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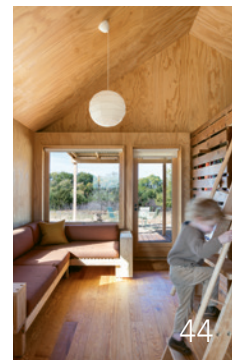
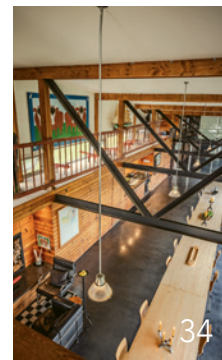
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PUBLISHED BY
SOLA GROUP
 SOLA Group, Inc.
 444 N. Michigan Ave.,
 Suite 300
 Chicago, Illinois 60611-3989
 847.920.9513

Publisher
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 For subscription information
 and address changes, write to:

Residential Design,
 Circulation Dept.,
 444 N. Michigan Ave., Suite 300, Chicago, Illinois
 60611-3989, or email rd@omeda.com and add the
 subject line "Circulation Dept."

**Statement of Ownership, Management, and Circulation
 (Requester Publications Only)**

PS Form 3526

1. Publication Title SOLA GROUP INC./RESIDENTIAL DESIGN		2. Publication Number 22860	ISSN 2689632X	3. Filing Date 09/15/2024
4. Issue Frequency BI-MONTHLY		5. Number of Issues Published Annually 6		6. Annual Subscription Price \$ 50.00
7. Complete Mailing Address of Known Office of Publication 223 W ERIE ST STE 3SW CHICAGO, COOK, IL 60654-6562				Contact Person MIKE SERINO Telephone (630) 699-2004
8. Complete Mailing Address of Headquarters or General Business Office of Publisher 223 W ERIE ST STE 3SW CHICAGO, IL 60654-6562				
9. Full Names and Complete Mailing Addresses of Publisher, Editor, and Managing Editor				
Publisher (Name and complete mailing address) PAUL DEGRANDIS 223 W ERIE ST STE 3SW CHICAGO, IL 60654-6562				
Editor (Name and complete mailing address) PATRICK O'TOOLE 223 W ERIE ST STE 3SW CHICAGO, IL 60654-6562				
Managing Editor (Name and complete mailing address) S. CLAIRE CONROY 223 W ERIE ST STE 3SW CHICAGO, IL 60654-6562				
10. Owner (Do not leave blank. If the publication is owned by a corporation, give the name and address of the corporation immediately followed by the names and addresses of all stockholders owning or holding 1 percent or more of the total amount of stock. If not owned by a corporation, give names and addresses of the individual owners. If owned by a partnership or other unincorporated firm, give its name and address as well as those of each individual owner. If the publication is published by a nonprofit organization, give its name and address.)				
Full Name		Complete Mailing Address		
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PATRICK O'TOOLE		223 W ERIE ST STE 3SW, CHICAGO, IL 60654-6562		
11. Known Bondholders, Mortgagees, and Other Security Holders Owning or Holding 1 Percent or More of Total Amount of Bonds, Mortgages, or Other Securities. If none, check box <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> None				
Full Name		Complete Mailing Address		
13. Publication Title SOLA GROUP INC./RESIDENTIAL DESIGN				
14. Issue Date for Circulation Data Below 07/01/2024				
15. Extend and Nature of Circulation		Average No. Copies Each Issue During Preceding 12 Months	No. Copies of Single Issue Published Nearest to Filing Date	
a. Total Numbers of Copies (Net press run)		43017	42168	
b. Legitimate Paid and/or Requested Distribution (By Mail and Outside the Mail)	(1) Outside County Paid/Requested Mail Subscriptions stated on PS Form 3541. (Include direct written request from recipient, telemarketing and Internet requests from recipient, paid subscriptions including nominal rate subscriptions, employer requests, advertiser's proof copies, and exchange copies.)	40396	40626	
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	(3) Sales Through Dealers and Carriers, Street Vendors, Counter Sales, and Other Paid or Requested Distribution Outside USPS	0	0	
	(4) Requested Copies Distributed by Other Mail Classes Through the USPS (e.g. First-Class Mail)	0	0	
c. Total Paid and/or Requested Circulation (Sum of 15b (1), (2), (3), (4))		40396	40626	
d. Non-requested Distribution (By Mail and Outside the Mail)	(1) Outside County Nonrequested Copies stated on PS Form 3541 (include Sample copies, Requests Over 3 years old, Requests induced by a Premium, Bulk Sales and Requests including Association Requests, Names obtained from Business Directories, Lists, and other sources)	1710	1040	
	(2) In-County Nonrequested Copies stated on PS Form 3541 (include Sample copies, Requests Over 3 years old, Requests induced by a Premium, Bulk Sales and Requests including Association Requests, Names obtained from Business Directories, Lists, and other sources)	0	0	
	(3) Nonrequested Copies Distributed Through the USPS by Other Classes of Mail (e.g. First-Class Mail), Nonrequestor Copies mailed in excess of 10% Limit	54	35	
	(4) Nonrequested Copies Distributed Outside the Mail (include Pickup Stands, Trade Shows, Showrooms and Other Sources)	514	164	
e. Total Nonrequested Distribution (Sum of 15d (1), (2), (3), (4))		2278	1239	
f. Total Distribution (Sum of 15c and 15e)		42674	41865	
g. Copies not Distributed		343	303	
h. Total (Sum of 15f and 15g)		43017	42168	
i. Percent Paid and/or Requested Circulation ((15c / 15f) times 100)		94.66 %	97.04 %	
16. If total circulation includes electronic copies, report that circulation on lines below.				
a. Requested and Paid Electronic Copies (Sum of 15c and 15e)		1338	1460	
b. Total Requested and Paid Print Copies (Line 15c) + Requested/Paid Electronic Copies		41734	42086	
c. Total Requested Copy Distribution (Line 15f) + Requested/Paid Electronic Copies		44012	43325	
d. Percent Paid and/or Requested Circulation (Both print and Electronic Copies)		94.00 %	97.00 %	
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17. Publication of Statement of Ownership for a Requester Publication is required and will be printed in the 11/01/2024 issue of this publication.				
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PAUL DEGRANDIS		PUBLISHER	09/15/2024 08:26:53 AM	
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Haunting Home



While connecting with Brian MacKay-Lyon's office about possible projects we might publish, I mentioned that we had an upcoming issue on remodeling. They had just finished photographing a very unusual renovation and addition, and asked if I would be interested. There was hesitation on their part to submit it because, as Brian later pointed out, "it's not much like a conventional house."

The building in question is quite famous in architecture circles, as is the program from which it came: Ghost Lab, Brian's legendary design-build boot camp in Nova Scotia. Built in 2006, it represents the group efforts of Ghost 8. The original 100-foot-long wedge-shaped "whale" rises toward the ocean and tapers toward the land. Clad in corrugated metal, it's the anchor structure among projects emerging from 12 years of Ghosts held on Brian's remote rural property.

Shobac Studio, as it's now called, was not designed to be a house. "We built it as a studio and dining hall for Ghost Lab," says Brian. "Then it functioned as a rural office for the practice. And now we live in it. It's one of the wildcard spaces. It has a 40-foot table in it. If you have a 40-foot table, you find you need it."

Working with his architect son and structural engineer daughter, Brian has recently expanded the studio into a full-time residence, adding another 100-foot-long piece to the wedge for an indoor pool, spa, and gym—at his wife's request. There are other tweaks to the structure, too, which already contained a galley kitchen, sleeping alcove, living area, a loft bedroom, and a vast dining area for that essential table.

The family plans to open the new exercise facilities to the local community they have fostered on this ruggedly beautiful property, dotted with buildings designed, restored, or adapted by MacKay-Lyons Sweetapple.

"There are all kinds of events that we have here and it's a working farm. We're living with sheep, cattle, and horses," says Brian. "Functionally, it's very diverse. It's a village-making utopia thing where we test ideas. We're weaving a whole lot of little buildings into the fabric. It's a conversation that keeps going with the land."

He's still building houses for others nearby—designing them as small as he can, in keeping with his philosophy of "enough house." After all, if you have the shared amenities of a community, no individual house needs to loom large. "Mostly we do really tiny houses, and I never get tired of that. It's about the clients—who they are and what they think. That's what keeps me doing this—making stories together."

Stories are best told breaking bread together over a leisurely meal, and there's room for everyone at the Shobac table. Indeed, it may be that this dining table—located at the heart of this "wildcard" building and Shobac Farm—is what has defined it as a home all along.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "S. Claire Conroy".

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Some Thoughts From This Year's CRAN Symposium

BY MARK ASHER, AIA

The great unheralded trick of residential architecture is its multidisciplinary nature. Conventional wisdom often pigeonholes us into the category of generalist, where we know a little bit about many things. I think we even view ourselves this way. However, the reality is you must be very good at very many things. You might go so far as to say the custom residential architect must be good at everything.

Of course, there are specialists in any field. Still, we should take a moment and take a bow to the broad range of knowledge it takes to do this: art and history, construction on the cutting edge of environmental science, and practice management. The latter being the unruliest of all. Learning it all takes a long time, but learn it we do. The annual CRAN symposium—held this September in Seattle—celebrates the intersection of these often disparate skills.

At the top of this year's agenda, Kermit Baker, AIA, chief economist for the American Institute of Architects, spoke of economic trends, forecasts, and the astonishing shortfall in our housing needs. As we pondered that problem through spreadsheets and Gantt charts, professor Julio Bermudez, leader of the Architecture, Culture, and Spirituality Forum, reminded us of the transcendental possibilities of architecture. He recalled Alvar Aalto's quote, "The ultimate goal of the architect[...]is to create paradise." By necessity, architectural pragmatism and spirituality exist side by side. It is the great duality of architecture. It might be its great unifier, as the art of making architecture lies in



AIA CRAN's annual symposium, held recently in Seattle, gathered thought leaders and subject matter experts from across the country. (Shown clockwise from top left:) Kermit Baker, AIA; Susan Jones, FAIA; Luis Jauregui, FAIA; professor Julio Bermudez and Emily Mottram, RA.



doing so many things well—all at the same time.

Aalto's lofty polemic does not contradict the idea of building more climate-responsive architecture. Susan

Jones, FAIA, of atelierjones, LLC, presented her firm's approach to addressing this concern, which includes writing and creating guidelines for the burgeoning field of Mass Timber



This page: As part of the annual house tour, attendees ferried from Seattle to Bainbridge Island to see Miller Hull’s Loom House.

Design. It’s another example of the unavoidable intersection of design, technology, and innovation we face as architects, where a blend of art and science is required.

Similarly, Emily Mottram, RA, outlined her commonsense approach to building environmentally responsible homes. She is a co-author of “The Pretty Good House.” “PGH” offers an understandable and accessible methodology for residential construction. As Emily states, and as the book title suggests, the “perfect solution is often beyond most homeowners’ financial capability.” But we can do more—the smallest steps towards greener buildings benefit us all. PGH pushes guidelines for better building—and more responsive buildings—to a larger audience.

These elements of our work, be it design, construction techniques, or business development, are sometimes seen as smokestacks. The CRAN symposium attempts to weave them into one tapestry, which is essential to making architecture.

Finally, CRAN is a volunteer organization. And like all organizations, it is only as good as its people. From its origins as an informal gathering more than 15 years ago to one of the AIA’s most successful Knowledge Communities, Luis Jauregui, FAIA, has been a pillar of CRAN. Indeed, the CRAN

community would not exist without him and his outreach—and these efforts were honored at this year’s event. Luis may be the generalist we are purported to be, but he happens to be very good at everything. Thank you, Luis.

And thank you to all of our sponsors

and attendees. We hope to see you in Alexandria, Virginia, in 2025.

