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Northwest GLAMOUR

modern nest CONNECTING WITH
THE FORESTED LANDSCAPE OF WASHINGTON STATE THROUGH
A DYNAMIC FRAMEWORK OF WOOD-GLOSS AND STONE

photography by BENJAMIN BENSCHNEIDER text by PETER SACKETT





opening pages A rooftop clerestory crowns the window-walled living pavilion of a Nils Finne-designed residence on a wooded slope near Seattle. Montana ledgerstone walls define the garage and private quarters (right), linked to the pavilion by an entrance room with a custom mahogany and etched-glass door. **these pages** "A Douglas fir wood-quilt ceiling, a ledgerstone fireplace and exposed steel beams anchor the open-plan living area, dining area and kitchen," says Finne. Custom cherrywood cabinetry adds a layer of refinement to the fir-paneled walls and fir-inlaid vertical steel columns.



well-sited house is often hailed for its sweet spot—that one special place within its walls from which the occupants can focus on something beautiful that lies beyond,

always reminding them of where they are fortunate enough to live. But architect Nils Finne went the well-done house one better when he designed a residence for a family in a rural, wooded location east of Seattle and delivered vistas from every window.

A lofty circle of fir and cedar trees cradles the site, which the couple had cherished for the way it could conceal them in a nest of green. They asked Finne, principal of Finne Architects, for a design that would bring them closer to those protective trees and last for the generations to come. Just off-center on the sloping property, a plinth and ramparts of Montana ledgestone trace the T-shaped foundation. The building softens as it rises, shifting to windows interspersed with panels of tongue-and-groove red cedar. The structure indents over the first story, then lifts again with large clerestories held aloft by a sinewy matrix of steel all but unseen from the outside. The quilt-like ceiling of Douglas fir, visible through tall windows, is characteristic of Finne's work, the effect finessed and taut but alive with organic detail.

"I like to juxtapose naturalistic textures against smooth surfaces," says the architect and furniture designer. "I use a galaxy of textures, playing them against something with opposite qualities or a strong contrast." Finne's roots are Scandinavian, a culture with a rich tradition of modern designs in wood and other organic materials; he borrows heavily from that history. After studying in Helsinki, Finland, on a Fulbright scholarship, he worked with Richard Meier on the Getty Museum in Los Angeles. The rare chance to explore contemporary architectural design on a grand scale, with a big budget for superb craftsmanship, also influenced Finne's approach to residential architecture.

"This house is an example of what I call crafted modernism," he says. "It's where I take the idea of modernism and bring it to a level of craft and detail that is unusual." Finne organized the house into two broad, perpendicular concourses, one public and one private. The living pavilion sweeps skyward beneath a huge clerestory monitor and terminates at the hearth, a mosaic

of ledgestones softly illuminated by daylight from above. "I use roof structures as apertures for light," he says. "It's a way of taking natural light and bouncing, channeling and filtering it so that it enters a room soft and dappled, as if through a lens."

"I never have to turn on a light during the day in this house," says the wife, "even when it's rainy and overcast." Laughing, she adds, "It cures seasonal affective disorder!"

The woody pavilion accommodates four distinct social spheres over a luminous common floor of pale quartersawn oak—a large, theater-style kitchen, a dining space with a Finne-designed table, a living area and a small, open home office. Each activity has its own corner, but all mingle easily, have a view of the fireplace and are surrounded by windows and the tree line beyond. The room has lavish dimensions, but Finne keeps the visual scale modest with the soft radiance of Douglas fir, which also appears as an inlay in pairings of steel columns.

In the home office and kitchen, Finne designed cabinetry of cherrywood, similar to the fir in tone and color but more refined in texture. In a complementary cool shade of muted, mottled green, countertops of Burlington slate from England sit below a backsplash of green, grey and white stone tiles.

The ceiling height drops and the room dimensions narrow dramatically in the entry, which links the living pavilion and the private quarters and also invites visitors through the front door, a banded collage of textured mahogany and satin-etched glass, another example of Finne's fascination with contrasting details. On its way to the private spaces, the hall off the entry splits left to the master suite and right to the powder room, utility areas and garage. From the center of the hall, stairs to the lower-level study and guest quarters follow a custom teak and laser-cut steel banister designed to resemble abstracted reeds and grass.

The master bedroom, two stories above the sloping backyard, features a Finne-designed bed faced with small cherrywood shingles. From their airborne outpost, the couple enjoys sight lines through a second large clerestory into the spiky upper reaches of the evergreens. "This bedroom is wonderful," says the wife. "It feels like a tree house. During the day we can watch the weather, the deer and the birds. And because the windows are so big, we can see a show of the constellations at night." +



clockwise from left The Husfliden throw, Tufenkian rug and low table with Deloss Webber sculptures accent Minotti sofas in the living area; the Lofot mahogany-bentwood and blued-steel dining table is Finne's design. His bed and headboard of cherrywood shingles in the master bedroom. A custom teak and laser-cut steel banister leads to the guest quarters. "The kitchen and dining area occupy roughly half of the living pavilion," Finne notes. In the master bath a cherrywood vanity is framed with blackened steel, and limestone flooring is embedded with glass mosaic tiles; the shower, next to the tub, is "a freestanding glass box."



right “The delicate wood structure is connected to the landscape by a plinth of Montana ledgestone,” says Finne. “On the west elevation, the master bedroom [near right] becomes a kind of treehouse, surrounded by wood and glass and perched on a full-story stone base. On the south, the living pavilion [far right] is punctuated by the soaring glass roof monitor, bringing soft natural light into the living spaces.” Tongue-and-groove cedar siding wraps the main floor of the house.

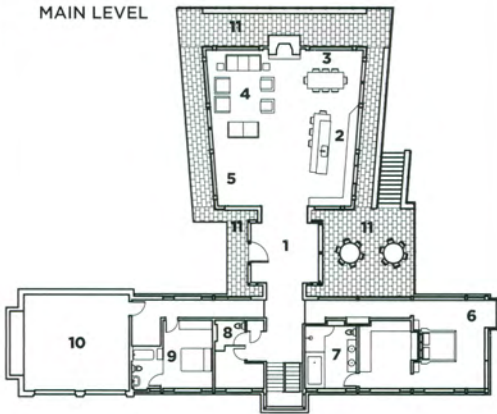
maximizing
space and light

DESIGN DETAILS

ARCHITECT **NILS FINNE**
USES NATURAL LIGHT
TO ENHANCE COMPACT
MULTI-USE SPACES.

“The nature of the open plan is evolving,” says Nils Finne, a twenty-five-year master of the form. “Sustainable design is all about building smaller. That means spaces must become more multi-use. At the same time, natural light will be critical in more-compact habitats. It provides mood and a means of extending interiors to the landscape or cityscape. The largest clerestory in this Washington house [right] faces north for a reason. Constant and glare-free northern light has always been the lighting of choice for painting studios. A skylight,” Finne cautions, “makes the worst possible use of natural light, as the light it admits is harsh. That’s not to deny the beauty of a ray of sunlight slicing through a space. It’s simply that sunlight must be carefully modulated.”

MAIN LEVEL



- | | | |
|---------------|----------------|-------------|
| 1 Entry | 5 Office | 9 Bedroom |
| 2 Kitchen | 6 Master suite | 10 Garage |
| 3 Dining area | 7 Master bath | 11 Terraces |
| 4 Living area | 8 Powder room | |



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