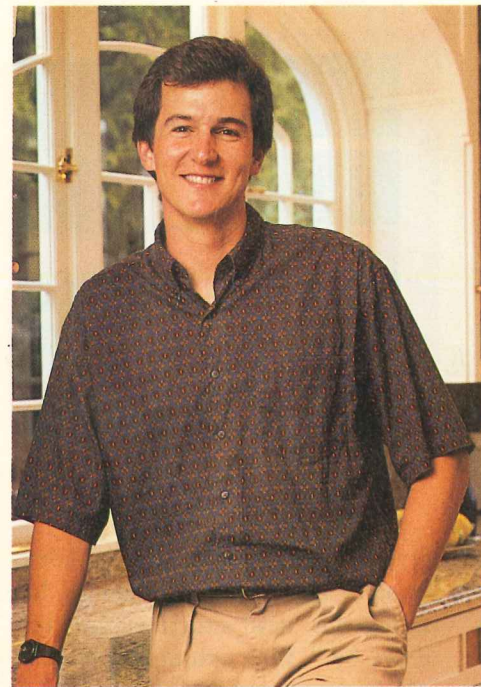


# Mackintosh Mondrian and Me

How one architect transformed  
a 1911 kitchen into an enlightened space  
for a family of four

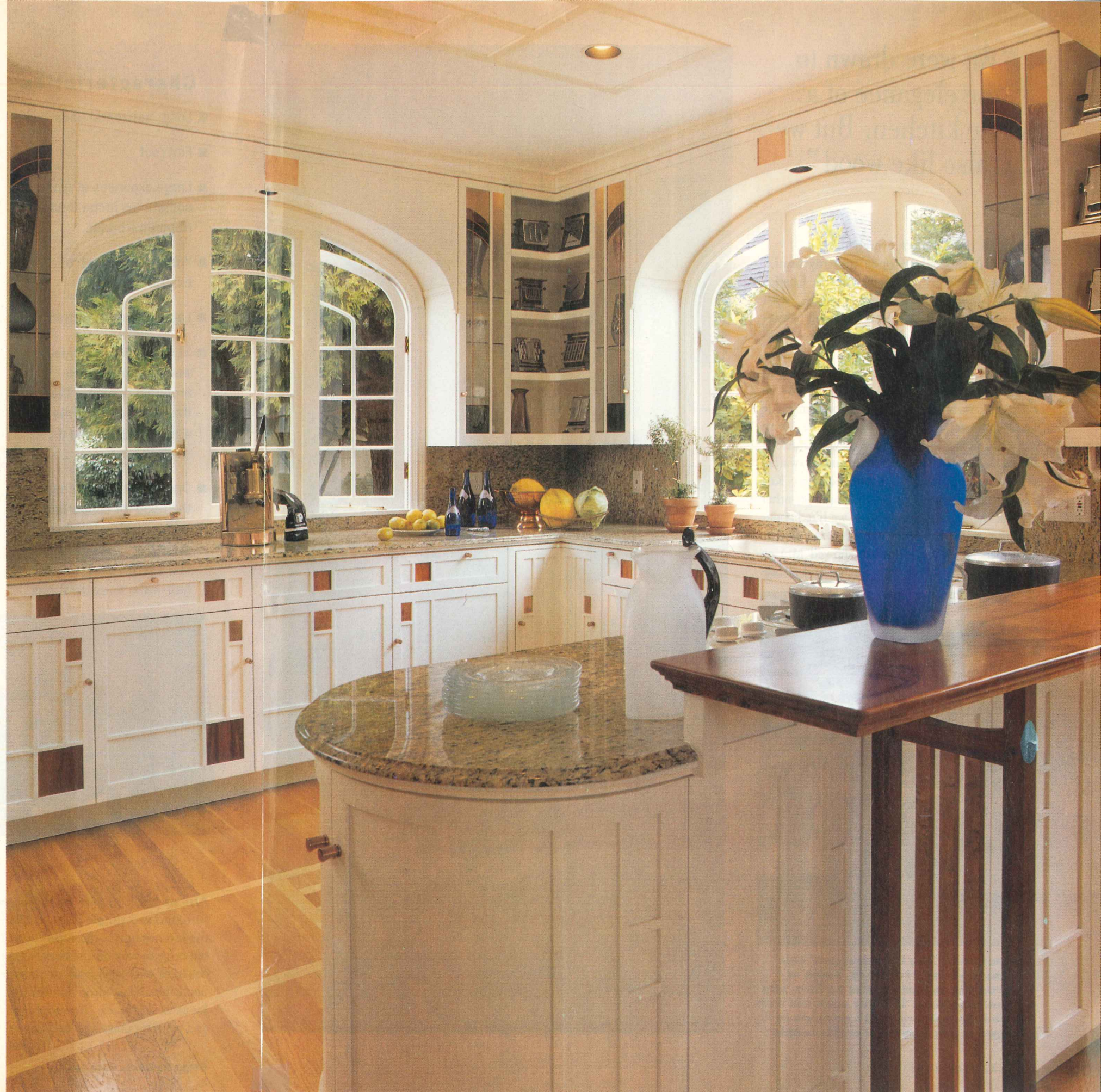
By James H. Roper Photography by David Livingston  
Produced by Wendy Ann Silverstein

**T**HIS REMODELED CALIFORNIA KITCHEN WAS INSPIRED BY AN unlikely pairing: the early-twentieth-century works of the Scottish designer Charles Rennie Mackintosh and the Dutch painter Piet Mondrian, admits architect Robert Nebolon. When Nebolon first saw the 1911 two-story stucco house with Craftsman-style interiors, the kitchen was the victim of a 1970s "remuddling." Gloomy dark birch was accented with deep-blue ceramic tile and red quarry tile. The space was poorly planned, with the centerpiece a 2½ x 2½-foot furnace flue that extended from the ceiling through the floor. A corner stairway to the basement took up even more valuable space.



