

Art vs Function... No Problem!

A Manhattan kitchen becomes a work of art

Strauss Kitchen / Article 9/96

Project:	Kitchen and Breakfast Room Remodeling / 1996
Client:	Upper East Side Manhattan, Gallery Owner
Designer:	Nicholas Boonin, Inc. West Collingswood, New Jersey
Project Artist:	Sherry Bufano
Kitchen Consultant:	Richard P. Mackin
Lighting Consultant:	Liberty Hall
Construction:	Hanjo Contractors
Size:	Kitchen 9.5 x 10.5 / Breakfast Room 8 x 10.5 (184 square feet total)
Cost:	Not available
Photographer:	Steve Coan



This upper east side rehab is as much a work of art as it is a kitchen. The designer and artist have created an oasis in a harsh urban environment using precious under used space.

The property owner is very involved in the fine arts. Without this patron's enthusiasm for creating such a visually unique space the project would never have taken on the form that it did.

Nicholas Boonin (president of Nicholas Boonin, Inc. of Collingswood New Jersey) is not a stranger to creative collaborative projects. Much of his practice is involved in the design and fabrication of complex exhibits for museums and visitor centers. In these projects he has honed his design and communications skills working with the high expectations of his clients and the needs of artists, craftsmen and the construction trades. A job as bold and innovative as this one would have been impossible without the trust and respect of all the people involved. This projects collaborative spirit is responsible for much of it's success.

The project's scope was limited to the renovation of the existing kitchen and breakfast room and creating access to an existing roof garden and deck. The space was originally laid out with the kitchen in the rear of the building next to the deck. The deck was accessed through a standard size door on one side of the rear wall, on the same wall a small window over the sink let in some light but afforded a minimal view. Circulation was cumbersome and movement from the kitchen to the dinning room was blocked by the table in the breakfast room. The new design reversed the location of the kitchen and breakfast rooms and replaced the old rear door and window with a large sliding "patio" door that occupies most of the rear wall to the outside. The new locations of these rooms created much better access to the deck outside and to the dinning room. It also made the new breakfast room a much more inviting place to be, creating a garden view with abundant natural light and no kitchen traffic interrupting people who are enjoying the room.

The warm yellow-orange light shown in the photographs is not a photographic error. The film, lab work and color balance are all correct. The space literally glows with a golden light created by the painted surfaces which is reflected onto every surface and object in the rooms. The cascade of warm color is captivating, inviting a visitor to pause and relax. The feeling one gets while in these rooms is warm, embracing and safe. The qualities this space possesses is in sharp contrast to the cooler more formal adjoining rooms and is like a sanctuary from a harsher world outside of cold concrete.

Art vs Function... No Problem!

The space reveals itself subtly, it is comparable to discovering the multi layered complexities of a work of fine art which reveals itself with repeated viewing. The view from the salon (a formal, raised paneled living room and dining room) is unobstructed. The appliances must therefore be presented visually in a way that is consistent with the elegant formal spaces and still creates a space that beckons with a more intimate experience. (see photo)

Sophisticated geometric elements complement the right angled formalities of the raised paneled living room. A sense of visual continuity is established while the still separate functions of these two rooms is clear.

Before the renovation the kitchen and breakfast room were purely functional, now you are constantly pulled in by this warm jewel like glow emanating from a cool white setting.

These colorful, warm and inviting spaces separate and connect the formal interior rooms to a casual exterior space (a roof garden / patio). The earthy colors and bold geometry tie together the cool formality of the public spaces to the intimate coziness of the more private spaces of the kitchen, breakfast room and garden. The green granite and oak floors emphasize the natural colors and edges on the painted surfaces. The richly colored oak floors reflect the deep ochre color of the walls and ceiling. The floor of the kitchen matches the living room floor creating a continuity and visual flow between all the rooms. Areas to display objet d'art are built into the cabinets. The appliances are not exotic, they are well designed functional and treated as visually abstract forms. Many of the details (knobs, light fixtures and some of the colors) were designed after the cabinets were painted. This enabled the design to grow and be responsive as the project developed.

The cabinets are painted with artist's oil paints. The paint is applied in textured brush strokes and as a stain to highlight the rich wood grain of the surfaces. The cabinets were created and presented as paintings, Bold brush strokes and soft edges reminds the viewer of modern abstract art movements (Abstract Expressionism and Russian Constructivism) and maintains a hand made quality to the highly crafted pieces.

The designer believes that cabinets, like these, is an appealing alternative for entertainment centers, use in studies and home offices as well as in the kitchen application shown here.

The client was thrilled with the results and in the fashion of grand gallery openings (the client owns a gallery) the new kitchen was presented with an opening of it's own, complete with invitations and champagne.

The rearrangement of the two rooms was a great success. It gives the client many more attractive options for the use of the space. The choices of color and the hand painting of the cabinet doors also yielded a lavish richness to this project. The selection of high quality mid range appliances helped to keep this project affordable and gracious in the rang of features offered.