



LINDA LEIGH PAUL

coastal retreats

*the pacific northwest and the
architecture of adventure*

UNIVERSE

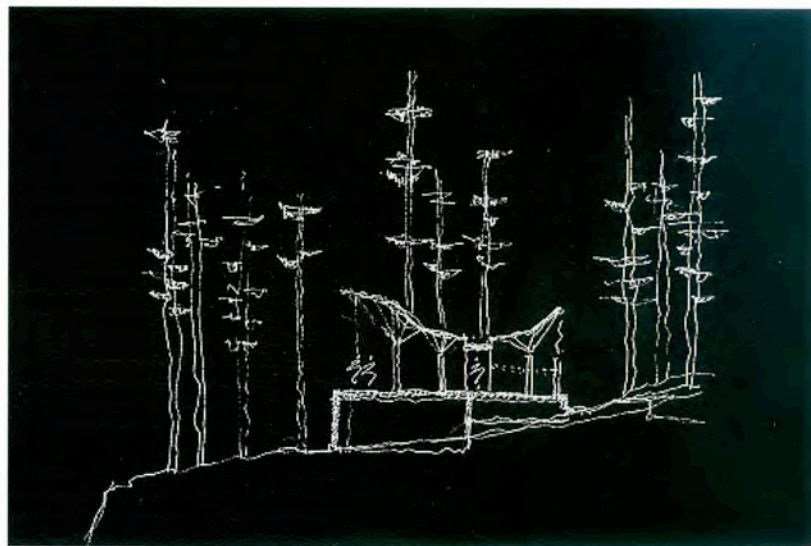


SEMIAHMOO RETREAT

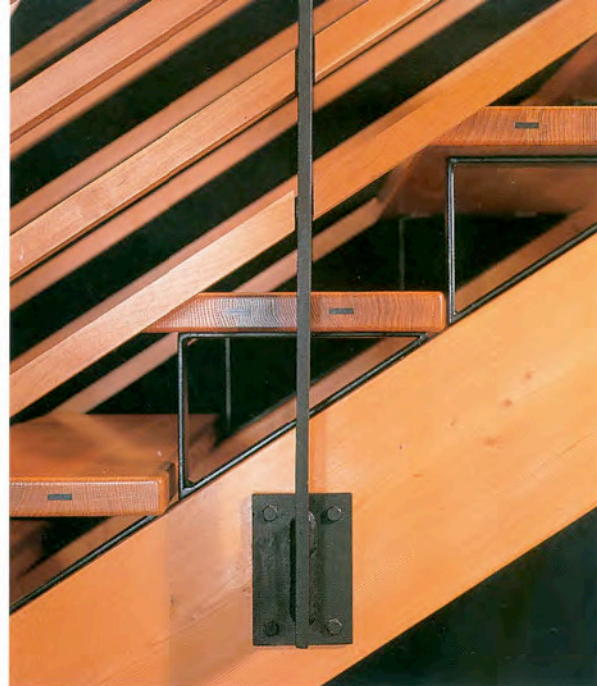
ARCHITECT: Finne Architects; Nils C. Finne, FAIA

PHOTOGRAPHER: ART GRICE

The entryway leads to a sun-filled landing off the terrace (OPPOSITE); a freehand sketch of Semiahmoo by Nils Finne (ABOVE).



PRIOR TO DISCUSSING this new home at the Semiahmoo Resort on the Canada-U.S. border, the owners had lived in one house for thirty years and were new to the idea of working with an architect. They had some ideas about what they hoped to incorporate into the house, and architect Nils Finne patiently collaborated with them. The results surprised them, as they were off in a new, modern direction. Finne, a designer who trusts the collaborative design process, moved confidently forward. He realized from the beginning that the key to comprehending this project was to tie the idea of the design to a language that was familiar to the clients. That language became decipherable through the materials they wanted to live with:



A detail of the door, showing hardware designed as a symbol of the owner's career in aerospace (ABOVE LEFT); interior stair detail (ABOVE RIGHT); the outdoor terrace between living, dining, and sleeping areas of the house (OPPOSITE).

granite, cherry wood, copper, cedar. In addition, a highly detailed level of craftsmanship was required to achieve a quality that had been a part of their beloved older home. Finne worked diligently to design furnishings, details, and other features that would evoke events and memories meaningful to the owners, as well as stand alone as elegant objects in and of themselves.

