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Diplomatic Mission

In Washington, DC, an embassy kitchen negotiates formal functions and family

By Alice Liao

As the seat of the Italian embassy in Washington, DC, and a showcase for Italian design, Villa Firenze, a 1,985-sq.-m Tudor-style residence, seems aptly named. After all, *Firenze* is Italian for Florence, which enjoys a rich cultural past, made famous by the likes of Michelangelo, Leonardo da Vinci and Filippo Brunelleschi. But interestingly enough, Villa Firenze does not take its name from that sparkling Tuscan city. Instead, its inspiration is none other than Florence Guggenheim, mother of previous owner Colonel Robert Guggenheim, who christened the home in her memory. For some, the connection may seem more than coincidental. Destiny? Perhaps.

Today, the interior of Villa Firenze speaks to the best in Italian design, yet does so while paying respect to the home's 1920s architecture.

Both modern and traditional-style pieces cohabit comfortably in rooms elegantly ornamented with decorative molding, wood paneling and period-accented details. One noteworthy exception, however, is the 70-sq.-m kitchen, which was designed by the project division of Italian kitchen company Arclinea. Here, an unabashedly contemporary sensibility, modern conveniences and a versatile layout combine in a space intimate enough for casual family gatherings yet capable of catering a 250-guest diplomatic function.

The kitchen ably responds to both scenarios thanks to a floor plan conceived with considerable input from the current ambassador, Giovanni Castellaneta, and his family, as well as the embassy's full-time professional chef. Roughly consisting of a kitchen within a kitchen, noted

products



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1 Chosen for its name, which reflects the intent of the kitchen remodel—to showcase Italian design, **Arclinea's Italia** was designed by Antonio Citterio to be a pro-style line for residential use. It comprises not only custom cabinetry and working islands but also countertops and sinks. Doors feature a recessed handle and are offered in lacquer, laminate, Solid Ray (an eco-friendly material), stainless steel, teak and oak. **Circle No. 223**

2 The customized cooking area is composed of four gas cooktops from **Scholtès**: Model DCDR, which features five burners; Model SR-R with one burner; and Model TC with two burners, of which there are two. The burners range from 3,412 to 17,061 Btu/h. Also included are two fryers and a barbeque. **Circle No. 224**

3 **Scholtès** also supplied a 90-cm oven (Model FP 955.3) with nine cooking programs and a combination microwave convection oven (Model MWP 23) that features five cooking functions and 10 automatic settings. The kitchen is also equipped with a steam oven (Model FPV 6) that offers eight preset cooking functions to prepare everything from vegetables to fish to eggs to chocolate. **Circle No. 225**

4 From **Arclinea's Lignum Et Lapis** kitchen line, the greenhouse allows herbs to be grown in the kitchen for easy access. It is formed of stainless steel and consists of an array of LEDs that are preprogrammed to fade on and off slowly throughout the day. **Circle No. 226**

5 Made by **La Palma** for Arclinea, a pair of **Quadro** stools provides seating at the smaller island for informal family gatherings. The stools measure 81 cm high and feature a painted metal frame and a wooden or lacquered seat. **Circle No. 227**



Because the kitchen is intended to be seen not only by family members and professional staff, but also by special guests, great care was taken in selecting cabinetry and appliances that marry good looks with a strong work ethic and transition effortlessly from a fast-paced, high-activity commercial environment to an inviting, family-friendly setting. Along a perimeter wall and on the islands, stainless-steel base cabinets with simple doors and drawer fronts provide ample storage while exuding a touch of industrial chic. The units are equipped with integral deep-bowl sinks to maximize convenience and feature recessed handles for a clean, streamlined look.

Lending warmth and visual balance, the stainless steel is tempered by a wall of tall black oak cabinets that house a variety of appliances, including a coffee maker, microwave and convection steam oven, as well as an old commercial oven that the in-house chef wanted to preserve from the previous kitchen. Glasses and silverware are also stored here, displayed behind glass-fronted doors and kept conveniently above two built-in wine coolers that together can safeguard more than 90 bottles.

With meals being prepared for parties of varying sizes, cooking appliances play a key role in the kitchen both functionally and aesthetically. Their selection and integration demanded close collaboration with an appliance manufacturer known not only for the quality of its products but also for its facility with custom solutions. In addition to those ensconced in the appliance wall, four cooktops (for a total of 10 gas burners), an electric barbecue, two electric fryers, a warming drawer and warming top serve up dishes, regardless of size or number, with relative ease and are contained in the larger island. The kitchen also features four dishwashers, which are located in the cleanup area.

For use as garnish or seasoning, herbs can be grown in a mini indoor greenhouse suspended above the "convivial" island and

Arclinea interior designer Giampietro Monti, it comprises a modest-sized "convivial" island for family use; a second, larger "professional" island for cooking, staging and plating; an adjacent appliance wall; a cleanup zone; and dry and cold storage in an adjoining room at the far end of the space. The open plan, wide aisles and abundant counter space ensure smooth traffic flow and easy food prep for large-scale entertaining, with one side of the room relegated to cold dishes and the other to warm.

Although the remodel left the existing walls and windows in place, the electrical and plumbing systems, both of which were "obsolete," said Monti, were another story. All required replacement and, in some cases, relocation to support the new spatial configuration. For example, the water drains were moved to the center of the room, which in turn necessitated a new floor, Monti noted, and a new ceiling was installed to integrate overhead lighting, the ventilation hood and HVAC. To accommodate special events needs, the design team also increased the electrical voltage capacity.

SOURCES

Designer: Giampietro Monti, lead designer—Arclinea project division, Caldogno, Italy; www.arclinea.com **Manufacturers:** Cabinetry: Arclinea; Appliances: Scholtès; Lighting: Arclinea (undercabinet); IGuzzini (downlights); Flooring: Edilcuoghi Ceramiche; Seating: La Palma for Arclinea **Photography:** © John Horner

illuminated with an array of high-brightness LEDs. Below, a black oak counter at one end of the work surface, along with seating, creates an area for informal dining. The island also has an integral sink and, as with its larger counterpart, electrical outlets that rise out of the countertop when needed and retract when not.

Other highlights of the kitchen, said Monti, include its record-setting 641-cm-long single-piece stainless-steel countertop, which lines the perimeter wall, and an oversized image of Alberto Sordi, who starred in the 1954 film, *Un Americano a Roma*. The black-and-white film still adorns the far wall, adding character and interest, and offers up a playful nod to the Italian emphasis of the kitchen design, as well as the rest of the home. ■

Sleekly modern, this 70-sq.-m kitchen easily transitions from commercial-grade efficiency to family-friendly setting. Fully equipped for just about any occasion, it features an impressive assortment of appliances as well as stainless-steel and black oak cabinets—all of which are presided over by Italian film star Alberto Sordi.

