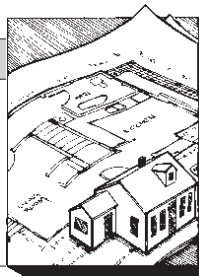


# The Art of Blending Old & New Structures

by Gordon F. Tully



The curves then took off on their own, and a new design emerged, one with curves everywhere. There was a curved coffer in the kitchen ceiling, a curved peninsula. The clients approved, pleased that they had gotten what they had come to us for in the first place: a design with some pizzazz.

The moral about the inside? The solution worked because it developed out of an internal problem. It was the first and only time I have "gotten into" curves, and it happened for a good reason. (We will leave for another time the fascinating and partially unresolved problem of how to actually *construct* those curves. I think I know how...now.)

## The Exterior

The outside of the house posed an entirely different set of problems. In the front, nothing would be changed except for the addition of a 1980s greenhouse onto a 1930s colonial imitation. We were changing things extensively in the back, but there we had the advantage that the existing wall was populated with numerous, unresolved bumps and offsets.

In the front, the job was to find a way to blend the rather shocking all-glass element into the traditional facade. Only one solution seemed possible: the sloped greenhouse glass had to extend the

Renovations are full of surprises. There are the surprises when you actually remove the old finishes and discover that the joists run the other way, when you learn that the carpenter ants have been more industrious than the owner, or when the main plumbing stack is found to run on center through a proposed window. But the surprises I will talk about here relate to style, and I will use a kitchen renovation we did three years ago as an example.

The house was a large, imitation Dutch Colonial located in a fancy suburb. The new occupants were a young family who were vacating a lovely old farmhouse in the country so they could live closer to the city. One member had grown up in a modern house on the West Coast, and neither was particularly interested in perpetuating the stuffy environment of the 1930s so evident in their new colonial.

Like many houses of the era, it was a rabbit-warren structure of small, specialized rooms with low ceilings. The new owners wanted a larger, lighter kitchen, a better connection to the attached garage, a back porch, and a more generous entry with a sunspace for informal dining. (Entering into such a space was totally consistent with their casual lifestyle.)

There was no mystery about how to proceed: Remove the partition between the entry and an adjacent small room; add a bay, widening the kitchen enough to insert an island; build a greenhouse next to the front door; and reorganize the spaces at the rear (which was much easier to talk about than to accomplish).

The inside would be "modern" in the sense that the kitchen would be in a European style and the walls would be bare and white. (There was little nice woodwork in the existing house to extend, and neither we nor the owners wanted more of the same.) We concentrated on working the kinks out of the complex and constrained plan, and the plan developed without any flair.

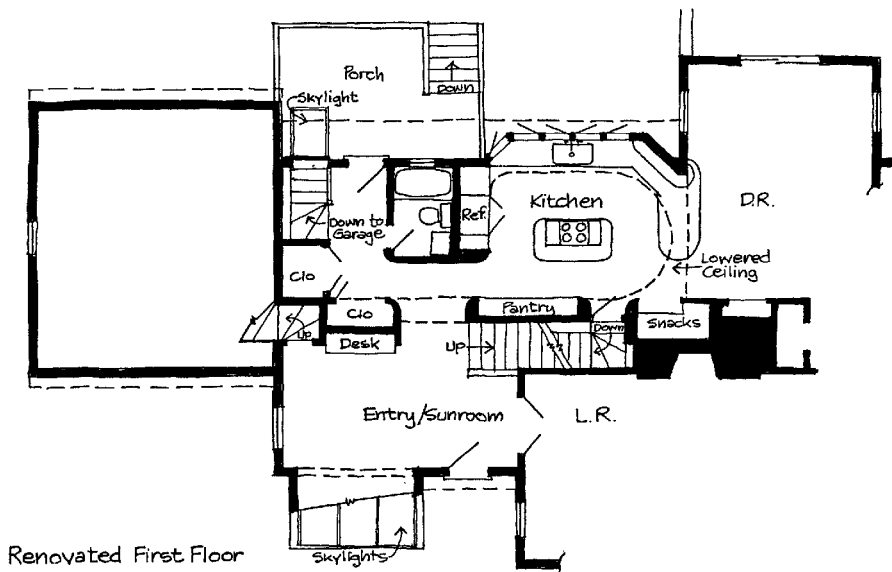
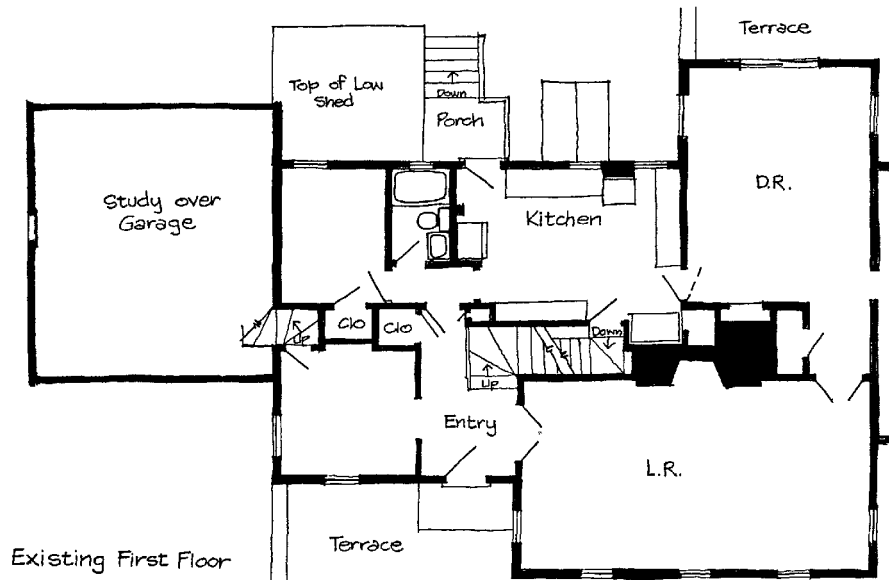
After we completed the first design, we realized that it just didn't work. Then I

