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escape

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May 2006



Plus ...
FOCUS ON THE VIEW:
A West Seattle home
shows you how

COMFORT IN

This West Seattle residence makes coming home feel like a getaway

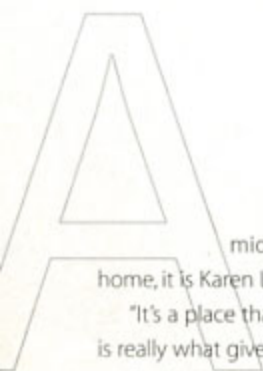
WRITTEN BY ALLISON LIND PHOTOGRAPHS BY MICHAEL JENSEN



THE CLOUDS



THE PANORAMIC VIEW AS WELL AS THE HOME'S TERRACE—DESIGNED BY LISA PFEIFFER OF PFEIFFER LANDSCAPING (PFEIFFERLANDSCAPING.COM)—INSPIRED ARCHITECT TOM LAWRENCE TO ORIENT THE FLOOR PLAN TO THE OUTDOORS. CUSTOM WINDOWS AND GLASS DOORS FROM VANCOUVER, B.C.-BASED DYNAMIC (DYNAMICWINDOWS.COM) ADD A SIMPLE, SLEEK LOOK—ONE THAT IS UNUSUAL TO SEE IN RESIDENTIAL USE. FROM THE TERRACE, THEY MIRROR THE STUNNING VIEW. EXTERIOR-MOUNTED TRANSLUCENT SUNSHADES ON AUTOMATIC SENSORS ARE ACTIVATED WHEN THE SUN'S GLARE IS TOO STRONG, KEEPING THE INTERIOR COMFORTABLE WITHOUT OBSTRUCTING THE VIEW.



Amid her many travels and the three other cities she calls home, it is Karen Lahr's West Seattle house that is her haven.

"It's a place that, when I'm away, I think about and sigh," she says. "This is really what gives me the greatest sense of feeling at home."

Nestled in a quiet hillside above Alki Beach, Lahr's 2,500-square-foot house has a sweeping view of Puget Sound. Like clockwork throughout the day, ferries glide across the deep-blue bay like a slow-moving painting. And on clear afternoons, the Olympic Mountains dazzle in the distance. Set peacefully high above it all, the home feels like a small castle amid the clouds.

The home was a project Lahr dreamed up with her husband, William, a few years ago. Unfortunately William never got to see their dream to fruition; he passed away from lung cancer only months before the home was completed. "I know how much he would have loved living here," she says, "and that gives me comfort."

The home's sense of restfulness is not simply due to its stunning view; it also comes from the sleek architecture and streamlined décor—a captivating combination created by Seattle architect Tom Lawrence and Minneapolis interior designer Carol Belz, who also designed Lahr's loft in that city.

Although relatively small, the home makes a striking statement. Its design is deceptively simple: a rectangular box with a slightly sloping roof. Windows, framed by crisp aluminum, span most of the western side and flood the interior with natural light. For the exterior, Lawrence chose low-maintenance Parklex panels, made of warm-colored African hardwood, that are anchored by exposed steel screws. "We could have concealed them, but I thought it added another layer of interest to the panels," Lawrence says.



THE HOME'S COLOR PALETTE WAS KEPT QUIET TO INVOKE A RELAXED ATMOSPHERE AND NOT DISTRACT FROM THE VIEW. GRAY FURNISHINGS KEEP THINGS SUBDUED, WHILE BURGUNDY GLOBAL VIEWS WOVEN-LEATHER CHAIRS (GLOBALVIEWS.COM) AND A GREEN SLATE FIREPLACE-SURROUND FROM OREGON TILE & MARBLE (WWW.ARACNET.COM/~TILE) ADD SUBTLE COLOR AND TEXTURE. THE ROBERT KUO SIDE TABLE, FROM BAKER KNAPP & TUBBS (BAKERFURNITURE.COM), AND THE PLAYFUL FIAM ITALIA COFFEE TABLE SOFTEN THE ROOM'S OTHERWISE STRICT LINES. A FLORAL ENCAUSTIC PAINTING BY BETSY EBY (REPRESENTED BY WINSTON WÄCHTER FINE ART) ALLUDES TO THE OUTDOORS.



The interior architecture is equally stunning. Bamboo flooring, used throughout the public spaces, was stained to echo the warm fir ceiling and framing around the expansive windows.

Inspired by the "wow factor" the view provides, Lawrence designed the entire floor plan around the picture-perfect vista. "We wanted the rooms to be able to communicate to one another as well as to the outdoors," he says. The result was an open living-dining-kitchen configuration, and a media room on the main floor that can be closed off with opaque-glass sliding doors. The U-shaped second floor frames the exposed dining area below.