Mark Asher is principal of Asher Slaunwhite + Partners in Jenkintown, Pennsylvania, and chair of the Philadelphia chapter of AIA CRAN.



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A while back, architect Oonagh (pronounced “Oona”) Ryan arrived at her clients’ Santa Monica bungalow to discuss plans for their new home in Los Angeles. As she was walking up to the house, she noticed a bush with a profusion of bright red berries. She picked one and brought it to the meeting, suggesting that it could be incorporated into the palette of their new home. The clients responded with enthusiasm. The resulting house is cream-colored, but the adjacent art studio is a vivid red, signaling that artistic chaos has a place here along with calm and order.



Oonagh Ryan, AIA, ORA founder and principal.



Boldly colored, warmly inviting, distinctively personal—these are not adjectives that are always associated with modern architecture. But when L.A.’s Midcentury Modern legacy, its tradition of freewheeling architecture, and the vibe of its buzzy retail and hospitality spaces are combined with an inventive mind that enjoys a good design challenge, you get Oonagh’s firm, which is named ORA.

“We attract creative clients that have ambitious goals,” says Oonagh, who speaks with a slight lilt that she retains from her native country of Ireland. “We find out what is unique to them and their values and culture—something that no one else has—and integrate that into their home. It’s about creating extraordinary places for everyday life.”

Oonagh’s own path shows how suited she was to becoming an evangelist for L.A.’s optimistic spirit and indoor-outdoor lifestyle. Growing up in the Irish countryside, her favorite activity was to accompany her grandfather, who owned a construction company, to different jobsites. She studied architecture at Technological University Dublin in the late ’80s.

Captivated by Frank Gehry’s hugely influential home renovation in Santa Monica and the work of other cutting-edge practitioners in Southern California, she entered the green card lottery, hoping to pursue her dream of doing architecture in L.A. She won the lottery and made the move, but it



Opposite and top left: Natural light floods the Boomerang House, thanks to its narrow floor plate and a long row of skylights strategically placed over the stairwell. The house bridges its contemporary outlook with the surrounding neighborhood via traditional wood elements. Window shutters and a barn door soften the impact of the home’s modern form and its small but brightly colored wing.

took her a little time to establish herself. After a year of waitressing, she landed a job as a designer at Frederick Fisher and Partners, where she worked on a mix of high-end residential, restaurants, and civic commissions. Five years later, she moved to Koning Eizenberg, where she continued to work on a wide variety of projects.



According to Oonagh, she might still be at Koning Eizenberg today if she hadn't purchased a house on the east side of town. The Koning Eizenberg office was on the west side, resulting in a grueling commute. While she contemplated looking for a new job, she also began taking on some side projects; three years later, she had enough work to launch her own firm.

The ORA Principles

That was in 2014. Ten years later, ORA has a distinctive body of work that includes award-winning residential, commercial, and hospitality projects. They include the restaurant Auburn in Hollywood, which won a James Beard Foundation Restaurant Design Award; Liberation Coffee House in L.A., which received a national AIA Small Project Award; and the residential project Art Barn, which garnered multiple local AIA awards. In 2021, ORA was honored as an emerging practice by the local chapter of the AIA, highlighting the firm as one to watch. "Every project is an exploration into how materials come together to create powerful space," the jury commented.

One of Oonagh's first projects as a solo practitioner, the renovation of her home in L.A.'s Mount Washington neighborhood, provides a good introduction into her guiding principles. Rome House, which is named after the street it is on, is a classic Midcentury post-and-beam house. It was sold as a tear-down, but Oonagh saw that it had good bones (first principle: renovate whenever possible). In her plans for the remodel, she opted out of air conditioning, leveraging the structure's deep overhangs and original ventilation panels (second principle: optimize natural light, heating, and cooling for comfort as well as sustainability). She also removed interior walls and enlarged windows (third principle: emphasize connections to the outdoors) and kept



This page: Oonagh renovated her own home, a modest Midcentury post-and-beam house, to heighten the sense of being on a porch overlooking the backyard. To maximize glazing along the kitchen's back wall, she placed the refrigerator in an enclosed pantry and designed open shelving instead of upper cabinetry.



the home’s existing footprint of 880 square feet (fourth principle: design spaces efficiently for living large). “My dining table seats six, but I can have twenty people over for dinner on my patio,” Oonagh notes.

To create a sense of ease within a project, the design team at ORA uses a consistent palette of materials and colors, and creates built-in cabinetry with the same detailing throughout. “Architectural elements shouldn’t line up exactly and furniture shouldn’t fit perfectly, so that spaces have the breathing room to flex and change,” says Oonagh.

Flexibility is yet another key principle. “Since the pandemic, houses have to work so much harder now,” Oonagh observes. “You have to build in that capability.” Located in Santa Monica, Bookend House was designed pre-pandemic, but includes everything you would want in case of a pandemic. In addition to the main 3,330-square-foot house, it also has a large home office and a 2-bedroom guest house/accessory

dwelling unit. The two adjunct spaces are “bookends” to the main house but can also function as self-contained units. The structures are designed to conserve space for a sizable lawn and pool.

To maintain privacy for all three areas, the ORA design team sunk the home office and guest house a few feet below grade, and gave them strategically placed windows that restrict sight lines. Their rooftops cleverly double as gardens for the upper level of the main house. Neither the main house nor the guest quarters are equipped with air-conditioning, since natural ventilation systems, including operable skylights, keep them sufficiently cool.

The home with the red art studio, dubbed Boomerang House, deploys a similar strategy: the main house is a narrow bar, leaving room for the art studio “wing” and plenty of outdoor space, rather than building out to the edges. Like Bookend House, the slender main structure offers plenty of opportunities for natural lighting and ventilation. The entrance opens into a



This page: The brick-clad guest quarters of Bookend House have strategically placed windows for privacy. Its roof is a viewing garden for the two-story house. Movable wood screens shade upper level spaces, while an overhang protects the lower level. Large sliding doors bring in air that flows through skylights, cooling the house.



dwelling unit, with its own bathroom and kitchen area, accommodating guests as needed. The trapezoidal skylight was inspired by artist James Turrell’s Skyspaces and is tilted to the north to bring light deep into the studio.

Another project with an artistic focus, Art Barn, began life as a cottage-style home in Manhattan Beach, and continues to look like one from the front. But the ORA design team redid the back half so that its owner could have the entertaining space of his dreams. The new addition is a great room that combines kitchen, dining, and living area, and opens onto a wide backyard terrace. It has the voluminous scale and drama of a repurposed industrial space—lofty ceiling, butcher-block flooring, exposed steel structure—but is domesticated by a Midcentury-like ceiling of knotty-cedar boards and Douglas fir joists. The kitchen features a glass and ceramics collection displayed in custom wooden shelving, and the living room showcases artwork suspended from a custom steel track system.

“We gravitate towards simplicity and things that are made well,” says Oonagh. “We’re aiming for an understated, laid-back Californian feel that has room to breathe and evolve.”

—Lydia Lee

Lydia Lee writes frequently about architecture and design and is the author of “The Well-Designed Accessory Dwelling Unit: Fitting Great Architecture into Small Spaces” (Schiffer Publishing).



This page: For the Art Barn kitchen, ORA designed a custom system of open shelving with cabinet fronts of vintage pebbled glass in steel frames that slide along a track. Another steel track system displays artwork on the facing wall (one piece of art is used to conceal the television). The distressed wood island is topped with a custom pebble terrazzo countertop. The addition flows through sliding barn doors to the new terrace in back. The extension of the roof on the right side is a Midcentury move that shields the kitchen from the neighbors.

vestibule with a glass wall at the end, drawing the eye outside. The main house is on the left, and on the right is the art studio. The two-story house has a long set of operable skylights over the staircase, highlighting the circulation route and bringing light and air into the center. The custom stair railing

is inspired by the metal gate from the clients’ previous home (and includes the repurposed gate itself).

The eye-catching art studio is a true flex space. With its double doors, it can function as a one-car garage, satisfying local building code for a covered parking space. It is also an accessory



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House on the Park

CHICAGO, ILLINOIS
STUDIO DWELL

On the outside, the restored Italianate house in the Chicago neighborhood of Wicker Park looks as it did in 1885, when it was originally completed. Its red brickwork, limestone moldings, and intricate metal cornice are vibrant and pristine. A black metal staircase, newly built with historically accurate hand railings, leads visitors to an elevated porch and the original front door, flanked by lanterns and topped by a transom of original stained glass. The

only tell of the façade's restoration is the stair's open risers, which hint at what's to come inside.

That's where all semblance of the original Italianate architecture disappears, lost over decades of innumerable renovations. "It was chopped up into three or four different apartments," says Mark Peters, AIA, principal at the local firm Studio Dwell Architects, which oversaw the three-story, 6,371-square-foot house's renovation and expansion.



Multiple door openings and staircases had been added in, and the interiors were in rough shape.

The dissonance between the exterior and interior, however, didn't faze the home's owners, a family with two young children. They were committed to preserving the integrity of the historical façade, but they wanted an open and light-filled interior with modern elements and amenities. With little love lost, the house was gutted, save for portions of the original brick sidewalls and wooden floors, which would need reinforcing.

Bright Refresh

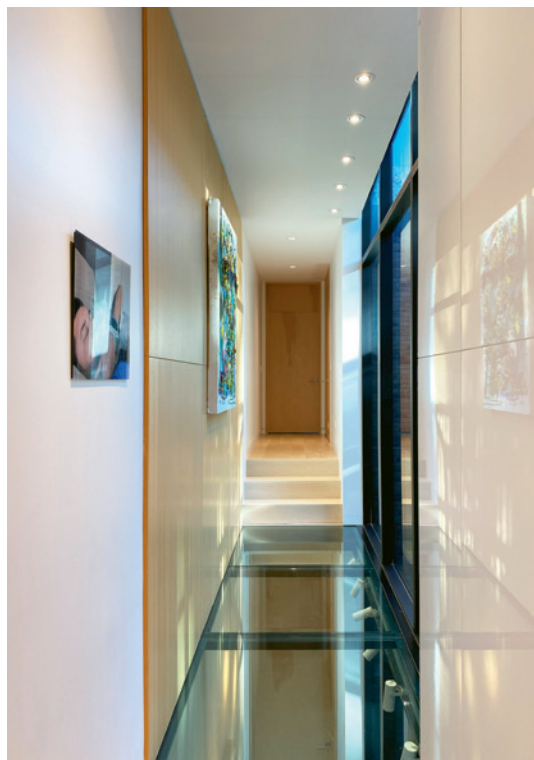
Following 14 months of construction, the new interior is light and minimalist. White oak flooring, millwork, soffits, and open-riser stairs intermingle with a custom maple breakfast counter and cabinets, countertops, and the kitchen hood finished in different sheens of white. The neutral-color materials provide a foil to the wall expanses of exposed original Chicago common brick, pressure-washed to reveal their rich texture and yellow/tan, red/orange, and black

In contrast to the exposed brick walls, the interior features neutral finishes—including white oak soffits—that appear as distinct architectural objects, making the volume of the open space seem larger than it is.





The prevalence of glass on the rear curtain wall, stair walls, and breezeway floor sends natural light deep inside the home and helps deliver the openness desired by the owners. The laminated glass floor is about 1 inch thick and set in dark frames to match the window mullions.



composition. “We wanted to limit the palette so that the concept came through cleaner and felt lighter,” Mark says.

Radiant floor heating and cooling free the walls of utilities. To bring water service to a first-floor wet bar, Studio Dwell cleverly hid

pipes in a wall-mounted chase clad in white oak that integrates with floating white cabinets in a discreet, geometric arrangement. “In rehab situations,” Mark says, “you often have to make field decisions and come up with design elements on the spot.”