Nebolon began by rerouting the plumbing and relocating the stairway outside the house. Next, he listened as the homeowners, a couple with two children, told him how they dreamed of a bright, light-filled space where they could entertain—logical since a new family room adjoins the kitchen. And, they added, the room should have cabinetry that was white and finely detailed. The couple showed the architect a book with a photograph of a Craftsman cabinet. "We were drawn to the elegance of a white kitchen," says the homeowner, "but we also like wood. We wanted something that looked original, like we had created it,

**In a once dark and dull kitchen, architect Robert Nebolon (above) created a bright and airy 225 sq. ft. space, complete with custom-painted wood cabinetry, expanses of granite on countertops and backsplash and gracefully arched windows.**





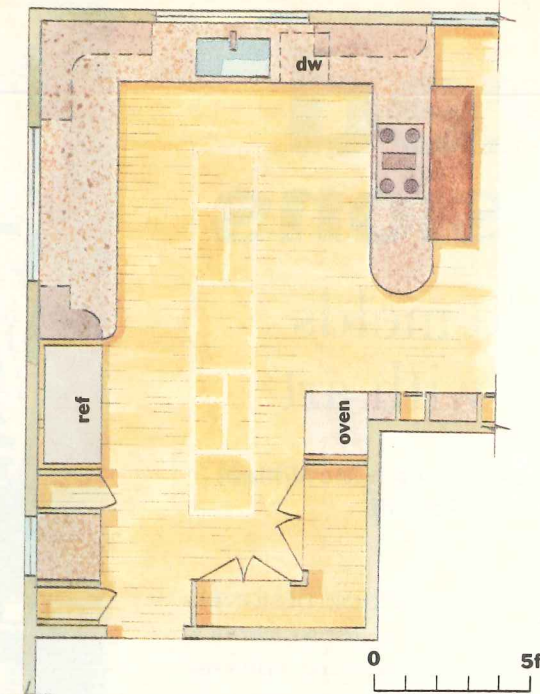
“We were drawn to the elegance of a white kitchen. But we also like wood”

instead of the cabinets everybody has.”

“Then it suddenly popped into my head,” says the architect. He remembered Charles Rennie Mackintosh’s cabinet designs, with their square motifs, vertical lines and white-painted wood—unusual for someone so influenced by Arts & Crafts design, where most surfaces were left unpainted. After looking at some of Mackintosh’s work, Nebolon came up with his own interpretation: custom-made wood cabinets, painted a warm white, with vertical and horizontal strips of wood. Alternating square shapes of copper and Hawaiian koa wood are inset into the pattern. Koa seemed appropriate since it was used in other parts of the house. “That’s what we liked about working with Robert,” explains one of the homeowners. “Every time we showed him an idea, he took it a few steps further and always



**Cabinet coup:** The homeowners’ collection of vintage toasters, some of them dating as early as the 1920s, sits on open shelving. Slender cabinets with stained glass doors hold examples of glassware made by local craftspeople.



After removing a heating flue and a stairway, the architect created a room with a U-shaped work zone at one end and a pantry area with full-height cabinets at the other end.

came up with a really creative solution.”

Nebolon’s repetition of square shapes—in the cabinetry, in the window muntins and in copper inserts above the windows—is a tribute to another luminary, the painter Mondrian, famous for his blocks of color.

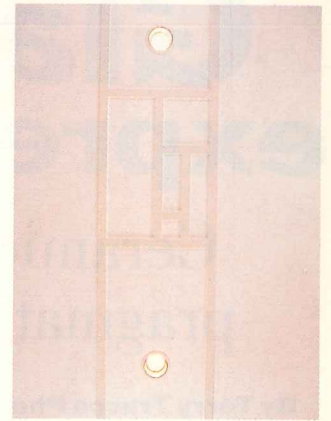
On the ceiling, there’s another reference to Mondrian. Nebolon created a geometric pattern with thin strips of painted wood; recessed can lights are integrated to fit within the squares. The homeowner liked the look so much that Nebolon designed a “reflection” on the floor in white oak, which contrasts with the red oak used for the bulk of the floor.

The architect fashioned the custom windows to be reminiscent of older styles, but not exact copies of some specific period. The middle pane of this muntined casement arrangement is fixed, while the two side panes are operable.

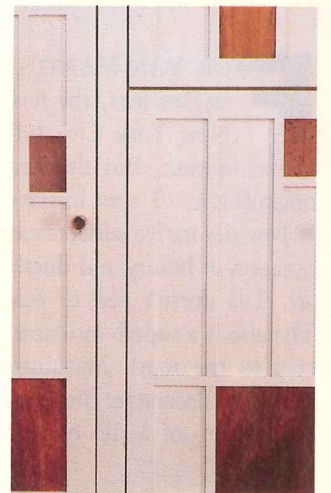
For countertops and backsplash, Nebolon used a gold-toned granite with bits of garnet stone that also complements the koa and copper. To Nebolon, square-edged granite would have looked “unfinished, too chunky,” so he cut identical facing ogee edges in both the granite and the wood strip underneath it.

The new design not only changed the look of this kitchen, it nearly doubled the size—to 225 square feet.

## Geometry lesson



**Patterned ceiling**



**Cabinetry insets**



**Oak flooring**

The ceiling (top) and the floor (above) share a subdivided rectangle reminiscent of a Mondrian composition. Center: The unique cabinets’ contrasting insets are koa wood at top and bottom, and copper in the center. Shopping Guide, page 146