To be sympathetic to both the architecture and the view, interior designer Belz kept the color palette quiet, concentrating on materials and textures that add interest without distracting. "When you walk in, there can't be a lot of noisy color or pattern that would compete with the view," she says.

The living room radiates sleekness and comfort. Deep burgundy woven-leather chairs add subtle color to the otherwise neutral-toned seating area. Sharp furniture lines are softened by an hourglass-shaped drum side table and a playful glass coffee table. "It makes such a beautifully quiet statement," Belz says of the Fiam Italia table.

The corner fireplace is surrounded in green slate that protrudes from the base to form a benchlike platform along the length of the wall, on which hangs a commanding Betsy Eby encaustic painting.

The minimalist dining area holds an oak-and-steel dining table and subtly curved leather dining chairs atop a mohairlike rug made of soft FLOR tiles. A "Birds" chandelier by artist Ingo Maurer—made of light bulbs and feathers spiraling upward—adds a touch of sophisticated whimsy. "I thought this space could be a little too serious and not friendly enough," Lahr says. "I wanted to show that there's humor here."

The kitchen continues the restrained palette. Lines are clean and colors neutral, but materials and hues create a stylish interplay. Poliform Varena cabinets in three varieties—lacquered with muted charcoal, Italian walnut and translucent glass—balance coolly with the brushed-steel backsplash and counter tops. A second backsplash, framed by a wall of walnut cabinets, is made of metallic tiles that catch light from the windows and reflect the subtle colors in the room.

To maintain the minimalist décor but provide ample storage, architect Lawrence designed a "tansu-chest-like" storage space behind the dining area under the open stairwell. For cohesiveness, it is painted the same muted charcoal as some of the adjacent kitchen cabinets.

Upstairs, the spare and restful master bedroom is immersed in light. Raumplus opaque glass sliders on the room's entry wall open to link the

CHAIRS BY HICKORY BUSINESS FURNITURE ARE MEANT FOR AN OFFICE BUT FIT THE STREAMLINED, CONTEMPORARY DÉCOR OF THE DINING ROOM. POLIFORM VARENA CABINETS, INSTALLED BY URBAN EASE (URBANEASE.COM), AND A BRUETON INDUSTRIES DINING TABLE PROVIDE A SLEEK AND MINIMAL LOOK, WHILE SURPRISING ELEMENTS LIKE THE "BIRDS" CHANDELIER BY INGO MAURER (INGOMAURER.COM) AND A GLIMMERING TILE BACKSPLASH ADD PERSONALITY.







ABOVE: THE WALNUT ISLAND WITH CONTEMPORARY STOOLS FROM LIGNE ROSET (LIGNE-ROSET-USA.COM) IS LAHR'S FAVORITE PLACE TO RELAX WITH HER MORNING PAPER. OPPOSITE, TOP: UPSTAIRS, A BRIDGE CONNECTS THE MASTER SUITE AT ONE END WITH THE OFFICE, GUEST BEDROOM AND BATH AT THE OTHER. RAUMPLUS SLIDERS (FROM URBANEASE.COM) AT BOTH ENDS OPEN THE ROOMS TO THE REST OF THE HOME. OPPOSITE, BOTTOM: A "WINDOW" OF RAUMPLUS SLIDERS BETWEEN THE MASTER BATH AND BEDROOM GIVES THE OWNER A VIEW EVEN FROM THE BATH. ABOVE THE SINKS, ROUND MIRRORS ON THE CLOSED SLIDERS SOFTEN THE RECTANGULAR LINES OF TWIN LIMESTONE OMVIVO WASHPLANE SINKS (OMVIVO.COM).



room to the exposed area below (sliders on the office at the other end of the bridge open to the space as well).

Lawrence used the same Raumplus sliders on the wall between the master bedroom and bath. When closed, they create a subtle frame for the bed on one side and a privacy screen for the bath on the other. When open, the bedroom's view is accessible even from the Japanese soaking tub on the far wall.

Relaxation reigns in the master bath, which is doused in neutral tones and natural surfaces. "It's the most relaxing place in the house," Lahr says. The tub is surrounded in rough-hewn oak, and twin sinks are made of limestone. Polished nickel faucets, an aluminum frame around the sliders and a glass backsplash add a cool, contemporary effect, while the darker slate floor (with radiant heating) prevents the space from being too stark.

The overall effect is that of a comfortable getaway that is also a home. "It's true that I've been through a lot of sorrow, and friends worried that I would be overwhelmed here," Lahr acknowledges. "But it's not overwhelming—it's magnificent. It always feels comfortable and protective."

Standing in her living room, she gestures toward the panorama of water, clouds and mountains. "Every day I can't believe how lucky I am; looking out at that just gives you a calm," she says. "When you look out here, you feel like you're the only thing around." ■