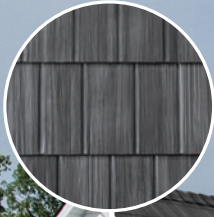
Bringing in Light

The modern interior isn’t the only surprise behind the façade. The 22-foot-wide home has an astonishing 80-foot depth, revealed in dramatic effect by its open floorplan. As typical for the neighborhood, the site is approximately 25 feet wide. “It sits on the property line on one side and has 3 feet of clearance on the other side,” Mark says. Neighboring houses continue this spacing, allowing each home to stand detached, but limiting opportunities for daylight to enter along their length.

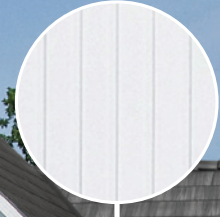
Consequently, achieving the light-filled space that the client envisioned was one of the project’s biggest challenges. Because no new openings would be made to the preserved northwest façade, the daylight would have to come primarily from the building’s rear, southeast elevation. A three-story, glazed curtain wall paired with an open, double-height space between the first and second levels allows daylight to reach deep into these lower two floors.

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Above left: The lower level's polished concrete floor complements the white and wood finishes, as well as the exposed brick walls. *Above right:* To keep walls clear of utility infrastructure, Studio Dwell hid water lines to the wet bar inside a wood-paneled chase that intersects floating white cabinets in a sculptural arrangement.



A Rear Retreat

A deteriorating three-car garage situated against the back property line provided the footprint for additional square footage. Studio Dwell rebuilt the structure as a two-car garage and then topped it with a fitness room, another item on the owners' wish list. Similar to the main house's rear elevation, the fitness room features full-height windows with black mullions. "They wanted to have this transparent, visual connection between the fitness room and the house," Mark says.

An enclosed two-story breezeway with a glazed curtain wall ties the two structures physically and visually together. The glass expanses are juxtaposed with exterior wall planes of

Chicago common brick, which also complement the brick cladding of neighboring houses. This more utilitarian brick was often used on the side and rear elevations of houses, Mark explains, while the more architectural brick was reserved for the façade.

Studio Dwell found a manufacturer that made a modern common brick, with hollowed cores for rebar, and had different color combinations mocked up. Ultimately, a composition of roughly 75% yellow/tan, 5% red/orange, and 20% black best enhanced the black curtain wall and window frames and the surrounding existing brick. "It feels like the addition was a continuation," Mark says, "or something already existing."

House on the Park

Chicago, Illinois

ARCHITECT/INTERIOR DESIGNER/LANDSCAPE ARCHITECT: Mark Peters, AIA, principal in charge; David Pierson, project manager, Studio Dwell, Chicago

BUILDER: Fettner Construction, Highland, Illinois

STRUCTURAL ENGINEER: Rockey Structures, Chicago

PROJECT SIZE: 6,371 square feet

SITE SIZE: 3,485 square feet

CONSTRUCTION COST: Withheld

PHOTOGRAPHY: Marty Peters Photography

KEY PRODUCTS

APPLIANCES: Wolf (range); Broan (vent

hood); Miele (oven, warmer drawer, speed oven); Fisher & Paykel (dishwasher); Thermador (refrigerator); LG (washer/dryer)

CABINETS: White lacquer; high gloss enamel; solid maple island tabletop (kitchen); Häfele (hardware); white oak veneer panel (built-ins)

CEILING AND SOFFIT: White oak veneer panels; drywall

CLADDING: Bricks, Inc.

COUNTERTOPS: Solid surface

DOORS/WINDOWS: Fleetwood; LaCantina (folding); VELUX (skylight); Omnia (interior door hardware); SOSS (hinges); existing (entry doors and hardware)

FAUCETS: Grohe (kitchen); Dornbracht (primary bathroom); Hansgrohe (controls & faucets)

FLOORING: Polished concrete (first floor); 7-inch white oak plank (second and third floors)

HVAC: Whole-house HEPA filter and energy-recovery ventilation system; Broan (bathroom ventilation)

LIGHTING, EXTERIOR: WAC Lighting, Delta, Tech Lighting

LIGHTING, INTERIOR: Juno (downlights); Lutron (controls), Lightology

PAINTS AND STAINS: Benjamin Moore

SINKS: Ruvati (kitchen); ADM and Duravit (bathrooms)

TOILET: TOTO; Viega (flush plates)

TUB: Lacava (primary bathroom); Signature (filler)

VANITIES: ADM, Duravit



The breezeway provides protection from the elements, as well as a gallery for the owners' artwork collection, an additional source of daylight for the interior, and a third wall for a courtyard retreat nestled between the house and garage. For its location in a city of millions, the courtyard, complete with a reflecting pond, feels surprisingly intimate due to its careful siting from the neighboring house. "There is a good sense of privacy ... because the angles are played with so that nobody can get straight views," Mark says.



Preserving the historical structure was the project's most sustainable accomplishment, Mark believes. "It's much cheaper and easier sometimes to start new," he says. "But when you can save a building that is almost 140 years old, that's fantastic."—*Wanda Lau*

Left to right: The main bedroom takes in light from the historical northwest façade and features white oak panel walls. The rear courtyard is sited out of direct view of neighbors.



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Unified Front

On a remote Canadian island, a home renovation and addition for a nature-seeking couple became a study in harmony and contrast.

BY CHERYL WEBER

DOUBLE ISLAND COTTAGE

ARCHITECT: SUPERKÜL

BUILDER: MOON ISLAND CONSTRUCTION

LOCATION: GEORGIAN BAY, ONTARIO, CANADA

To get to Double Island Cottage, one must traverse Lake Huron's Georgian Bay by boat, tie up at a dock where the twin islands barely touch, and follow a rocky path up to the house. It's a fitting introduction to the stunning site that inspired the home's original design by a protégé of the modernist Canadian architect Ronald Thom—and its recent remodel by Superkül in Toronto. Built in the early 1980s, the concrete block house had expressive, if somewhat chaotic, rooflines. Perhaps their geome-



This page: Raising and reshaping parts of the dipping roofline restored head-room and views in the living room. The fireplace—parts of it newly exposed—is the only interior element that was preserved.

tries were inspired by the craggy terrain and intensely windy location, resulting in roofs that folded into deep valleys. However, here and there they blocked the views of big water and made some of the interior spaces feel pinched. The house's heavy feeling was one of the first things the firm addressed.

The aptly named Double Island, one of tens of thousands in this bay that form the world's largest freshwater archipelago, looks like a pair of lungs connected by a slim bridge of land. The Toronto-based clients purchased the island with the intention of renovating and expanding the house that stood there. Given the difficulties of barging building materials to this remote destination, Superkül was a natural choice for the project. Although the firm's portfolio ranges from single-family homes to high-rise buildings, they especially appreciate the challenges of keeping as much of the structure as they can on adaptive reuse and renovation projects.



“The first phase was probably the most challenging,” says partner Andre D’Elia, FRAIC. “It would have been easier if it was a new build, and it would have been a different house. Existing conditions are both a constraint and an opportunity—you develop a creative response. How do we give this building new life? It’s more about doing interventions and keeping the character and soul of the original project. It’s challenging in that respect; there’s always a surprise when you peel back the layers.”

Edge Condition

One aspect that did give the architects full creative license was the addition of a primary suite. After exploring several expansion schemes that grew from the house’s awkward geometries, the architects abandoned that approach. They drew a linear pavilion that essentially stands on its own but tucks under a roof on the house’s east side. “We wanted to create a pavilion that lightly touched the house and hovered over the rock, oriented to the sun,” Andre says. After considering the whole



This page: White-washed knotty pine, a nod to the original decor, ties together the kitchen and dining room, where glass sliding doors and skylights add light and a sense of expansiveness. The steps between the kitchen and dining room were reconfigured for casual seating during extended family get-togethers.



landscape, “we said, this is what we need to do. We sent the clients a hand sketch, and they said, “Oh my god, yes!””

Resting on slender piers, the pavilion is reached through a glass-enclosed bridge from the main living space. Its “box-within-a-box” design allows it to be experienced as a world unto itself, a platform from which to observe, unimpeded, the movement of sun, clouds, and storms. Floating within the steel and glass structure are white-oak-lined compartments for sleeping, bathing, and dressing, with the bedroom facing south and the en-suite bathroom and concrete freestanding bathtub facing east. Floors and ceilings cantilever beyond the wooden core, creating a clear, clean edge that keeps the focus on the sweep of landscape.

The architects saw the rectilinear design as both an antidote and complement to the angular architecture of the original structure. On both volumes, new oversized glazing shares a datum line that ties the structures together, while the pavilion’s simplicity is a foil for the cottage’s geometric

complexity. “Generative juxtapositions of this kind were key to the overall architectural design,” the architects wrote. “Whereas the main cottage is clad in concrete masonry blocks that express a visual gravitational pull down toward the rock, the addition appears to levitate while the glazed link opens up entirely on both sides to create a breezeway and multiple access points into the home. Together, the two structures convey a simultaneous experience of solidity and ethereality, durability and permeability, being inside and outside.”

It’s no coincidence that the design also introduces wind and sun breaks on this extreme site. “The pavilion ties into the house, creating outdoor courtyards or shelter areas” on the south and north, Andre says. “The bridge piece that links the house with the pavilion has doors that open on both sides, so if it’s too hot on the south, they can move to the shady area on the north side, and if it’s too windy, they can get a break from the wind on the opposite patio. We wanted to keep those active uses prominent in the design.”

Breathing Room

One of the renovation goals was to accommodate visiting siblings, children, and grandchildren. The gut remodel included removing partitions, inserting larger windows, and reshaping parts of the roof to open the insular interiors. They also bumped out the footprint on the east side of the main level, near the entrance, to add a bedroom facing the water.

“We wanted to create a more unified ceiling and roof structure,” Andre says. “There were columns coming down in awkward places on the floor plan. We removed those columns and introduced steel beams to replace some of the roof structure, simplifying parts of the roof around the main entrance and liberating the main living space.”

From the entryway, a stairway on the right leads to an existing loft, now used as a TV room and office, where the roof was raised and a window added on the north side. Straight ahead, the cathedralized living space was redesigned for entertaining and views of the rocky coastline.

The water-facing dining room on the right sits a few steps above the open kitchen and living room. Removing partitions doubled the size of the dining room, now lit with operable skylights that, along with sliding glass doors, admit cooling cross breezes. Originally, part of the dining room was sectioned to create an inglenook for the see-through fireplace between the living and dining rooms. Filling in the fireplace on the dining side and removing the walls around it simplified and opened the room’s footprint. And redesigning the wide steps between the kitchen and dining area established an informal gathering spot where grandkids can sit or play while someone is making dinner.

“It would have been easier if it was a new build, and it would have been a different house. Existing conditions are both a constraint and an opportunity—you develop a creative response.”

