

Inside Kitchens: Breaking with Tradition

by Gordon Tully

Most house plans put the kitchen on the outside. It's unclear exactly why this is. In small, skinny plans and in some other plans, the size or shape of the house absolutely requires that the kitchen (and virtually all other rooms) have outside walls. The desire for a window over

the sink, so that the cook can have a view, is another reason. But as often as not, the kitchen seems to be put along the outside wall simply because that's the way things are done: it's a sort of unofficial, unquestioned tradition.

There are times, however, when

it's useful to overturn this tradition. Siting the kitchen in the interior of the house, surrounded by other rooms or passages, often makes for a useful, pleasant kitchen (particularly if attention is paid to lines of sight from the kitchen) while opening up other possibilities precluded by an outside kitchen. For instance, an interior kitchen is useful in cases when outside wall space is limited, and it often improves the circulation patterns. It also puts things right when an outside kitchen would result in an inside eating area, as often happens. In those cases, not only are those seated at the eating table without natural light, they must also look out over the kitchen counter to any view.

Below are described three plans in which I have located the kitchen on the inside of the plan, separated from eating or circulation areas with free-standing counters.

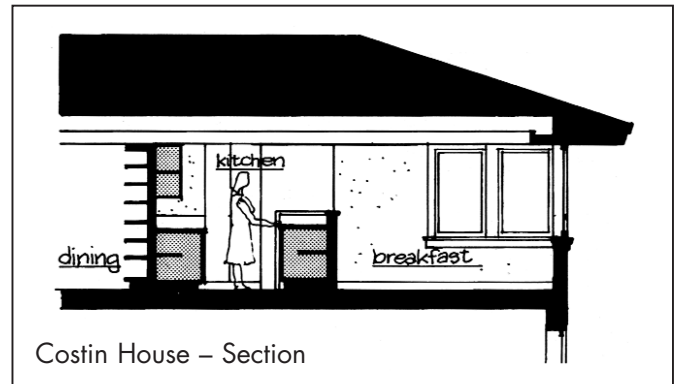
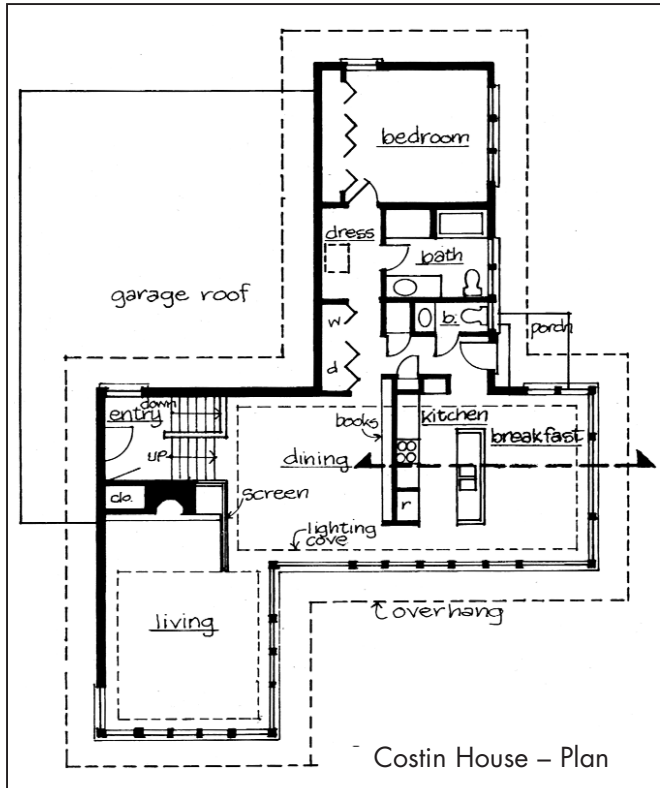
The Costin House

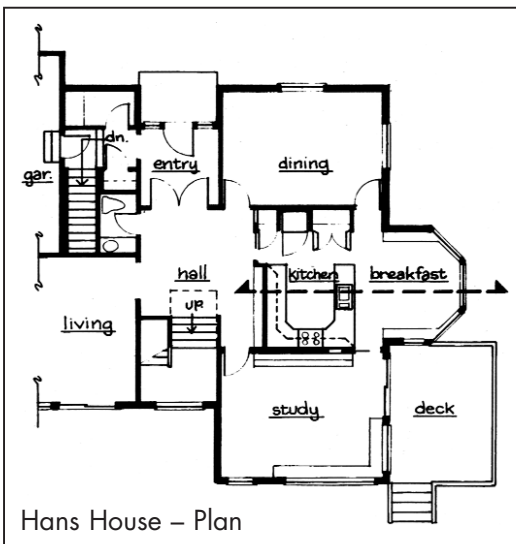
Here I wanted to keep a continuous band of tall windows going around the whole house; a kitchen on the outside wall would have spoiled this, since it would have required raising the bottoms of the windows over the kitchen counters. In addition, this house also had a large space in the center of the house that needed to be filled, similar to the Hans house.

