid cabinet sides are built-up from smaller planks.



The datum band along the top of the kitchen cabinets was not made from a single continuous piece of wood.



Salvaged original parts are the best blueprint.



The first cabinets to go in were the shallow units under then north windows. They will have adjustable shelves.



First cabinets as seen looking in from living room.



All window hardware and flanges for the pan rack were replated.



A ventilation fan was removed from the kitchen. The hole needed to be plugged with spare bricks.



Original shelves which have been reused have patches in their back corners from a miscalculation during their original installation in 1934.




Cabinets in place.



HOW DOES IT FEEL?

After being accustomed to the Howe kitchen one of the first things you notice about the original is the petite Wrightian proportions. This room is a reminder of just how delicate his architecture can be. The original kitchen was designed to a 1930's standard of living. People had less and thus there is much less storage and counter surface space but the proportions of the finished "workspace" as Wright called it exude a beauty, way beyond compare to the 1970s equivalent.



The deep red, battleship linoleum used on the floor and the countertops, a perfect match to the original, confers a rich and honest warmth to the room. A bracket light above the stovetop is the way the kitchen was lit when Nancy prepared dinner. Exposed cookware hangs from a massive chrome pipe that extends the entire width of the room. All in all, the kitchen feels modern and somewhat spare yet utterly functional. Like the rest of the house it is entirely human in scale and rich in material substance. 


Original fragment of island countertop in place for reference.



Cove with pass-through opening for phone.



PASS - THROUGH

An interesting feature of the original kitchen that we decided to resurrect was an innovative pass-through window that allowed the old corded telephone (yes, we found the right one) to be passed between the wardrobe (coat closet), which did double-duty as a phone booth and the kitchen. Unlike today, the phone was not a fixture in every room and a phone call obviously did not go on uninterrupted for hours on end. A reminder that in the early years of the phone it was chained to the wall rather than being chained to the user. 



New drawers with new cast pulls at the island.



Exposed curved shelves.



South wall cabinets in place.



Pass-through being trimmed out.



Vintage electric stove.



APPLIANCES

A centerpiece of the restored kitchen would have to be the vintage appliances. We found a matching set of 1932 General Electric unrestored originals. The refrigerator, only a small step removed from an icebox, was known as a "Monitortop" because of the compressor motor that was mounted on the top of the refrigerator. By the mid 30's all refrigerators had their motors mounted below where they were unobtrusive.

The early electric stove had three burners and an oven the size of a shoe box. Perfectly adequate during the depression. The matched set came out of a household in New Jersey and are in excellent working condition. They could not be passed up when we located them. It is only through the assistance of The Old Appliance Club that we found the appropriate kitchen appliances to meet our needs. I highly recommend joining if you are looking for specific old appliances or parts for existing appliances.

The Old Appliance Club can be found at <http://www.antiquestoves.com/toac/index.htm> 



Original drawers are used on the south cabinet side of the kitchen. These are shown with two original aluminum pulls.



Bracket light above the stovetop.





Vintage appliances.




Josh and Stafford working with the plywood countertop just prior to installation of linoleum.



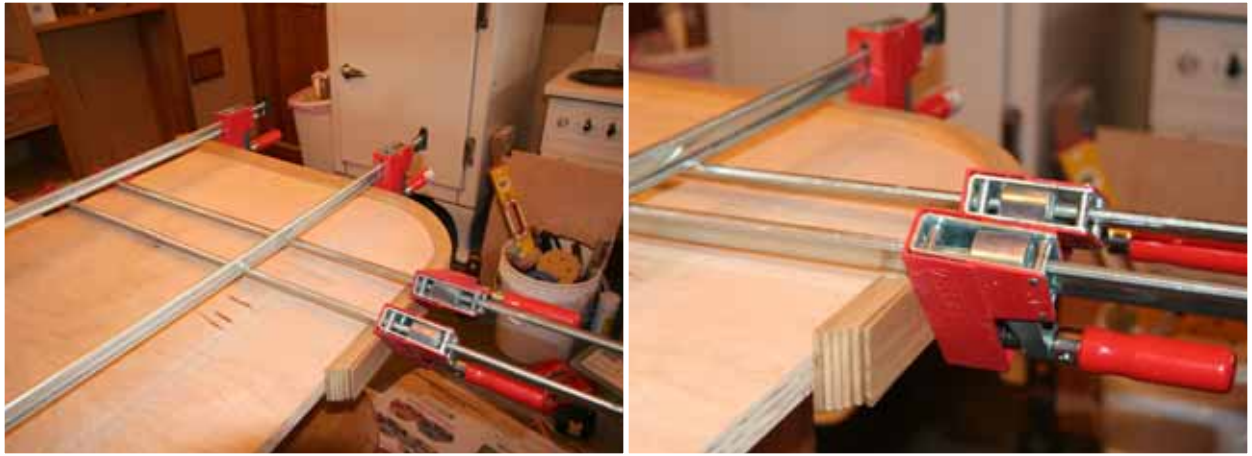
Two cutting boards can be combined to increase counter surface when required.

