

Old House Journal's

# NEW OLD HOUSE

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# Preserved in the Pantry

Classical design principles are preserved in a modern butler's pantry—a versatile transitional space between kitchen and dining room.

BY ELIZABETH NAPOLITANO

“The doors *slide*...they’re gorgeous!” says Sarah Blank, owner of Sarah Blank Design Studio in Darien, Connecticut. She’s referring to the stunning restoration-glass sliding cabinet doors in her impressive in-studio replica of the Ogden Mills Mansion’s butler’s pantry, designed by famed architect Stanford White in 1895.

An award-winning designer educated at the Fashion Institute of Technology in New York, Blank began her career designing kitchens in 1980. Later, she spent 17 years at Kitchens by Deane in Darien before founding her own interior design firm in 1999, when she expanded her repertoire to include interiors other than kitchens. As a member of the

Institute of Classical Architecture and Art, Blank has made the study of classicism in architecture an ongoing pursuit. Describing her philosophy, she explains, “We are classicists, and classicism in interior design is really a language that carries through everything we create.” Blank’s design expertise and painstaking attention to detail are rooted in her



Designer Sarah Blank re-created the Ogden Mills pantry designed by architectural legend Stanford White.

NANCY HILL PHOTO

ongoing study of classical architecture. Her belief that classical forms enhance the use of space in any home is the underpinning philosophy of her firm. The studio's customized kitchens, pantries, and other residential interior designs support this belief.

Her devotion to classicism, in part, has led her to study some of the grand estates of the Gilded Age. Among them is the work of McKim, Mead & White: the Ogden Mills Mansion in New York and Naumkeag, the Choate family summer home in Stockbridge, Massachusetts. When Naumkeag was built in 1896, McKim, Mead & White had embraced the Shingle Style—a home design that countered the ornate late Victorian style. Naumkeag displays the hallmarks of the Shingle Style, including broad gables; simple, informal lines; and rustic materials. Even in this summer vacation home, the design of a low-profile room like the butler's pantry was perfectly executed according to the firm's standards.

Blank and her staff spent days sketching the millwork and crown moldings at Naumkeag as part of her contribution to a Naumkeag-inspired butler's pantry for a client of noted interior designer Bunny Williams. The design retained many of the details of the original Naumkeag pantry, such as luscious mahogany woodwork and moldings, mahogany cabinets above paneled doors and drawers, double bead wainscoting, and a food-prep sink.

While the Naumkeag-inspired pantry design was not a replica, Blank's Stanford White pantry was conceptualized to be just that. Stanford White was the lead architect on the 1895 expansion of the original Ogden Mills Mansion, which was bequeathed to the state of New York in 1938 by the Mills' granddaughter, Gladys Mills Phipps. Blank and her staff studied and sketched the interior, as they



JONATHAN WALLER PHOTO

Above: The original pantry at Naumkeag offers several “modern technologies” of the day, such as a dumbwaiter, call box, and knife sharpener.