Building homes for other people appeals to me so much more than building and taking care of one for myself,” wrote Boston architect Eleanor Raymond (1887–1989) to her fellow Wellesley College alumnae in 1919. Raymond (figure 1) was born in Cambridge in 1887. A 1909 graduate of Wellesley College, she became interested in gardening and landscape architecture after completing her undergraduate education.

In 1916, Raymond enrolled at the Cambridge School of Architecture and Landscape Architecture for Women. The school was then just a year old, having been formed by Harvard University architecture professor Henry Atherton Frost (1883–1952) in 1915 when a colleague persuaded Frost to give evening drafting lessons to an alumna of Radcliffe College. The Cambridge School provided women with a unique opportunity to receive academic training in architecture in an all-female environment. But the school’s curriculum, which focused solely on the study of domestic design and gardens, reflected prevailing gender biases and effectively confined graduates to residential work. And yet, as Raymond’s message to her classmates suggests, the Cambridge School created professional opportunities unimaginable to previous generations of American women.1

After graduation in 1919, Raymond became a partner in Frost’s firm.2 Unfortunately, little is known of their working relationship. One can safely assume, however, that given Frost’s significant teaching commitments, Raymond oversaw the firm’s commissions and daily

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1. Frost & Raymond Suburbia and the Single-Family House of the 1920s

Nancy Gruskin

FIGURE 1. Eleanor Raymond

Courtesy of the Frances Loeb Library, Harvard Design School
operations. The printed announcement of their partnership stated that the firm would specialize in “the private house, including its gardens, interior decoration, and furnishings.” By taking this course, Frost and Raymond stood to capitalize from the middle-class housing boom of the 1920s. The number of newly constructed, single-family houses in suburban America nearly tripled between 1920 and 1922, reaching a peak in 1925.3

Winchester, like many metropolitan suburbs of the post-World War I era, experienced significant growth in the 1920s. Between 1920 and 1929, the town’s population increased just over twenty-one percent, and the number of single-family houses in Winchester rose from 2,091 to 2,967.4 Throughout the first half of the twentieth century, Winchester prospered. According to a 1984 study of Boston’s suburbs, Winchester climbed from the thirty-seventh position in 1890 to the fifth position in 1940 on the list of most affluent communities in metropolitan Boston.5

FIGURE 2. Entrance façade of James H. Cleaves house, 10 Lawrence Street, Winchester, 1921, designed by Frost and Raymond. Illustrated in House Beautiful, November 1922.

FIGURE 3. First-floor plan of the Cleaves house. From House Beautiful, November 1922.
The house Frost and Raymond designed at 10 Lawrence Street for Winchester salesman James H. Cleaves reflects these statistics (figure 2). Although the house encompasses only 1400 square feet, it cost over $21,000 to build in 1921, approximately seven times the national average cost of a new home that year.

The Cleaves house, which has served as a parsonage for the nearby First Baptist Church of Winchester since 1959, typified the smaller American house of the 1920s. The waning reliance on domestic servants, due in part to a government curtailment of European immigration in 1924, and the ready availability of labor-saving technologies such as vacuum cleaners, clothes washers, and central heating, changed domestic planning between the wars. The new interest in efficiency is reflected in the first floor plan of the Cleaves house (figure 3). An entrance hall separates the living and service wings of the house. A door at the left end of the hall leads to a small lavatory, a coat closet, and a laundry room. As originally designed, the laundry room accommodated a washing machine and an electric mangle and was planned to convert easily into a maid’s room, should the need arise.

The kitchen adjoining the laundry room received particular attention from Frost and Raymond (figure 4). In an article written for House Beautiful magazine in 1992, Cambridge School alumna Rose Greely highlighted the kitchen’s ergonomic design:

Looking beyond the breakfast room, the old-fashioned housekeeper will at first be struck by the small size of the kitchen. But one by one, its conveniences will press upon her notice, until she realizes that nothing is lacking, that on the contrary, everything is so compactly planned that the cook’s labor is cut in half. She will be impressed by the sink,
placed at the correct height for the housekeeper herself, with a special shelf on the inside of the cupboard door at the right for the soap and sink brushes; the mixing counter with its marble slab set at a lesser height than the sink to allow the straightening of arms necessary in the preparation of food; the space at the left of the stove for the tea wagon which is wheeled to the table; and the location of the fixtures correctly related for proper routing in the preparation of a meal.\footnote{7}

The kitchen led to a small breakfast room, one wall of which was lined with shelving accessible from both rooms (figure 5).\footnote{8} A Dutch door along the back wall of the breakfast room still opens onto an open terrace on the south side of the house. The living wing of the house consists of a dining room overlooking the rear terrace, a large living room (figure 6), and a book room, which, with its three walls of casement windows, might have been more aptly labeled a sunroom.

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\footnote{8}
On the second floor (figure 7), a bedroom and dressing room for the owners of the house are arranged within the footprint of the downstairs living room. The master suite includes a sleeping porch. Three additional bedrooms and a bathroom complete the second floor.

