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What the Pros Know

The Latest Looks

- Decorating
- Renovating
- Outdoor Living
- Collecting
- Gardening

10 Questions

How Will New Orleans Grow?

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JUNE 2006
USA \$4.50
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Display until
June 12, 2006
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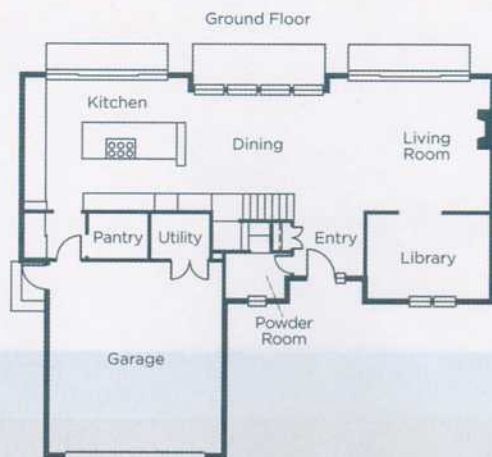
In the living room, which focuses on a slate-framed fireplace, contrasts in materials and textures provide visual interest in lieu of overt color or pattern; the sofa is from Della Robbia, the drum side table by Robert Kuo for McGuire; the painting is by Betsy Eby. Opposite: Windows on the front of the house were kept small, as they face a shared driveway; the exterior is clad in Parklex wood-composite panels (see "What the Pros Know," page 107).





PACIFIC FUSION

A COMPACT, MODERN HOME OVERLOOKING
PUGET SOUND COMBINES NEW MATERIALS
WITH DETAILS INSPIRED BY JAPANESE
FARMHOUSES.



With

their twins off to college, Bill Lahr and his wife, Karen, figured it was time to launch the next phase of their lives. The Minneapolis residents had always liked Seattle, so they started searching for property on Puget Sound.

While driving around the city they spied a FOR SALE sign in front of a tiny hillside cottage. Although the house was too small for the couple's needs, even as a future retirement home, it boasted a panoramic view of twinkling water and emerald islands backed by snow-capped mountains. The couple bought the property and asked area architect Thomas Lawrence to design a new house inspired by the rural farmhouses Bill had admired in Japan. "At one point," recalls Lawrence with a laugh, "Bill actually said, 'Hey, can we do thatch?'"

But the plans took a radical turn when Bill fell in love with a magazine photo of a barrel-roofed metal house and Karen became enamored with Parklex, a sleek wood-composite siding she'd seen on a Twin Cities arts center. "We started to rethink the house," says Lawrence, "and it morphed into something much more modern."

With its boxy form and shed roof, the completed house bears little resemblance to the shingled cottage Bill and Karen originally envisioned, although it retains many Japanese-inspired details. The underlying goal, however, remained the same: to create a compact, low-maintenance home with interconnected rooms that opened into each other and deferred to the view.

**PRODUCED BY LINDA O'KEEFE AND LINDA HUMPHREY.
PHOTOGRAPHS BY JOHN GRANEN. WRITTEN BY FRED ALBERT.**

Ingo Maurer's *Birds Birds Birds* chandelier dominates the dining area, which is carpeted in economical InterfaceFLOR tiles in a faux-mohair finish. Floor-to-ceiling windows offer unobstructed views of Puget Sound and the Olympic Mountains; walnut-finish cabinets from Poliform frame a backsplash of shimmering glass tile from Pratt & Larson.







When

you step through the front door, the exterior's geometry gives way to ethereal openness and a 2,500-square-foot interior that's as soothing and soulful as a sonnet. Floor-to-ceiling windows drench the rooms in light, while bamboo floors and fir paneling exude warmth even after the sun goes down.

A compact living room anchors one end of the main floor, while the other is given over to a seductively understated kitchen fitted with walnut-and-lacquer-finish cabinets. A towering dining room divides the two spaces, a fanciful Ingo Maurer chandelier erupting from its center like a flock of birds in flight. "The house could have been too serious," Karen cautions. "I wanted to have some fun here."

Like many of the home's appointments, the chandelier was found by the design-savvy client and vetted by her design team,

which included Minneapolis interior designer Carol Belz, who had worked with the Lahrs before. To give the home a Zen-like sense of serenity (without upstaging the view), Belz eliminated nearly any trace of color or pattern, allowing contrasting textures and materials to provide the necessary visual interest. "Those quiet juxtapositions stayed consistent throughout the house," notes Belz.

A switchback staircase framed in sinewy stainless steel (a detail inspired by I.M. Pei) leads to a second-floor bridge connecting the guest room and office with the serene master suite. A chaise—the sole holdover from the owners' Minneapolis home—overlooks the parade of ferries crossing Puget Sound; a headboard wrapped in a Jack Lenor Larsen botanical provides the sole whisper of adornment. "It's not a house for noisy fabrics," says Belz.



Clockwise (from top left): An interior window over the bed offers views into the master bath; a bridge at the top of the staircase connects the second-floor master suite to an office; *tansu*-like storage below the stairs speaks to the home's Japanese influence. Opposite: Shoji-style panels fitted with translucent white glass permit views across the bedroom to the office or can close for privacy.



What the Pros Know The Lahr home is covered in Parklex, a wood-composite panel made from multiple layers of Kraft paper impregnated with resin and topped with a resin-impregnated wood veneer. Weather-resistant and virtually maintenance-free, it comes in four-by-eight-foot sheets and retails for about \$12 to \$14 per square foot. The material is attached to vertical battens affixed to the home's exterior—a ventilated rain-screen system that allows moisture and air to circulate behind the siding. Architect Thomas Lawrence was impressed. "It gives you a very contemporary feel," he says, "but warm and very distinctive." Parklex comes with a ten-year limited warranty and is available through Finland Color Plywood Corporation (fcpcusa.com).



Despite

the changes to Bill's original Japanese farmhouse notion, many vestiges of that Asian aesthetic remain. Rooms are crowned with stout fir rafters that extend beyond the windows to support broad, overhanging eaves. A coven of cubbyholes under the stairs pays homage to the stair-step *tansu*, and shoji-like panels fitted with translucent white glass reveal rooms (or views) with artful discretion. There's even a Japanese soaking tub in the master bath.

Bill and Karen lived out of state while the home was under construction. Sadly, Bill never got to see his vision fulfilled. Three months before the house was completed, he was diagnosed with cancer. Although the crew from SBI Construction worked feverishly to wrap up the project, Bill passed away before the home was finished.

Today, a single framed photo of her husband graces Karen's bedroom shelf, but his spirit infuses every corner. It was Bill who campaigned for the home's easy indoor-outdoor flow and insisted that Lawrence save the original home's Hobbit-like front door (now consigned to the passageway between the garage and kitchen).

"It was his way of saying, 'This was another house before, and we thought it was worthwhile to remember that,'" Karen says.

Karen takes comfort in these memories and cherishes the house all the more because of them. "I never felt, Oh gosh, I don't even want to live here because we can't share it together," she says, "because I feel like he is here and is sharing it with me." ❀

See Resources, last pages.



An oak surround frames a Japanese soaking tub in the master bath; windows look past the driveway to a hillside. Opposite: The bathroom's Omvivo Wash-plane sink drains into a concealed metal trough. Mirrors are affixed to sliding panels that open to reveal the bedroom—and Puget Sound.