

Custom Home
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Degrees of Separation
by Leslie Ensor

Architect Samuel Van Dam calls devices that partially define a space screens. This kitchen in a vacation house on an island off the coast of Maine illustrates how effective this device can be in the hands of a skilled designer.

Van Dam used screens on three levels to mark the boundary between the kitchen and the rest of the open first-floor living space. At ground level an island faces the living area with a neat series of bookcases topped with a slate surface. The island, stained with a blue aniline dye, steps down on the kitchen side to a sink and laminate prep counter. The level change shields the business side of the island from the social side of the room and allowed Van Dam to spec a less costly material in the kitchen.

Above the island hangs a light bar that traces the kitchen's outline. The custom fixture, designed by the architect, consists of low-voltage lights inserted in a band of MDS board suspended from the ceiling with cable. Higher still, the ceiling over the kitchen is covered with painted wood that hides mechanical equipment. It contrasts with the floor joists over the rest of the space.

Once he defined the kitchen, Van Dam made sure it fit the rest of the room. Custom ash cabinets with a high gloss finish and striated glass doors and the stainless steel counter look polished but not too formal. The overall effect is an easy-going, easy-on-the-eyes space just right for an island retreat.

Project Credits:

Builder: Wright Ryan Construction, Portland, Maine; Architect: Van Dam & Renner Architects, Portland; Project size: 144 square feet

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