—Andre D’Elia, FRAIC

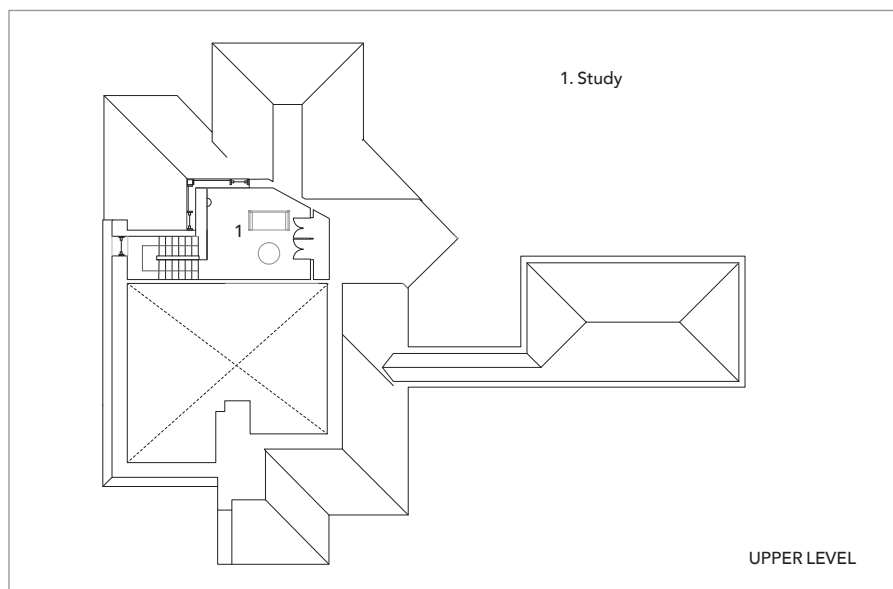
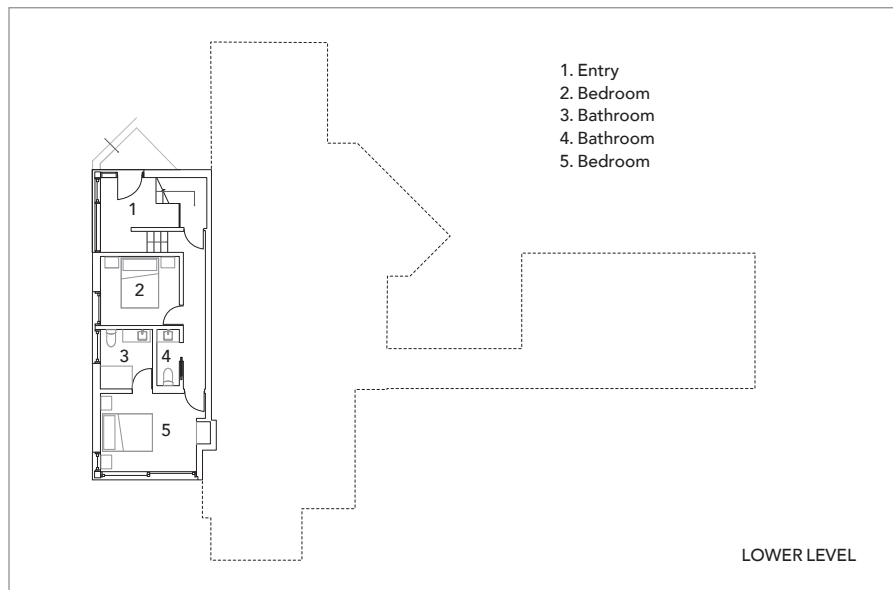
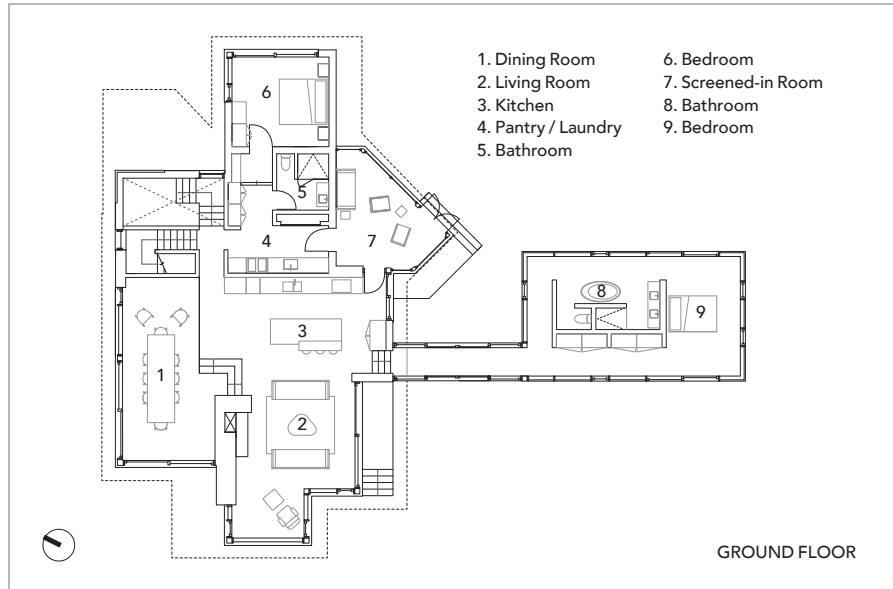
“This was their oasis; they wanted to be really immersed in nature,” Andre says. The living room’s masonry walls were distilled to posts infilled with glass that takes in the landscape; small picture windows were exchanged for floor-to-ceiling windows and sliding glass doors. “It felt like the heavy roof above closed the whole thing,” Andre says. “We let it breathe a bit.”

They also raised the roof over the kitchen and removed partial walls that hemmed it in. In fact, everything in this house is new except for the concrete-block fireplace. The architects highlighted its monumental presence by exposing portions that were concealed and removing the soot. “It was a process of elimination for the fireplace,” Andre says. “The same thing with the roof. We cleaned up valleys and ridges, put a new cap on the fireplace chimney, and peeled back the roofline that partially covered it.” The entire project was a process of “preservation, subtraction, and immersion” to honor aspects of the home’s core personality, minimize unnecessary waste, and reduce the number of barge deliveries to



Opposite page and left: The floating primary suite addition is designed as a series of white oak boxes within a glass box. Its sleeping zone faces south over Georgian Bay. Above: A knotty-pine-clad guest rooms features a suitcase niche.

CASE STUDY



this outer island—a journey of about 90 minutes from the mainland (though half that by boat).

The west side of the house received a new elevation with the removal of balconies and piers off the dining room and downstairs bedroom. Cutting back the dipping roofline and adding larger windows opened the northwest corner to outdoor views. The design team also simplified the screened porch’s roofline on the southeast, behind the kitchen. Overall, “we kept the spirit of the roof but rationalized it,” Andre says. All this was done as surgically as possible by propping up the existing roof and reframing it, peeling back the layers to expose more spacious interiors.

Downstairs are two guest bedrooms with a bath between them. Both were stripped and given larger windows. In the northwest bedroom that benefited from the streamlined elevation, a concrete block wall supporting part of the living room fireplace made a niche that the architects reclad in whitewashed knotty pine—the perfect spot for a houseguest’s suitcase.

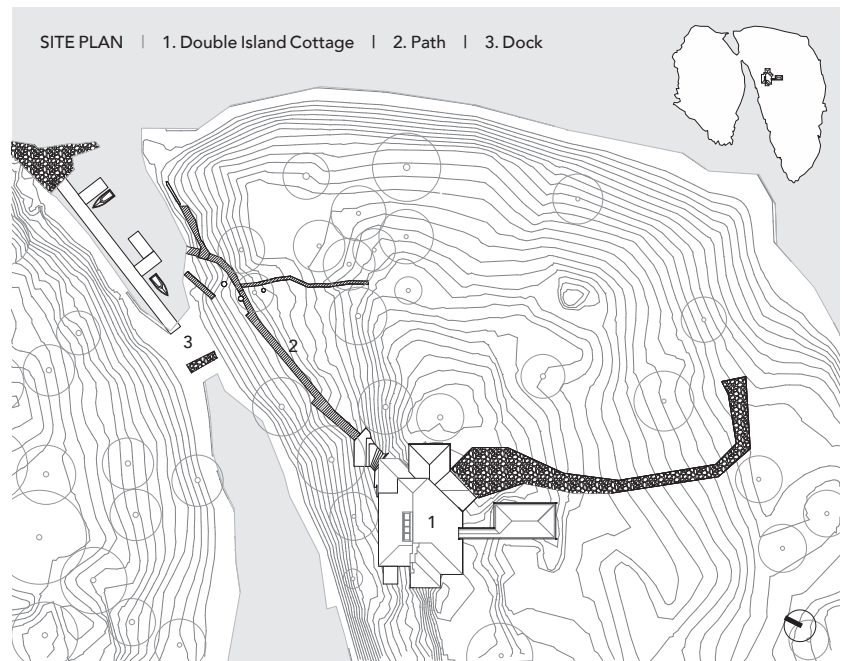
Soft Focus

The interior material palette imparts a sense of expansiveness in keeping with the vast natural landscape. A nod to the home’s original decor, whitewashed knotty pine figures prominently among the minimal finishes. In addition to



lining the walls and ceilings of the secondary bedrooms, where it's applied with a horizontal reveal, it also appears in the entryway and on the soaring kitchen and dining room wall, tying the two spaces together. Other ceilings and walls are skimmed in creamy plaster with a sandy stucco finish. "It softens the light and gives the ceiling a lot of depth because the microfines in the finish absorb light," Andre says.

Throughout, the casework is white oak. Adding to the soft-focus effect, the Bulthaup kitchen's white laminate cabinets are paired with a mottled-gray porcelain backsplash that echoes the Georgian Bay rock and concrete block fireplace. "We tried to keep the palette very simple," Andre says. "The only real color we have is behind the bathtub in the primary suite," where handmade tiles supply a wavy pop of pattern facing the water.



Double Island Cottage

Georgian Bay, Ontario

ARCHITECT: Andre D'Elia, partner in charge; Jennifer Esposito, project architect; Carly Kandrack, Janean Brühn, design team, Superkül, Toronto, Ontario

BUILDER: Moon Island Construction, Mactier, Ontario

INTERIOR DESIGNER: Superkül

STRUCTURAL ENGINEER: Kieffer Structural Engineering, Toronto

MILLWORK: Chervin Kitchen & Bath, Port Carling, Ontario

PROJECT SIZE: 3,042 square feet

SITE SIZE: 5 acres

CONSTRUCTION COST: Withheld

PHOTOGRAPHY: Studio Shai Gil

KEY PRODUCTS

CLADDING: Concrete masonry blocks

COOKTOP: Gaggenau

COUNTERTOPS: Caesarstone

DISHWASHER: Gaggenau

FAUCETS: Brizo, Rubinet

FLOORING: Moncer Flooring

HARDWARE: Hinge Hardware, Casson

INTERIOR WALL CLADDING: White-washed knotty pine

KITCHEN: Bulthaup

LIGHTING: Herman Miller, Flos, Astro, Lambert & Fils, Peter Bowles, Liteline, DELTALIGHT, Artemide

OVENS: Gaggenau

REFRIGERATOR: Gaggenau, Bosch

SINKS: Bosch, Blanco

SKYLIGHTS: VELUX

TILES: Stone Tile

TOILETS: TOTO

TUB: Native Trails

WASHER/DRYER: Bosch

WINDOWS AND WINDOW WALL SYSTEMS: Schüco | Bigfoot Door


WINE REFRIGERATOR: Liebherr



Outside, a new steel roof resists the location's high winds, and the concrete block was parged for uniformity between old and new. "The house had a lot of water damage from leaky windows," Andre says. "These materials are just more durable." The house is cooled passively through cross breezes and heated with a few in-floor baseboard units (an electrical cable on the lake floor supplies service to the island from the mainland). "The clients use the house from May to October and close it down in the winter," Andre says. "In mid-April it still gets quite cold and sometimes there are still ice floes."

Bobcats were barged over to dig the septic system, and steel beams were erected with winches and chains, working from scaffolding. Given the frigid winter temperatures, construction on these islands is mostly limited to summer months; however, the crew arrived on snowmobiles to finish

the interior over the winter. In a final move, the sand and gravel outside the house was scraped back to expose the rocky landscape. Gray-brown granite for the patios came from a nearby quarry and mirrors the rust-colored patterns in the island's natural rock.

Together, the house and low-slung primary suite convey a sense of solidity and weightlessness. By recapturing interior headroom, enhancing passive ventilation, and creating transparency, the architects made the cottage more permeable to the amazing setting while increasing its durability in a daunting climate. "The clients really feel like it's what they envisioned," Andre says. "This is their oasis, and they wanted to feel like they're outside. The client is always puttering in the landscape, building paths through the island, going for a swim. At night the house becomes a beacon for the island." 

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Keeping the Pieces

Adaptation is sometimes the sincerest form of architecture.

