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REAL ESTATE | DESIGN | THE CRITICAL EYE

How to Hide A Kitchen

Not every homeowner with an open floor plan wants to spotlight the kitchen. Here, a designer put the emphasis on a big room's dining spot, while the kitchen strategically recedes



SPLIT DECISION In a New York apartment remodeled by architect Anik Pearson, the kitchen and dining area are artfully at odds. PHOTO: ERIC PIASECKI/OTTO

By *Catherine Romano*

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Our Design Assessment

Though it seems determined to ignore the adjacent kitchen, the dining area in this Manhattan prewar apartment, decorated by New York interior designer Robin Henry, hangs together on its own terms. The 1960s rosewood Z chairs, designed by Dane Kai Kristiansen, reflect the angled lines in the parquet floors, and the ikat upholstery, with its jagged pattern, keeps up the beat like an electrocardiogram. While offering welcome relief from all that zig-zagginess, the simple bench is upholstered in a solid purplish-brown fabric that picks up on a color in the chairs' material, connecting the bench to the dining area scheme. The kitchen island, meanwhile, is jarringly pale and bucks the trend for cantilevered counters and tall stools. Is this because given the choice of sitting in a cushioned chair at a mahogany table or a bar stool at a marble counter, no one would choose the latter? And though the kitchen's shaker cabinets nicely relate to the room's wall molding, there's zero "dialogue" between the richly detailed seating area and the blank kitchen. In fact, the contrast is a real head scratcher.

The Designer's Response

"I was aware that the fabric on the chairs echoed the Z chairs," said Ms. Henry of the woven abaca-fiber textile. "The material, which sort of has the texture of horse hair, dresses things up a bit." The parquet floors did not, however, inspire the play of angles. "Some things we do are intentional and some are just unconscious." Her main goal, she explained, was to connect the dining area with the rest of the open plan, which includes a living room where the family lolls on a sofa, watching TV. Hence the comfy banquette that pointedly turns its back on the kitchen in lieu of bar stools (space limitations were another factor). So why does the dining area give the kitchen a cold shoulder? This is the home's sole dining table, around which the family entertains, Ms. Henry explained:

“I wanted this not to feel like you were sitting in the kitchen.” So she painted the cabinets and all the walls the same Dorian Gray from C2 Paint and kept the kitchen very tailored, with small pulls. “I wanted it to disappear.”

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