In its symmetry, massing, and exterior detail, the Cleaves house was inspired by eighteenth- and nineteenth-century domestic architecture. On the street side, the demarcation between the service wing and the living wing is denoted by a slight setback of the former (figure 2). The two wings were further differentiated through the use of materials—originally, the living wing was finished with flat tongue and grooved siding and the service wing was clad in wood shingles. An austere

FIGURE 8. The garden façade includes an ell with the sunroom on the first floor and sleeping porch on the second floor. An awning covers the terrace. From *House Beautiful*, November 1922.

entranceway framed by pilasters and a classical entablature adds a vertical element
to the otherwise horizontal façade, as do the elongated windows of the first floor.
On the garden side, the visual effect is more three-dimensional (figure 8). The
first-floor book room and the second-floor sleeping porch form an ell that borrows
vocabulary from Greek Revival architecture of the 1830s and 1840s.

Writing about the Cleaves house in 1928, art historian Henry-Russell
Hitchcock, Jr., saw the potential of its design as a way to break through the
“impasse” of traditionalism that typified American architecture of the period.
According to Hitchcock, who would later co-author The International Style, a book
that introduced European modernism to an American audience, the wooden lat-
ticework on the garden façade of the house was “as modern as Oud’s wire grilles
on his houses at the Hoek van Holland.” Hitchcock may have overemphasized
the aesthetic similarities between the Cleaves house and the work of European modernists
such as J. J. P. Oud, most likely in an effort to advance the cause of modern architecture.
But he correctly gauged the conservative taste of New England clients.
Generally unwilling to embrace the concept of houses as “machines for living,”
most New Englanders preferred to live in Capes, Colonials, and Tudors.

Raymond, however, exhibited a great interest in European modernism. She and
her partner, Ethel Power, sought out the work of Walter Gropius, Le Corbusier, and
other European modernists during a trip to Europe in 1930. The following year,
Raymond designed a Bauhaus-inspired house in Belmont for her sister Rachel
Raymond (figure 9).

Yet the Cleaves house proved to be a more representative work in Raymond’s oeuvre.
The period details of the house, its compact plan, and Raymond’s attention to
the needs of the single family and the single-family housekeeper were under-
standably of immense appeal to upper middle-class families searching for modern
conveniences in a comfortably familiar form.

(Nancy Gruskin, a resident of Cambridge, Massachusetts, is an architectural historian
and a lawyer.)

NOTES

1. For more biographical information on Raymond, see Doris Cole, Eleanor Raymond,
Writing about Eleanor Raymond,” in Singular Women: Writing the Artist, eds. Kristen

2. The firm of Frost & Raymond continued until 1935, when Raymond opened her own prac-
tice in Boston.

3. See Gwendolyn Wright, Building the Dream: A Social History of Housing in America
(Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1989); George Soule, The Economic History of the United States:
Prosperity Decade, From War to Depression (1917–1929) (New York: Rinehart, 1947); and Kenneth T. Jackson, Crabgrass Frontier: The

4. Bruce Winchester Stone, History of Win-
chester, Massachusetts (Winchester, Mass.: Town of

5. Matthew Edel, Elliott D. Sclar, and Daniel
Luna, Shaky Palaces: Homeowning and Social Mobility in Boston’s Suburbanization (New York:

Crusade and After, 1914–1928 (New York:
Macmillan, 1930), p. 141, and Wright, Building
the Dream, p. 195.

7. Rose Greely, “A Small House of Distinction,”
House Beautiful 52 (November 1922), p. 423. See also “House for James H. Cleaves,
Winchester, Massachusetts,” The Architectural Record 66 (November 1929), pp. 442–443;
“House of James H. Cleaves, Esq., Winchester, Massachusetts,” The Architectural Forum
(January 1927), pp. 95–96; and Ethel Power, The
Smaller American House (Boston: Little, Brown,
1927).

Raymond’s life partner, Ethel Power (1881–1969), was the editor of House Beautiful
magazine when the Cleaves house was featured in the publication. The two women met in
1915 through their volunteer work as Massachusetts suffragettes, and they enrolled
together at the Cambridge School. Power’s tenure at House Beautiful provided Raymond
and the firm of Frost & Raymond with invaluable publicity. From the early 1920s until 1934,
when the magazine’s editorial offices moved to New York City and Power resigned in order
to stay with Raymond in Boston, Raymond’s work
was featured at least twice a year in the magazine.

8. The wall separating the kitchen from the
breakfast room has since been removed, creating
an expanded kitchen.

Architects,” 2 The Hound & Horn (September
1928), p. 45. Hoek van Holland (literally, “Corner of Holland”) is a town in South Holland
in the Netherlands. Dutch architect J.J.P. Oud
designed low-cost workers’ housing in Hoek van Holland in the mid 1920s.

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