BY S. CLAIRE CONROY AND CHERYL WEBER





Shobac Studio / Spa Extension

UPPER KINGSBURG, NOVA SCOTIA
MACKAY-LYONS SWEETAPPLE

Brian MacKay-Lyons' newly expanded Shobac Studio is not so much a house as it is a kind of roman à clef—a life story steeped in the history of its site, the traditions of the region, and his own evolving views on architecture and construction. It's also a Ghost story—and the ghosts are the scores of architects, students, critics, and historians who gathered on his property each year for a hands-on master class in regional design-build construction.





Beginning in 1994 and continuing for a dozen years, Ghost Lab, as the program was called, extracted participants from urban classrooms and practices all over the world—a new group each summer—and immersed them in this remote and ruggedly beautiful landscape and its haunting sense of history.

The seaside property, stitched together over the years, contained remnants and ruins of former homesteads when the Ghost program launched and is now a working farm and village community, dotted with the program’s idiosyncratic constructions and MacKay-Lyons Sweetapple’s professional projects.

Shobac Campus and Farm is now a quilt of structures, each with its own meaning and memories, showing the work of many hands but guided by Brian’s mandate to distill, reduce, and simplify. The result is a collection of elemental and timelessly modern buildings that serve a variety of flexible functions. Chief among them is to experience and appreciate this spectacular locale.

The collection of buildings includes the Shobac Studio, a half dozen cabins, a restored barn and schoolhouse, a Cor-Ten “gate house,” and the “Sky-Room”—a outdoor star-gazing spot adapted from a historic foundation. (“The foundation is older than any official European history,” Brian notes.) But it’s the Shobac Studio—dubbed “the whale”—that anchors the campus and establishes its sense of place.

Ship in a Bottle

Once a remote and forested area where the LaHave River estuary joins the North Atlantic Ocean, Upper Kingsburg traces its roots variously to native indigenous peoples, an outpost for early explor-





Originally built as a studio and dining hall for the firm's Ghost Lab design-build program, Shobac Studio served as a "wildcard" structure for nearly 20 years until its latest adaptation as the architect's family home.



Top and above: The former loft bedroom is now the primary suite, with few changes. A closet and bathroom are hidden behind the cedar-clad wall. *Above right:* The main level sleeping alcove is one of the few areas without an ocean view.

ers, seasonal fishing settlements, and farmlands. Utilitarian structures are a component of its vernacular building traditions.

When the eighth Ghost gathering took place in 2006, the concept was to design and build a sizable studio and dining hall for the program. At 100-

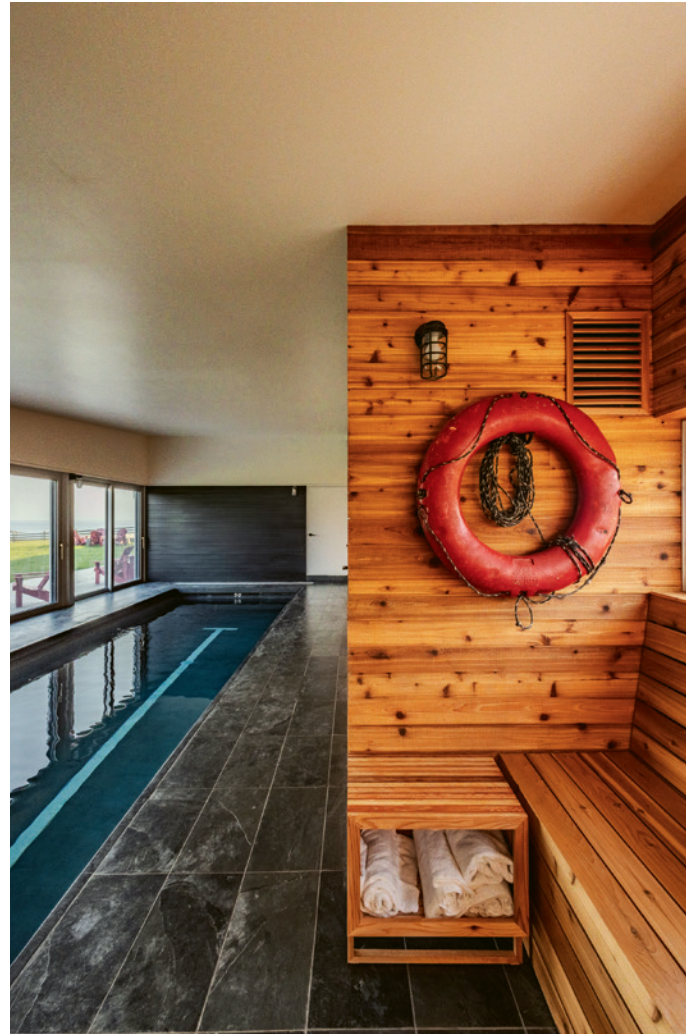
feet long, it was going to be the biggest and most commanding addition to the property, but it needed to derive its inspiration from the challenging climate and the modest origins of the place. An industrial agrarian building was a natural fit.

Brian also tapped a solution he had used for the 1999 Howard House, located on a similar waterfront, cliffside site. The “zoomorphic wedge” shape, as the firm calls it, aims its rising “head” toward the water views and its tapering “tail” toward the land. Given the constraints—budget, time, labor skills—Shobac is even more pared down in its expression than the private Howard House, and thus cleaves even closer to the firm’s goal of “an architecture in dialogue with the ordinariness of a particular place.”

Keeping the building simple was also a practical consideration, as it was to be built on a tight schedule and by hand with largely unskilled labor. “It was built in a week,” Brian recalls. “And those trusses were built in the air and done in a single day. By suppertime, the structure was up. No single piece could be more than 200 pounds. It was like building a boat in a bottle, with a ship’s hull geometry.”

“It’s passive solar, so it faces south and has a thermal mass concrete floor,” he adds. “There are high windows on the north side and big ones on the south for the Venturi effect. Finnish architect Juhani Pallasmaa said about our work that you can feel the forces of nature operating on you here. You can feel the climate—kind of like a weather station.”

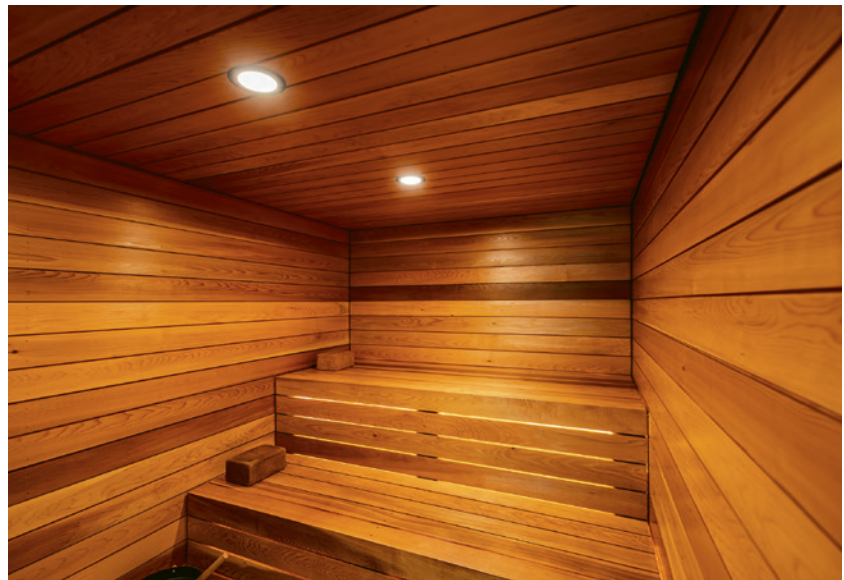
One room deep with a 40-foot dining table at its center—the space served a variety of functions in its ensuing 17 years. Ghost participants gathered at the table for creative brainstorming and meals, Brian’s firm used it as a satellite office, and it functioned as a community space for events—the beating heart of the Shobac Campus.



The Homecoming

Over the years, Brian’s career and commissions have lured him all over the world. But this region has always called him back. His adult children also left for school and other experiences, but they found themselves called back here as well. Whether living and working nearby or on the mainland, Kingsburg is the family center—the homestead.

So it made sense to adapt the Shobac Studio into a home for Brian and his wife, a neuroscientist, and a locus—with that 40-foot-long table—for bringing family and friends together. Indeed, the project was a family affair, with son Matthew



This page: All-season fitness facilities were the major impetus for the new 100-foot-long addition. The lap pool, spa, and gym will be made available to the community, Brian says.



Renovations include a revised main entry, new deck, and laundry and storage facilities. Humble but beautiful wood storage terminates the new extension. The Sky Room repurposes an ancient foundation.



Shobac Studio/Spa Extension

Upper Kingsburg, Nova Scotia

ARCHITECT: Brian MacKay-Lyons, FRAIC, FAIA, design lead; Matthew MacKay-Lyons, job captain, MacKay-Lyons Sweetapple Architects, Halifax, Nova Scotia

BUILDER: Axios Construction, Dartmouth, Nova Scotia

STRUCTURAL ENGINEERING: Renée MacKay-Lyons, Blackwell, Halifax

MECHANICAL AND ELECTRICAL: M&R Engineering, Ltd., Halifax

PROJECT SIZE: Studio and spa, 3,600 square feet; spa extension only, 1,500 square feet

CONSTRUCTION COST: Withheld

PHOTOGRAPHY: Matthew MacKay-Lyons

KEY PRODUCTS

CLADDING/ROOFING: Corrugated Galvalume

DECKING: Hemlock

FINISH MATERIALS: Cedar shiplap (pool area, sauna, bench); drywall (pool area, gym, washroom); slate tile (steam shower)

FLOORING: Slate tile (pool deck, entry, steam shower, washroom); rubber floor (gym)

HVAC: Lifebreath HRV; Solstice air-to-water heat pump; radiant infloor, Price electric duct heater; Harvia (sauna heater)

HUMIDITY CONTROL: Desert Aire (pool dehumidification unit)

