



Patrick Mealey and Joyce Jackson. recently renovated a 1940s-era kitchen, respecting its history but giving a nod to modern convenience

Working with the past

‘If you respect an old house, it will thank you’

Perry couple specializes in historical home renovations

By Sharon Kiley Mack

BDN Staff

EASTPORT — Renovations to any room in any home can be dramatic or even startling. But when a dated, stale kitchen is remodeled, the whole house seems to stand a bit taller, as if its heart has been defibrillated.

In a small but stunning kitchen on Water Street in Eastport, a 1940s-era kitchen recently was brought back to life, keeping the integrity of the home built in 1820 intact, but with a serious nod to 21st century convenience.

Reproduction hardware and lighting highlight the stark white cupboards and original wainscoting and doors. A smoky gray countertop provides a slick background to the small, quiet details. Built-in cupboards and pantries seem to expand the small space, and the modern windows bring in plenty of light.

“Letting the house speak to you may sound corny, but it’s a good place to start,” renovation artist Joyce Jackson said. “Maintaining the home’s integrity, even when faced with the inevitable updating, is not only desirable but downright essential. It’s more than just a worn cliché. If you respect an old house, it will thank you. We allowed this home to guide us, from trim to cabinets to finishing touches.”

Patrick Mealey and Jackson of Perry — she a photographer, he a fine artist — have found a niche in taking old, nonfunctional kitchens and making them new again. It is their background in fine arts that seems to carry their projects to a fine, detailed level.

“We wanted each detail to feel like it belongs here,” Mealey said during a recent tour of the kitchen, owned by Pamela Hanes of Colorado. “It is as much re-creation as restoration.”

One of the biggest compliments the couple can hear, Jackson said, is, “You brought it back.”

With a mutual affection for antique homes, running a successful restoration business first on Long Island, N.Y., and then Down East, seemed like a natural transition for the pair. They began their Maine career restoring their own home — a Georgian style, hipped-roof farmhouse on eight acres overlooking Boyden Lake in Perry. The home was built in 1893 and the couple had one guiding principle: Do as little damage as possible to the original fabric of the home while re-creating elements that were important, but lost. In July 2009, that fine restoration was featured in *Old House Interiors* magazine.



Counter and cupboard detail.



Sink area and counter of home.

The couple is garnering a strong reputation in Maine and Canada for their high-quality, one-of-a-kind kitchens, bathrooms, cabinets and furniture.

Whenever renovations take place, surprises are sure to follow and Mealey and Jackson said this most recent kitchen in Eastport didn't disappoint them.

They started with a funky, 1940s, almost art-deco space and immediately began tearing it apart.

"We put the cupboards on the side of the road and they were gone by lunch time," Jackson said.

Jackson said that in the original kitchen's era, furnishings in the room would have all been freestanding.

"We went with a butler's pantry look that was era-appropriate," she said.

Jackson said she and her husband have a passion for the process of melding new and old.

"Sometimes though it's a little like putting a round peg into a square hole," she admitted. "In 13 years working on antique homes, I've learned to hope for the best, but expect the worst."

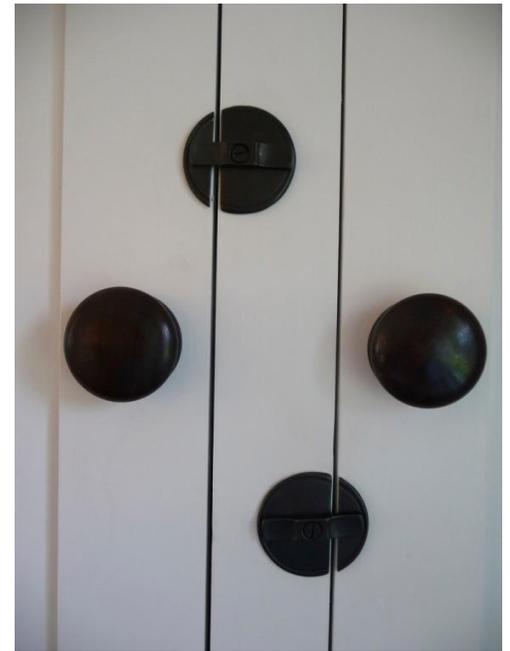
The couple discovered the Eastport kitchen had three layers of walls — each constructed on top of one another — which was an unusual find, Mealey said.

Inside one layer, they found newspapers from 1949 used as insulation.

They found the original pantry doors in the basement, and opted to keep original wainscoting for window trim. A decorative cast-iron radiator was restored.

"Demolition is always an adventure, really," Mealey said. "And we love making these discoveries along the way."

But as beautiful as the renovation is, it pales in comparison to a startling discovery about the home's previous owners that the renovators made after noticing two signatures on exposed wooden parlor beams. "One weekend while browsing through a local antique shop we came across an Eastport map from the late 19th century," Mealey said. "These maps can be invaluable as they often include next to each building the name of its current tenant. We located our house on Water Street and found that the homeowner was a G. Burnham. Another map, in an Eastport institution, The Waco Diner, showed a J. A. Burnham as the homeowner in 1855. Our curiosity was further peaked. Who were these Burnhams?"



Detail of cupboard hardware.

After a bit more research and hours in the registry of deeds, the couple matched the signatures to those of Josiah Burnham and his brother George Burnham. George Burnham is considered the father of the sardine industry, but before he could see the boon that his canning process would bring, he ran into financial difficulties and moved to Portland.

There, he partnered with Charles Morrill and began a canning business that eventually produced B&M baked beans.

The discovery was made even more special when it was found that the current Eastport homeowner shared the same birthday as George Burnham.

The couple said they love the historical research of a vintage home as much as the renovation.

“We’ve done contemporary homes, but most people find us for historical renovations,” Mealey said. “You can’t find the highly custom restoration that we do. We have a predilection for historical buildings. The people we work with are hiring us because of our style.”

The couple has several other restoration projects under way, but said they often use the winter months to make their line of cottage furniture and pursue their artistic fields.

Patrick Mealey and Joyce Jackson’s work can be seen at: www.fineartistmade.com or on their blog, www.fineartistmade.com/blog.php.



View of stove area where the couple discovered an old fireplace, complete with beehive oven, that had been covered up inside the wall. It was unable to be restored but the new stove wall was outfitted with built in cupboards to flank the stove.

WORKING WITH THE PAST by Sharon Kiley Mack originally appeared in the Lifestyle section October 2-3, 2010, the Saturday/Sunday edition of the Bangor Daily News
P.O. Box 1329 Bangor, Maine 04402-1329 Telephone: 1-800-432-7964 207-990-8000
www.bangordailynews.com story & photos by Sharon Kiley Mack © Bangor Daily News, 2010