The kitchen in this house (a favorite of mine) is part of the family eating area, separated from the formal dining room by a partial-height storage wall full of books. The sink is in an island, with a 180-degree view out to the trees, lawn, and garden. Working at the sink, you feel as if you are in command of a big ship.

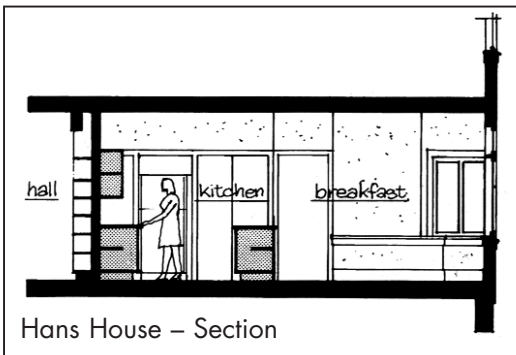
The Hans House

This is a big square house, so out-





Hans House – Plan

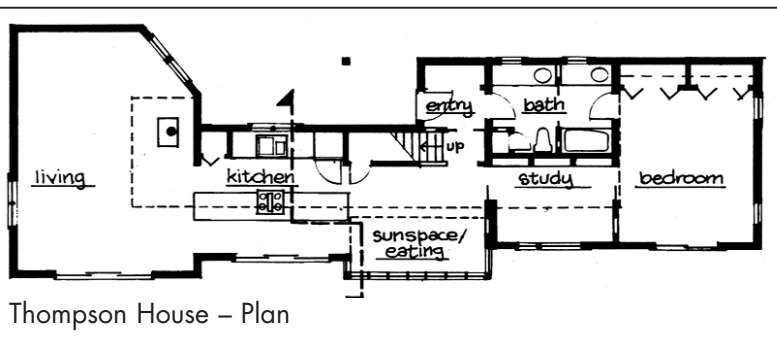


Hans House – Section

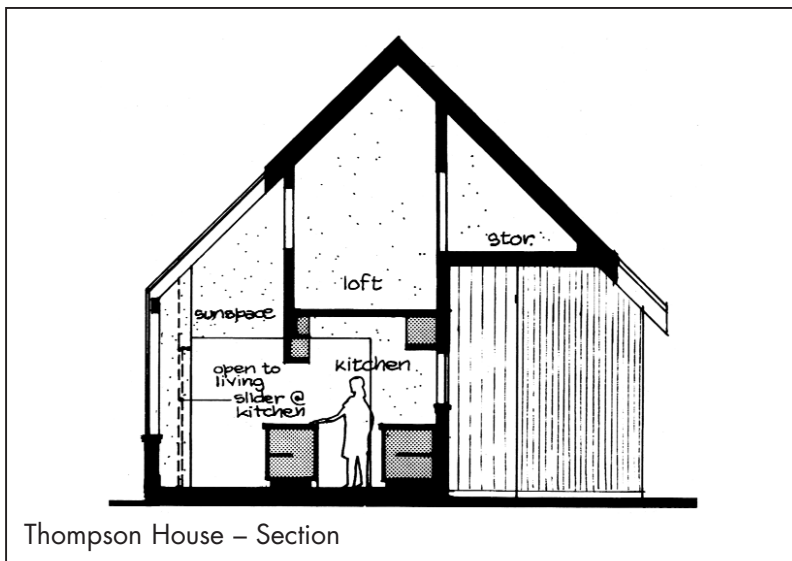
side walls were scarce, and made scarcer by the garage, which covered all the walls in the northern corner. The square plan also gave the house a kind of a hole in the middle that needed to be filled. I could have filled it with mechanicals and storage, but would have lost a room in doing so.

Instead, I put the kitchen there. It fills the center of the house nicely, forming a sort of pivot around which the rest of the house spins.

The kitchen is entered off the central hall. The adjacent breakfast area, set in a large bay, functions as the family eating space. A formal dining room a few steps off also has two exposures, as does the study. Both the study and the formal dining room can be reached either from the kitchen (through the breakfast area) or directly off the central hall. This is a terrific plan for a party, since guests can circulate past the kitchen to pick up food and drink.



Thompson House – Plan



Thompson House – Section

The Thompson House

This award-winning 100% solar house, which I helped design in my previous firm, Massdesign (1978), is extremely compact, yet feels quite spacious. Since it relied heavily on passive solar gain, we needed all the window space we could get. That precluded putting the kitchen along the outside wall.

The kitchen breaks all the rules, since you look right into it as you enter the house, yet it

works very well and has a wonderful view out the south-facing greenhouse. This house does not accommodate many people, as the kitchen creates a bottleneck; but for its owners, a doctor and his wife enjoying "empty nest" status, it works very well. ■

Gordon Tully is an architect practicing in Cambridge, Mass. He also teaches at the Harvard Graduate School of Design.