INSULATION: Rockwool; XPS rigid insulation

LIGHTING: RAB

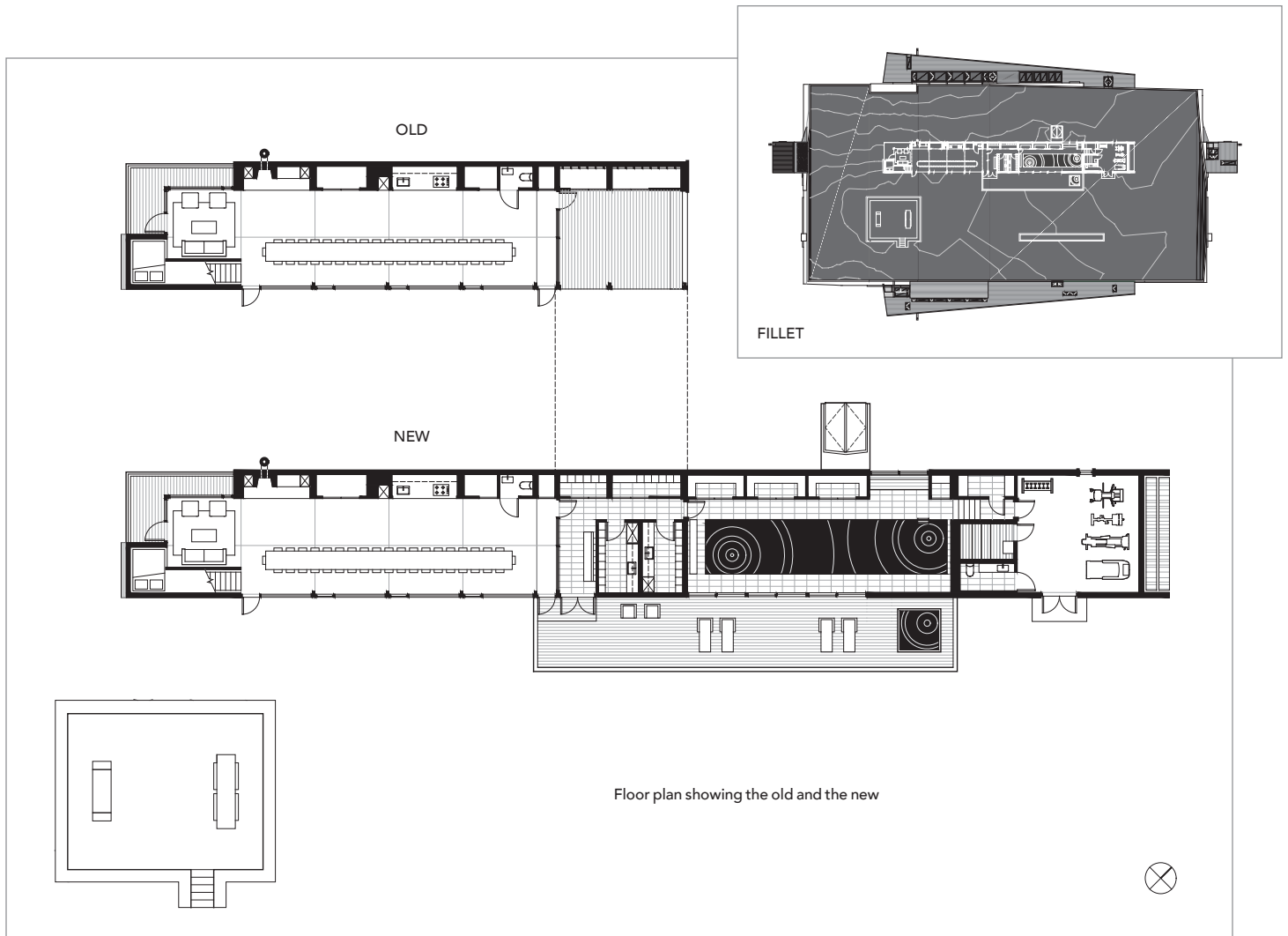
MILLWORK/TRIM: Cedar Shiplap

WINDOWS: Aluminum

the project architect and daughter Renée the structural engineer.

In keeping with the firm’s belief in building just “enough house” and no more, the changes were executed with restraint. Small tweaks to the original structure include a new open deck, a reworked main entrance, and new storage and laundry facilities. A small sleeping alcove off the main living area and kitchen was retained; and an existing loft bedroom and bath is now the compact primary suite. “The alcove is the only place you don’t see the ocean,” says Brian.

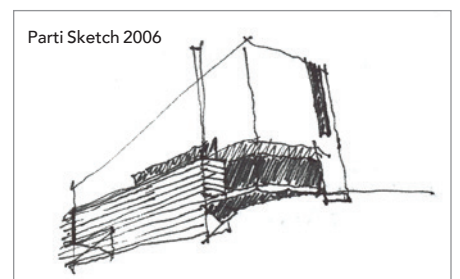
Conjoining the lightly renovated double-height building is a new addition that continues the taper of the wedge shape. Viewed from overhead,



you'd mistake it as a single entity, now extending 200 feet in length instead of 100 and terminating in a covered storage for firewood. From the broad sides, though, it's obvious where the two pieces are stitched together.

The stick-built addition contains a pool, spa, and gym—ideal for keeping fit during hot summers and cold winters. “My wife wanted the pool,” Brian says. “She has always wanted a pool. She works as a stroke researcher and knows what happens when you don’t move your body.”

In the spirit of Shobac’s utopian village ideals, the new facility is available to the community, he says. And, at twice its original length, the building creates even more of a pro-



Shobac Studio has been a compelling work in progress since it was first conceived during the 2006 Ghost Lab design-build program.



tected courtyard space in relation to the structures around it than it did before. “There’s something archetypal about that—something timeless,” he explains. “We often work with the space between buildings, like white space on a canvas.”

In transforming the Shobac Studio into his own home, the architect resisted padding it with luxurious finishes and flourishes. It merely extrudes the austerity of the original to encompass a few utilitarian amenities. Architect/

critic Kenneth Frampton once called Brian’s work “banal,” he says, and he takes it as a compliment, “When you achieve the banal, it’s as if the building was always meant to be there.”
—S. Claire Conroy

Loewen

AUTHENTIC

LUXURY WINDOWS AND DOORS

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Overbrook Overlook

OVERBROOK, KANSAS
BNIM



Situated near the state line between Missouri and Kansas, this 78-acre farm has been in architect Steve McDowell's family since 1960. He and his wife and son visited it only occasionally until the pandemic arrived, when their son started camping out there with friends. As the pandemic wore on, Steve and his wife Mary Ann decided to purchase an Airstream trailer to park on the property—a place to escape their house in the center of Kansas City, Missouri, about 90 minutes away. Although that plan didn't pan out, they came up with a better one: to convert the property's small hay barn into a more substantial getaway.





Simple as a child's drawing, it sits on rolling terrain overlooking the town of Overbrook, in the Tallgrass Prairie region of eastern Kansas. The land is dotted with broken limestone, much of it containing fossils of sea creatures from the inland sea that covered this area eons ago. Built plainly out of southern yellow pine and corrugated metal siding, the structure was solid but not square. To support the insertion of a bedroom, bath, loft, kitchen, and dining/living area, builders Delaney Moore and Caleb



New yellow pine plywood was used to stiffen the building. Originally intending to cover the plywood, Steve liked the look enough to leave it exposed. The flooring and wall material keep the exterior's yellow pine tradition alive.



Aldrich added shims and horizontal blocking, creating a frame-within-a-frame, and then lined the walls with plywood. “We made a decision that we wouldn’t cut any of the primary frame members,” says Steve, FAIA. “The window sizes had to fit within the stud spacing. Originally, we intended to have larger windows on the north, but this is tornado alley; we wanted the building to be as stiff as possible.”

Twenty feet wide and 24 feet long, the barn had a slatted crib wall that divided the interior in half lengthwise along its east-west axis. This lightweight wall also drew a line between two different types of construction. “The south half had sliding barn doors on the west and east and a dirt floor for trucks to drive through and deliver hay,” Steve says. “The north half had a concrete floor used primarily for corn storage,

Custom built-ins maximize every inch of living space. Steve crafted the sofa, and the bench in the dining nook was made from a fallen tree on the family’s city property.



Windows were slipped between existing studs to preserve both the building's aesthetic integrity and its strength in a tornado-prone region.



but also animals. That half also had 24-inch stud spacing and 1x6 yellow pine sheathing that ran horizontally, which made the north half stiffer. The south half had 4-foot stud spacings, like it was used simply for weather protection.”

Every inch of this modest building was used to make comfortable living quarters. An open living room and dining nook now occupy the south half of the old barn. Removing parts of the crib wall, the architect created two doorways to the northern half, which contains a kitchen and bedroom with a bath between them. The two new walls subdividing this section also support a loft deck made of salvaged yellow pine timbers. Accessed from a ladder in the living room, it is just big enough for a queen-sized bed.



Humble Ply

For two people who like to cook and entertain, a functional kitchen with full-size appliances was priority. The west half of the roughly 4-by-9-foot kitchen contains a sink and dishwasher and a set of deep drawers. A compact European washer/dryer is stacked on the south side with a set of deep drawers above, and the east wall contains pantry drawers and a combination high-speed convection and microwave oven. The east side of the kitchen also has an Italian four-burner gas range, countertop, and refrigerator. “It’s ergonomic and easy to use—a powerful little kitchen,” Steve says.

Aside from some fancy appliances, the interior finishes are rudimentary or recycled. “Initially the plywood was to be a substrate for live-edge pine planks we expected to have, but the ply was so beautiful and simple we decided to just stop at that point,” Steve says. “We used southern yellow

pine everywhere, including on the floor, to keep the tradition alive.” One exception is the kitchen and bathroom casework, which is made of Baltic birch plywood. A family friend, Navid Jones, built the dining nook out of cherry wood from a felled tree on the couple’s city property. And most of the bathroom surfaces came from Recycled Surfaces, a business Steve used to own. The countertops, floor, and shower walls are clad in a combination of recycled glass and porcelain.

The exterior, too, retains its beautifully utilitarian flavor. Silvery blue with a polka dot–patterned patina, the original corrugated metal siding looks like something you might see on a building in Marfa’s West Texas landscape. That and the original roof were left intact, although a new Cor-Ten roof floats on sleepers above the old one. A year after construction ended, Steve added front and back porches, along with dry-stacked stone walls to



Top: Steve built utilitarian porches and a stone patio that extend the living space outdoors. *Above:* “Underbrook”—an 1860 limestone cellar house—invites intrigue while awaiting use.

Overbrook Overlook

Overbrook, Kansas

ARCHITECT: Steve McDowell, FAIA, BNIM, principal in charge, Kansas City, Missouri

BUILDER: Delaney Moore and Caleb Aldrich, dmrtisans, Kansas City, Kansas

COLOR/DESIGN COLLABORATOR: Beena Ramaswami, BNIM

MECHANICAL ENGINEER: Tom Simpson, Introba, Kansas City, Kansas

STRUCTURAL ENGINEER: Trevor Acorn, Walter P. Moore Co., Kansas City, Missouri

PROJECT SIZE: 702 square feet

SITE SIZE: 78 acres

CONSTRUCTION COST: \$242 a square foot

PHOTOGRAPHY: Kelly Callewaert

KEY PRODUCTS

CABINETS: Custom Baltic birch ply by Sheldon Vogt

CEILING FANS: Ball, Modern Fan Company

COOKING VENTILATION: Bertazzoni

COOKTOP OR RANGE: Bertazzoni

COUNTERTOP: Recycled Surfaces

DISHWASHER: Bosch

ENTRY DOORS, HARDWARE, LOCKSETS: H Window

FASTENERS: Spax

FAUCETS: Grohe

FINISH MATERIALS: Sanded ACX pine plywood from New Zealand

HVAC SYSTEMS: Carrier Mini Split, Warm Tiles Electric Radiant System

INSULATION: Kansas Spray Foam

LIGHTING: Halo, Ikea

OUTDOOR GRILL: Big Green Egg

OVENS: GE Advantium

PAINTS, STAINS, COATINGS: Johnson Paste Wax

PASSAGE DOORS: Menards yellow pine, Zoro hardware

REFRIGERATOR: GE

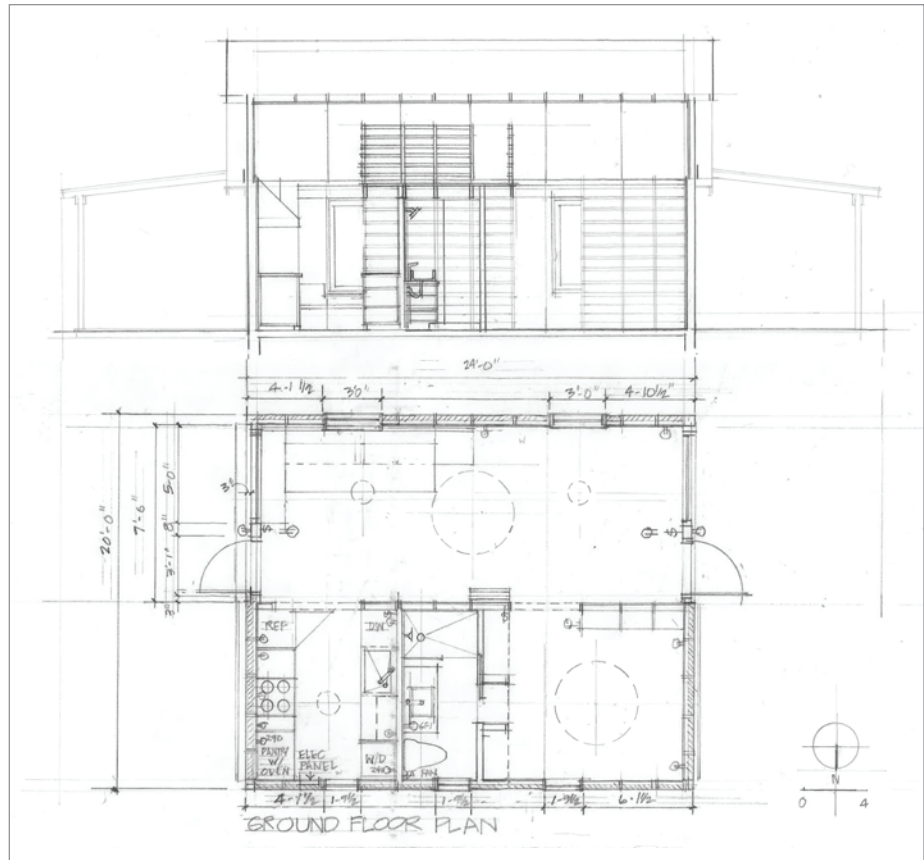
SHOWER ENCLOSURE: Delta

SINKS: Kraus, EAGO

TANKLESS WATER HEATER: Takagi

TOILET: Dual flush Glacier Bay

WASHER/DRYER: Bosch



level the ground around the house. “I watched Andy Goldsworthy build walls in an art project at the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art and decided I could emulate what his crew was doing,” Steve says. “I had all this rock that was dug up when we were excavating for the sewage lagoon. I spent the summer stacking those walls and had a neighboring farmer backfill it. A year later I

put all the paving stone down.” He also built window shutters from charred planking—a riff on the antique sliding doors still in place.