saw why: people had to negotiate a narrow hall opposite the entry to gain access to the backyard and the kitchen, and we had not found a way to make the turnings easy, even with newer, more

generous openings. The plan was sterile and rigid.

So I introduced the curves you see in the final version, starting at the crucial ones that turn into the narrow corridor.

**In the front, nothing would change except for the addition of a 1980s greenhouse onto a 1930s addition. In back, we had the advantage of an existing wall populated with numerous, unresolved bumps and offsets.**



existing roof plane, which was conveniently steep.

The design trick was to minimize the offset at the joint between the glass and the roof, and to hold the side of the new addition in from the edge of the building, so as to avoid an ambiguous joint at the corner and to make it clear that the greenhouse was a separate element. I think the house looks better with the addition, which blends in so well you hardly notice the anachronism. (And after all, the house was an imitation in the first place.)

In the back, the elements were arranged according to function and good massing, then they were detailed to match the existing building. For example, the rail was traditional, and the casement windows were separated by large mullions to help them blend with the existing double-hungs. Yes, the blank casements look "modern," but modern in a way we have grown used to, and no more so than the adjacent, earlier renovation that featured sliding glass doors.

The moral about the outside? Even in a building that demands respect, new elements can be inserted if you are careful. Think about what the original designer was after (or what the building has turned into through subsequent additions). Use

drawings by Gordon Tully

your additions to complete the composition, perhaps by creating enough further disorder to make the whole thing look intentional (as we did in the back of this house), or by adding a piece that punctuates and improves the previous composition, as in the front.

Then, if your work is subordinate to the overall image, as in this example, detail everything to blend in. Don't send the building off on a new career unless you have control over a substantial part of the exterior. If you can afford it, it's worth maintaining the quality of the existing trim unless, as in the back of this house, simple detailing looks modest and appropriate. ■

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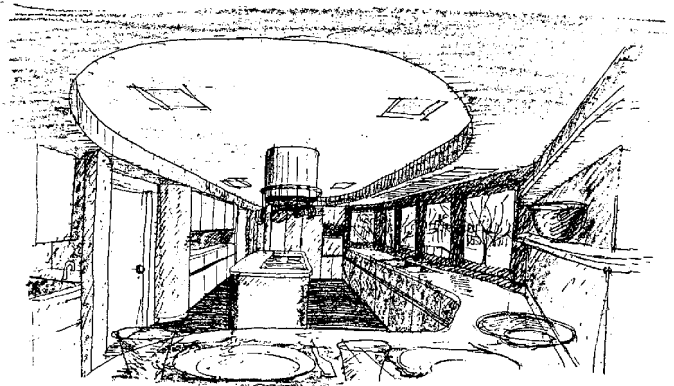
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North Elevation



Front (South) Entrance



Kitchen from Dining Room