C O U N T E R T O P

The countertop is crafted from a single piece (our last) of red Uni-Walton Battleship Linoleum. It is still manufactured in Germany and was distributed in the US by Armstrong. Sadly, it is no longer available through them although they offer a myriad of other options, I hope they (Armstrong) come to their senses and distribute the dark red again before we need some. I have to imagine that there are other Frank Lloyd Wright buildings that use the sheet material in the same color. The countertop features a coved back splash and runs up the wall on two sides of the "L" shaped counter. As a finishing detail the material fits into a recess where it meets the wood trim or cabinetry so there are no exposed edges. The exception is the counter edge which is entirely raw and exposed and slightly rounded over at the top edge. This unconventional finishing detail is taken directly from the original counter fragments. Our linoleum was installed by Bloomington Linoleum and Carpet. 



Curved cypress corner edge of counter island being built-up, glued and clamped to shape.



Opening for single basin sink.



Linoleum countertop cut to shape and laid out on the living room floor.



Jim trimming the counter edge.



Apparent relief at the success of the fit. Nice work guys.



Countertop prepped for the application of linoleum.



Opening for sink showing wooden supports.



New, single piece linoleum in place.



Two coved back splashes meet at the corner.




Perfect fit under south cabinets.

Sharp exposed edge of countertop prior to being relieved or rounded over.



BASE SHOE

The base shoe weaves and meanders in and out of the cabinetry, at times exposed and looking like a foot of a pedestal, at other times recessed below the kick space and at other times veering all the way back to the wall below unsupported cabinets. This exquisite base shoe is shown to its greatest advantage in the kitchen. 



Base shoe is same as used throughout the house. Thick planks of cypress wood was sourced from a salvaged water tower to manufacture enough for the rooms that were missing base.



Base shoe forms a pedestal below the island then wraps around the face of the sink base cabinet and runs all the way back to the wall. Base shoe inside the sink base cabinet.



Base shoe below the south wall cabinets.



The kitchen has a Dutch door that swings both directions. These photos show door construction, pivot mount and elaborate compound stop to prevent the top of door from swinging free of the bottom.



Living room view toward the kitchen. 1970s kitchen still in place.




Cardboard mock-up of a hexagonal ottoman designed for the house in two sizes. This is the larger of the two.



Styrofoam cut to fit the faceted hexagonal form.

HEXAGONAL OTTOMAN

What is hexagonal furniture doing in a house with a square module? It seems curious at first but if you look around the Willey house you'll start to see just how often 30 and 60 degree angles appear in this relatively rectangular dwelling. The kite windows, the rotated angle of the terrace, the exterior soffits, the base shoe, the pitch of the ceiling and roofline all are conspiring at a subconscious level to offset, literally the squareness of the Willey House.

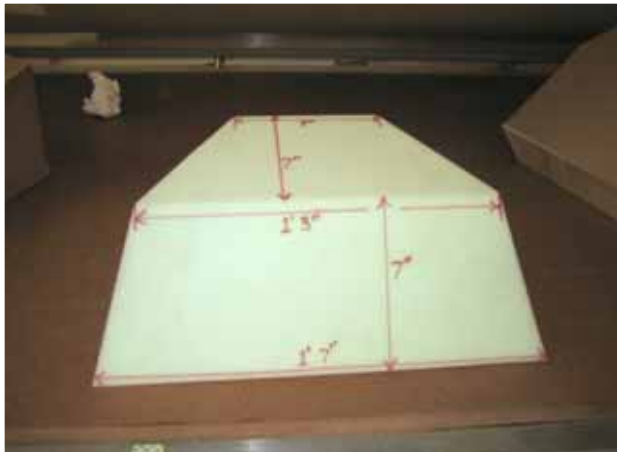
The ottoman in section s entirely 30, 60 and 90 degree angles. Multiple units can be arranged together to create a harmonious flowing pattern. There are three drawings of hexagonal ottoman. The larger size is the example you can see depicted here. On one of the drawings for the smaller versions Wright included a note to Nancy Willey asking for 10 of them for Taliesin. They are extremely complicated to build and upholster. It is not hard to understand why these were never executed. 



Inner structure of the hexagonal base.



Base with plywood cap.



Measured test foam blocks.



The final ottoman covered as specified in red leather.



Nearly invisible from above an exposed cypress foot adorns the base.



Stitching follows and defines the lines of the faceted hexagon.



Braided red leather handles are on opposite sides of the ottoman to make moving it an easier task.



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Restoration/Supervision: Stafford Norris III
Apprentice: Joshua Norris
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