Light Touch

Doors and windows provide natural ventilation, but heat comes from mini-splits and a radiant concrete floor. “It was a challenge, but a lot of fun, to



Above: The architect preserved the crib wall as an organizing element and a reminder of the building’s past use. Opposite: On the outside, the dwelling looks as it always has—including its sliding barn doors.



work around existing conditions and keep the building discreet, not flashy,” says builder Delaney. “After installing a vapor barrier and closed cell foam insulation, we hand-poured a new concrete floor, spreading it on top of the existing concrete, which created a thermal mass for heat retention.” The couple hopes to achieve net-zero energy consumption with the future addition of solar panels.

Where to run plumbing and mechanicals presented another hurdle. “Steve was brilliant with the design and drawings, but getting it all to work out logistically was a fascinating process,” says Caleb. “We cut channels in the cement pad for the plumbing and

ran the electrical in the few walls we had available.”

Near the cottage, an original 1860 dry-stack limestone cellar house—the couple dubbed it Underbrook—had been restored by previous owners. Steve added a door and window, and Caleb installed a limestone floor. “We stayed in it one night during a tornado alert,” Steve says, “but we’re trying to figure out options for adding more people; this is an interesting place to hang out for a day or so. I built the cottage’s couch and ladder so was planning to build a pair of same-design couches to sleep on. But we have a humidity issue in the hut, so we’re worried about fabrics. We’ve also

designed container houses; a friend is thinking about moving to our farm in a container house south of the cellar.”

Indeed, the Overlook is well used. Steve’s family is there most weekends and holidays, whether to tend the large vegetable garden or just escape from the city. “We’re surprised by how much respite it provides. Last Saturday there were coyotes howling all night long, and it’s a whole different community of folks here,” Steve says. For this family, visits to the old farmstead keep the urban scene from feeling stale. And with its sensitive embrace of old and new, the house tells a story about Overbrook’s agricultural past.—*Cheryl Weber*



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Peach Court Garden ADU

SEATTLE
WITTMAN ESTES

Peach Court had all the architectural bona fides of the best vintage Craftsman houses: a welcoming front porch, generously sized rooms with exposed oak box beams, diamond-pane doubled-lead windows, and a stately staircase. The owners, a young couple thinking of

starting a family, had purchased the 1910 house for the long term and loved the neighborhood's historic charm. But what it lacked was equally obvious. Like many houses of that era, it was inward-looking. The biggest shortcomings occurred at the west-facing rear, where



the first-floor kitchen and second-floor bedroom were hemmed in by storage closets, blocking easy outdoor access and views of a verdant backyard and lovely residential lane.

Wittman Estes was hired to remedy those conditions while preserving

the original front of the house. But the owners were also thinking about their community. Like many major U.S. cities, Seattle has a chronic shortage of affordable housing. In this North Capitol Hill neighborhood composed mostly of single-family homes, they

decided to create an ADU they could rent out to creatives. The full basement lent itself to such an arrangement, but it, too, would need structural interventions that brought in more natural light and a gracious way of getting in from the backyard. “They felt an ethical ob-



This page: Sympathetic insertions such as a window seat, minimalist bay window, and refurbished bar update the interior while respecting the original dark trim. *Opposite:* A 20-foot wall of sliding doors opens the kitchen and lounge to the renewed rear garden.



ligation, I think, to give something back by providing more housing,” says Matt Wittman, AIA. “More than a financial need, they felt a social responsibility to create additional units for people who want to be in the city and face challenges living in these historic neighborhoods.”

Another of their values was to preserve and reuse the original materials whenever they could. Dowbuilt Construction was on board with this “slower,” more intentional way of building, which meant deconstructing and labeling items and letting decisions unfold over time. “Seattle seems to be a city of tearing down and building new,” Matt says. “I had never worked on a Craftsman house, so this was new territory. I was looking to some of those European precedents for making modern insertions within a historic fabric, such as how to blend the dark colors so it feels like everything fits together.”

Old to New

What transpired was a gradation of almost original rooms on the street-facing side of the house, to completely new spaces overlooking the backyard. Nevertheless, the archi-





pects addressed the front by taking apart and rebuilding the failing front porch, bringing it into proportion with the rest of the house. The taller, wider porch has a gabled roof that extends as a carport; double posts, rafter tails, and built-in seating and storage give it a fresh look that abstracts its Craftsman character.

Inside, the remodel builds on the virtually untouched living room at the front of the house, with its dark-stained oak trim and floors. A bar area off the living room starts the transition from old to new. There, Matt and his team partially dismantled and reassembled a storage cabinet, leaving the section closest to the living room intact, reconstructing the middle part using the old pieces, and adding new elements next to the kitchen. “It was a classic Craftsman built-in, but the new part is configured to hold the owners’ music equipment, art, and storage needs,” he says.

Major transformations were saved for the gutted back of the house. To improve the flow, storage cabinets and a wall subdividing the kitchen and seating area were removed to create a larger kitchen that opens to a lounge and a dining area with built-in window seating. The kitchen—a combination of dark painted cabinetry and quarter-sawn walnut upper cabinets with an ebony stain—ties into the home’s existing deep, rich palette, while a new terrazzo floor and brass accents bring the sparkle.

As an antidote to the Craftman’s inward gaze, Matt designed modern bay windows and opened the entire back wall to the rear yard. There, a 20-foot-long fold-and-pivot





glazed door system, installed within a steel moment frame, lets the occupants spill out to a new porch and down to the private garden and back lane.

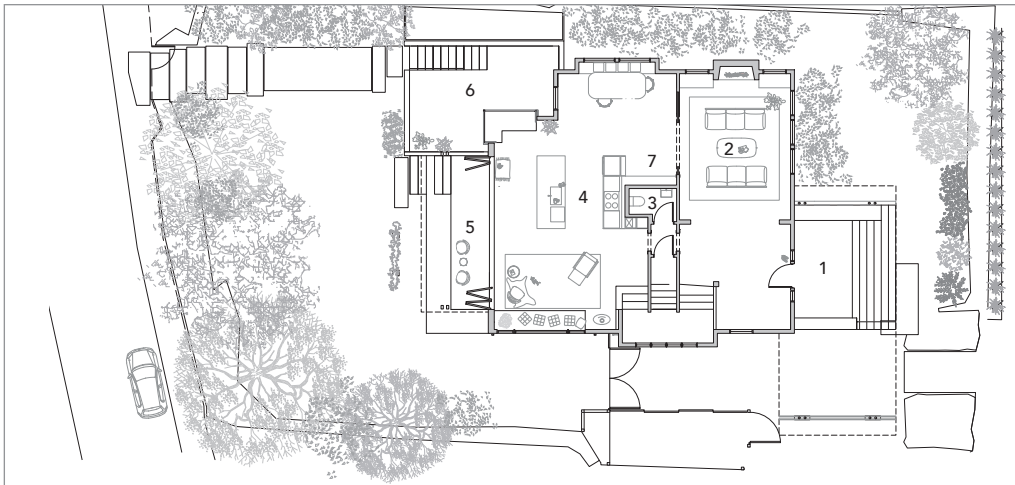
While the second story also has a distinct interior presence, it is now tuned to the outside world. Matt made sure of that by reallocating former

storage space to a primary bath that opens to an inviting deck and sauna above the backyard. “One of the prompts of the design brief was to retain the exterior building envelope and work within that,” Matt says. “It was a fun exercise in how to make it compact and feel luxurious.” In



The sunken garden was key to bringing a sense of light, space, and privacy to the ADU, which has a simple layout and concrete floors. Stair treads were recycled from a highway sound barrier.

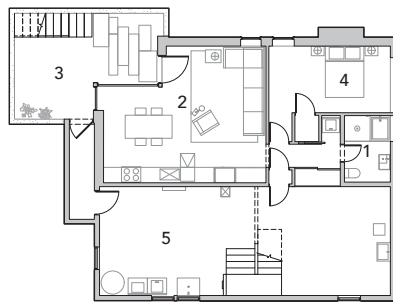




MAIN LEVEL | 1. Front Porch | 2. Living Room | 3. Powder Room | 4. Kitchen | 5. Lower Deck
6. ADU Sunken Garden | 7. Bar

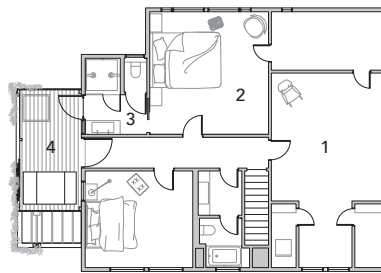
GARDEN LEVEL

- 1. ADU Bathroom
- 2. ADU Kitchen and Living Room
- 3. ADU Sunken Garden
- 4. ADU Bedroom
- 5. Gym / Workshop



UPPER LEVEL

- 1. Yoga Room
- 2. Main Bedroom
- 3. New Bathroom
- 4. Sauna Deck



The daylit ADU bath is cleanly composed with 4x4 white wall tile and wood accents. Upstairs, direct access to the second-story deck and sauna gives the primary bathroom an alfresco feel.

Peach Court Garden ADU

Seattle

ARCHITECT/INTERIOR DESIGNER/LANDSCAPE DESIGNER: Matt Wittman,

ALA, and Jody Estes, principals in charge; Mariana Gutheim and Alex Hale, designers, Wittman Estes, Seattle

BUILDER: Dowbuilt, Seattle

STRUCTURAL ENGINEER: J. Welch Engineering, Seattle

PROJECT SIZE: 3,349 square feet (main house), 581 square feet (ADU)

SITE SIZE: 6,160 square feet

CONSTRUCTION COST: \$495 a square foot

PHOTOGRAPHY: Rafael Soldi

KEY PRODUCTS

CABINETRY: Dowbuilt, Warmington & North

COOKING VENTILATION/ COOKTOP: Bosch

COUNTERTOPS: Absolute Black granite, PentalQuartz

DECKING: Anthology Wood

DISHWASHER: Bosch

DOORS: Signature Door (entry), Panoramic Doors (fold-and-pivot rear door system)

FAUCETS: Grohe, Lacava, Kohler

FLOORING: Pioneer Millworks (white oak), North American Terrazzo

LIGHTING: Dals Lighting (exterior), A-N-D, Sossego, Cedar & Moss, Santa & Cole

LIGHTING CONTROL SYSTEMS: Forbes & Lomax

OVENS: Bosch

PAINTS, STAINS, COATINGS: Benjamin Moore, Sherwin-Williams

REFRIGERATOR: Bosch, Sub-Zero (drawer)

SINKS: American Standard, Duravit, Decolav

TILE: Cascade Stoneworks, Fireclay

TOILETS: Duravit

TUBS: Aquatica, TOTO

WINDOWS: Quantum Windows & Doors

WOOD STOVE: Morso



the floor-plan shuffle, another former storage room between the primary bedroom and front yoga room now serves as the primary closet. A second bedroom and bath are across the hall, which also opens to the deck.

