

# Zen and the arts and crafts of kitchen design

by melanie gilbranson  
photos by brian edwards

a blend  
that is  
simply  
beautiful



**G**eometric Simplicity.  
Organic Harmony.  
Functional Utility. Three unmistakable phrases describe the architectural philosophy of Gustav Stickley and this kitchen designed by Laura Michaelides, an allied member of ASID. Stickley was the most well known name associated with the American Arts and Crafts movement, a movement that dominated American architecture, interiors, and furnishings in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Michaelides characterizes this \$120,000 kitchen as a “modernized, simplified, and updated version of the Arts and Crafts sensibility.”

The owners of this 1970s home approached Michaelides after their architect presented them with two designs of the exterior shell for a new kitchen. The six-month planning and construction process began. Michaelides assisted in their selection of the plan that extended the rear exterior of the house three feet and dramatically changed the kitchen’s eight-foot ceiling height.

She likes to work with clients who enjoy the design process. And these clients did; they took Stickley’s words to heart, examining volumes of trade magazines and books. The



In this kitchen, Laura Michaelides blends features common to both Japanese design and the Arts and Crafts period, including the use of natural materials and linear design. Even with its modern inflection, it maintains a sense of timelessness and serenity.

client showed a particular interest in the use of natural stones and linear design, characteristics of Stickley's Arts and Crafts style that shared elements with the Japanese style. "During the design phase, you get to know your clients very well and they often learn something about themselves. This kitchen turned out to be a mix of the Arts and Crafts, Japanese and modern influences," says Michaelides.

**GEOMETRIC SIMPLICITY**

Michaelides' meticulous attention to decorative refinement is evident in the detail of this modern décor. Handcut bands of maple create a rectilinear design throughout the kitchen, complemented by horizontal bands across the cabinet doors. The Japanese often showcased structural members in their architectural renderings. In this case, natural wood banding is used artistically to give the Japanese look and feel. The steeply peaked ceiling terminating at a massive structural timber, clad in

maple, adds subtle drama to the cleanness of the room's lines.

The Japanese influence is also evident in the selection of a handmade ceramic tile backsplash. Geometrically square tiles of Celadon Crackle Glaze emulate the Oriental color of jade. Random cracks in the glaze expose the natural color of the underlying clay and provide a welcome contrast to the unerring symmetry of all the architectural elements in the room.

Likewise, the simple curves of a wine rack offset the room's linearity. This kitchen is a testimony to simple beauty.

**ORGANIC HARMONY**

A creamy palette emphasizes the warm, honey tones of the handcrafted quartersawn maple cabinets. The clients agreed the purist Arts and Crafts style cabinets were not for them. They were lucky to find a cabinetmaker with the expert skills to handcraft the crisp lines of the more modern style and

*"The word that is best loved in the language of every nation is home, for when a man's home is born out of his heart and developed through his labor and perfected through his sense of beauty, it is the very cornerstone of his life."*

- Gustav Stickley (1858-1942)

finish they had chosen. He also milled the plain-sawn maple floors. The wild planing and rings of this cut provided a visual contrast to the refined perfection of the quartersawn cabinets.

True to the Arts and Crafts style, this kitchen seems like an extension of the natural environment. "This is a very athletic family that spends a lot of time outdoors," says



Michaelides. Five large single-pane windows bring in the outdoors and provide a structural link to similar modern windows in the living room that overlook an outdoor park. Suffused natural light pours in through clerestory windows that bridge the slope of the ceiling.

A threshold of maple inlaid with dark oak squares integrates the dark oak floors of the living room with the lighter patina of the kitchen. The cabinetmaker also installed handcrafted doors and simpler moldings throughout the home. This gave the entire first floor a more modern look reflective of the kitchen's new style.

The woman of the house wanted to use natural stone for the kitchen countertops. Candidates included honed slate, soapstone, terrazzo and even stained cement. However, the man of the house intervened, and chose a Sierra Series Corian®. The couple still got their natural stone. Michaelides ordered a honed slate table with modern dining chairs to finish out the breakfast area.

**THE BEAUTY OF SIMPLICITY**

Arts and Crafts interiors emphasize form and function through the use of built-in spaces and cabinets.

Michaelides discussed the use of every single cabinet with the client before designing the cabinetry. Open shelves were used to display the client's glassware and pottery. Baskets were placed in open sliding drawers for potatoes and onions. A spice drawer slides out underneath the stainless steel Thermador cooktop. Below, more sliding shelves make pots and pans easily

accessible. Metal warming racks, installed above, are convenient for daily use and for entertaining.

Michaelides designed cabinets for organizing plastics, glass and paper to be recycled. The split pantry includes 24-inch adjustable shelves above and pullout shelves below. A rounded maple countertop in the breakfast area acts as a serving area for casual entertaining.

Michaelides incorporated a variety of lighting elements. A continuous line of one-and-a-half-inch halogens placed under the front lip of the cabinets and two sleek modern pendants provide specific task lighting. Wall sconces and overhead large

aperture lights create ambient light. Dimmers create just the right mood for romantic or casual dining.

"A person's home environment is so important to them," says Michaelides. "As a designer, I have a wonderful job. I get to help my clients create a home that is a reflection of who they are." With a degree in Art History from Oberlin College and another in Interior Design from the Fashion Institute of Technology, she knows how to help clients implement their personal architectural and design style. Fortunately for Houstonians, she's a recent transplant from New York City, the design capital of the world.

Michaelides fulfilled the functional requirements of a kitchen yet created a warm, inviting environment. The emphasis on light and uncluttered space captures the crisp simplicity of fine craftsmanship. The fusion of stylistic influences enhances the room's virtues of order and beauty. Her clients certainly understood Stickley's architectural philosophy, "Employ only those forms and materials which make for simplicity, individuality and dignity of effect." Stickley himself could only describe this kitchen as simply beautiful. ■