

SPRING HOME DESIGN PACIFIC NW

The Seattle Times
MAY 8, 2016

Designs of Distinction

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'The Elliott Bay House' stunningly showcases architect Nils Finne's crafted modernism

On ONE HAND, architect Nils Finne embraces

state-of-the-art design machinery like super-sophisticated CNC routers and extra-large industrial water-jet cutters. On the other hand ... well, the other hand is kinda busy *sketching* those designs, thank you very much, with a good old inkbrush, on good old paper.

In one giant design high-five, it all comes together: "The human hand drives the machine," says the namesake of FINNE Architects — and crafted modernism results.

"Technology allows us to bring a level of craft to the design of the home that is unheard of," Finne says. "Everyone loves the idea of the crafted touch; that's why we love old homes: Someone 100 years ago really cared. Now we bring crafted materials in a reasonable way, particularly to modern homes."

It's a lovely concept.

In Finne's skilled hands, it's an *awesome* reality.

Take "The Elliott Bay House," for example: 3,500 square feet of light, air and sanctuary in the sweeping, almost floating, form of sustainable design that showcases jaw-dropping water and mountain views; dramatically adapted natural Northwest materials; and wow-worthy, touchable, true craftsmanship at every turn.

"Crafted modernism brings back the idea you can use natural materials and machine them to suggest natural patterns," Finne says.

Truly, it's a concept better experienced than explained. Just look. You will want to touch. But, for now ... just look. ☞

Sandy Deneau Dunham writes about architecture and design for Pacific NW magazine. Benjamin Benschneider is a magazine staff photographer.



Just inside the water-jet-cut Cor-Ten steel fence and front gate, in the intimate courtyard a sparkling reflecting pool, custom stainless-steel stands elevate two basalt boulders so they hover half an inch above the water's surface. The architectural massing of "The Elliott Bay House" is wrapped around this soothing sanctuary, architect Nils Finne says, which offers both "eternal views" (the sky, horizon and the great expanse of the Sound) and intimate ones ("the little pool you can touch and feel"). The pool gathers all roof drainage from the house, with the downspout from the living-room roof creating a 10-foot waterfall. Landscaping is by Leuner Landscape Design.

WHERE HANDS MEET MACHINES

BY SANDY DENEAU DUNHAM | PHOTOS BY BENJAMIN BENSCHNEIDER

WHERE HANDS MEET MACHINES



"The Elliott Bay House," built by SBI Construction, "reaches out to grab that view," says Finne. The exterior of the 3,500-square-foot, three-bedroom, highly energy-efficient home is all custom-stained red cedar, but two different patterns and colors: lighter stained tongue-and-groove siding on top, and more substantial channel siding at the base. "You cannot beat wood when you put it on the exterior," Finne says. "It has consumed only the energy it took to cut it. If you install a piece of wood with a layer behind it, it should last, at minimum, 50 years."

Satin Etch glass lets in light but provides plenty of privacy for the main-level powder room, with a floating mirror frame and Scraffito-textured Ann Sacks striated porcelain flooring.



Exposed Douglas fir beams "mark the living space as special" and form a roof that changes pitch dramatically along the length of the room. "The roof shape is responding to two views, almost like a fan unfolding in either direction," Finne says. The fireplace, by Metal Solutions, has a limestone mantel and a granite hearth bench.



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WHERE HANDS MEET MACHINES

Upstairs, the master bedroom cantilevers spectacularly toward Puget Sound. Nearly 12-foot-tall walls of glass wrap the room on three sides. "Clearly the view is a huge component," Finne says. "All major spaces open to sweeping views. As soon as we framed the master, everyone was, 'Oh, my God.'"

Far right: Three sets of free-form, sensuously curved steel lighting bars, drawn "all in one piece" by Finne and crafted by Landbridge Lighting, are set in recessed beech panels in the ceiling to unite the kitchen and dining area.



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WHERE HANDS MEET MACHINES



Inside the custom pivot-hinged front door, striking steel and wood stairs have water-jet-cut steel railings with a pattern based on Finne's hand-drawn inkbrush strokes — the same pattern as the front gate, as a matter of fact ... negative on the gate, positive on the stairs.



In the brilliantly luminous kitchen, beech cabinets showcase a custom CNC-milled pattern freehand-sketched by Finne; he calls it "imaginary landscape:" river valleys with mountain topography between them.