The house works on several architectural themes. First, it can be seen as a fragment of the larger natural order. There were also subtle adaptations of modernism to the idea of craft in building. Finally, the project can be seen as an investigation of the emotive qualities. Style makes its claim and expresses its own sense of what matters. This is particularly true of the use of stone, wood, and natural light.

The site slopes westward to the protected water of Semiahmoo Bay. The base of the house is a plinth of split-faced Canada granite, twelve inches above grade on the uphill side, graduating to a full story downhill. Atop the rough stone is a series of Douglas fir fan trusses on steel-banded fir columns, which lift and distance the roof system from the enclosure walls. The angle of the roofing plane results in a continuous clerestory band of fir-framed windows and v-groove cedar panels, while high clerestory windows provide natural light and ventilation throughout the house. In general, fewer trees are harvested on Finne's projects, and large timbers are frequently conserved by his use of banded wood columns and beams composed of smaller pieces.



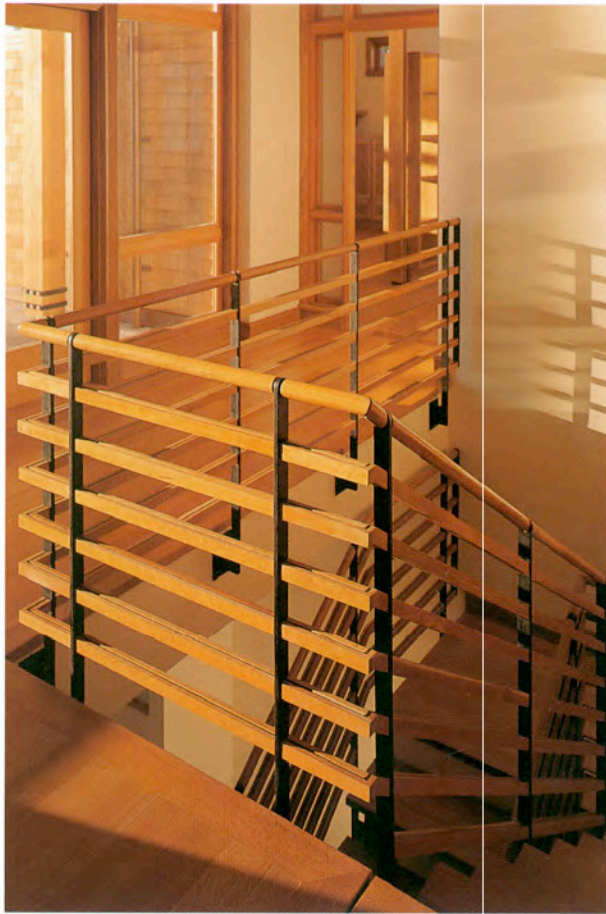


The main living level is upstairs, where an outdoor terrace is carved into the building just outside the entry hall, separating the living area from the master bedroom. Both upper wings enjoy the ever-changing and beguiling views, glorious late afternoon angles of the sun, and evening sunsets on the west bay and beyond. Guest rooms and a large entertainment area are located on the lower level, within the stone plinth.

The Semiahmoo retreat is filled with custom millwork and cabinetry designed for many individual spaces. Laser equipment was used to create copper light fixtures and cherry wood furniture with inlay, all designed by Finne. Interior stonework, etched glass, and stair details are a vocabulary that is intuitively understood. After a year of design and two years of construction, Nils Finne's clients have learned the language of modernism well.



The main living area showing the clerestory and the architect's use of banded laminate wood. Hanging copper light shades designed by the architect were laser cut (OPPOSITE); a view of the living and dining areas from the kitchen. The kitchen area is camouflaged by glass screens with a bead-blasted design that recurs in the furniture (ABOVE).



The delicate wood and steel staircase allows the free-flow of sunlight in many directions (LEFT); a custom-built bed echoes the glass design in the kitchen (RIGHT); sunlight floods the upstairs bedrooms through clerestory windows (OPPOSITE).