Recycled and Reused

Turning their attention to the ADU, the architects found they could work with the basement's 8-foot ceilings. However, to create discrete entrances on opposite sides of the main house, part of the foundation wall was cut away at the

rear corner and replaced with floor-to-ceiling windows and two glazed doors. They open to an excavated private patio and stairs to the backyard and laneway, bringing light into the living space. "The ADU feels larger than it is because of the view to the sunken garden," Matt says. "Like the upstairs, we were using the existing footprint." To reduce sound transfer between floors, the builders installed rigid insulation and a sound-dampening anti-vibration assembly between the fir joists. Finish materials are elegant but economical.

The kitchen countertop is the same Absolute Black granite as in the main house, but the cabinets are dark-stained maple and the compact bath features simple 4x4 white tile, a soaking tub, and a reused wall cabinet from upstairs.

"The owners were very attached to the materiality of the house and wanted to honor and reuse whatever they could," Matt says. "Our contractor documented and preserved a lot of things as they were deconstructed, and framing was reused whenever possible." A cast-in-place concrete retaining wall holds space for the sunken patio and entryway. "It's a low-tech version of rammed concrete," Matt says. "We made 2-foot lifts, put in stone, let it dry, and put in the next lift, which created horizontal lines. It was an efficient way of creating texture." The ADU entry stairs are made from the same wood as the decks: *Dinizia excelsa* hardwood repurposed from a 40-year-old highway sound barrier in Chicago. Tying the work together, the exterior was painted in Benjamin Moore Kendall Charcoal, and windows in the renovation areas were rebuilt with energy-efficient glazing.

This project embodies the firm's philosophy that landscape must be integral to architecture, rather than a budget afterthought. Matt and co-partner Jody Estes, who began their careers working in horticulture and landscape design, aim to create ecologically rich environments by considering the landscape first and treating the architecture as an extension of that. In this already lush backyard, a wisteria was preserved and retrained on a new trellis, and a mature birch tree was nursed back to health.

With all three levels now connected to the backyard and Peach Court, the house and its garden have a role to play in the quality of life, not just for the owners but for some lucky renters navigating a tough housing market.

—Cheryl Weber



Image Courtesy of Adam Reynolds Photography

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On Point



1



2



3



4

1. GAINING FLAVOR

Rich, earthy hues characterize Benjamin Moore's color trends palette for 2025. Chief among them is the company's color of the year, Cinnamon Slate 2113-40—a luxurious blend of "heathered plum and velvety brown" that strikes a reassuring tone for uncertain times. Benjaminmoore.com

2. NOISES OFF

Designed with commercial applications in mind, Luxxbox's Kurtain acoustic pendants offer opportunities for open plan residential spaces as well. Made in 77 colors of Camira wool and in various shapes and patterns, the units include dimmable LED lights and optional Bluetooth operations. Luxxbox.com

3. COUNTEROFFENSIVE

Defending against cord-nibbling housecats or just the typical octopus of household chargers, FreePower has partnered with surfacemaker Cosentino to provide integrated in-counter charging. Launching nationally with 300 fabricators in the company's Silestone and Dekton surfaces. Freepower.io

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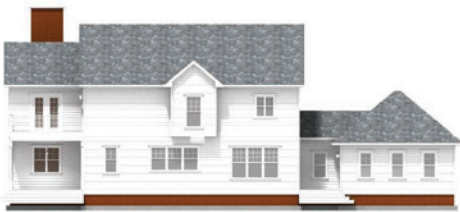
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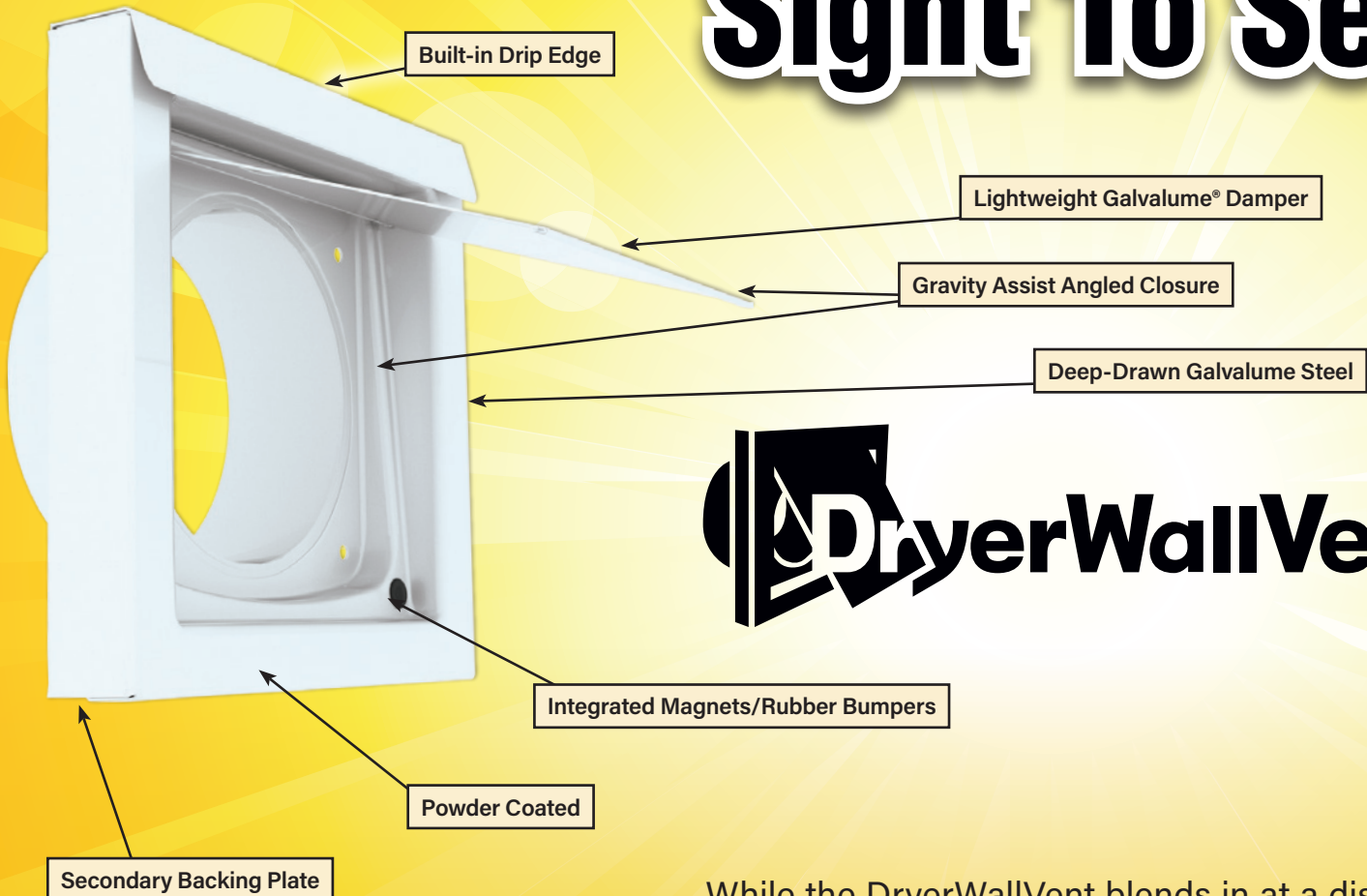
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Residential Design (USPS 022-860, ISSN No. 2689-632X print), Volume 6 – November/December 2024 Issue, is published bimonthly by SOLA Group, Inc., 444 N. Michigan Ave., Suite 300, Chicago, Illinois 60611-3989; 847.920.9513. Copyright ©2024 by **Residential Design**. No part of this publication may be reproduced without written permission from the publisher. **Residential Design** is published bimonthly. All statements, including product claims, are those of the organizations making the statements or claims. The publisher does not adopt any such statement or claim as his own, and any such statement or claim does not necessarily reflect the opinion of the publisher. One-year subscription to non-qualified individuals: \$50.00 payable in USA funds; print or digital copy within USA; digital copy only outside USA; valid email address required for digital copy. Single issues available to USA only (prepayment required), \$10.00 each. For subscription information and address changes, write to: **Residential Design**, Circulation Dept., 444 N. Michigan Ave., Suite 300, Chicago, Illinois 60611-3989, or call 866.932.5904, or email atn.circ. at rd@omeda.com. Postmaster: Send address changes to Residential Design, Circulation Dept., 444 N. Michigan Ave., Suite 300, Chicago, Illinois 60611-3989. Periodicals Postage paid at Chicago, IL and additional mailing offices. Printed in USA.



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It's a weighty ask when your clients request a “legacy house,” one that will welcome multiple generations of family in spaces infused with cultural reference and meaning. “It’s meant to be a heritage house that honors our clients’ South Asian past,” says Scott Specht, AIA. “The challenge was not to become kitsch or directly referential.”

Despite the project’s generous size—17,500 square feet on 2.6 acres—the clients’ program could have consumed “double” the space, says Scott. “It’s really more like a museum than a house—all steel, big glass, concrete. There’s no wood in the whole thing.” Durable Mesabi granite, travertine, brass, and bronze round out the palette.

The wooded waterfront site and the clients’ mandate to preserve trees drove much of the design’s shape, which leans to organic forms rather than a “Miesian” box, Scott notes. The



forms cantilever and hover over water; key indoor spaces open directly to outdoor gathering areas.

The word Ammamma means grandmother, reflecting the link between the owners’ past and their hopes for the future in their family home. Says Scott, “Every piece of this house is very meaningful.”—*S. Claire Conroy*

Project: Ammamma Legacy Residence; architect: Specht Novak, Austin, Texas; builder: Escobedo Group, Buda, Texas; landscape designer: Hocker, Dallas; interior designer: Salon; lighting designer: Orsman Design, structural engineering: Strandberg Engineering; project size: 17,500 square feet; site size: 2.6 acres; renderings: VER.

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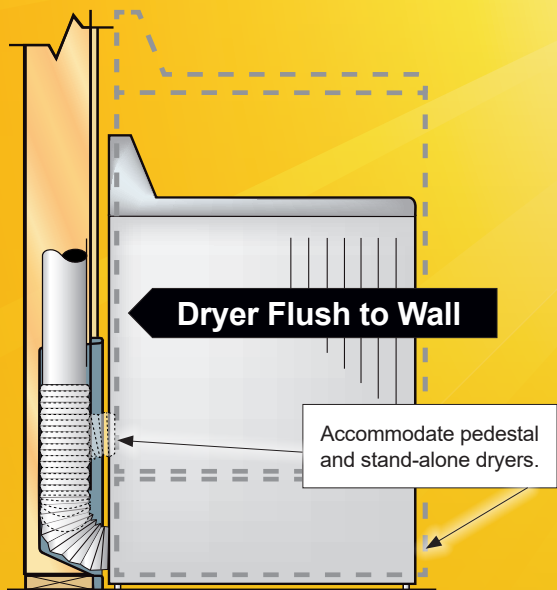
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