

# Custom Home

The Art and Craft of Custom Home Building ■ Winter 2007

## 2007 Product Guide

100+ Fine Touches


**Retire In Style**  
The New  
Empty Nest

\$6.99 U.S.



6 4

0 74820 08929 3

A photograph of a modern two-story house nestled among tall evergreen trees. The lower level is constructed from light-colored, rough-hewn stone and features several narrow, vertical windows. The upper level is clad in semi-transparent stained cedar shingles and is characterized by large, multi-paned glass windows that offer a view of the interior. A wooden balcony with a railing runs along the side of the upper level. The house is illuminated by warm interior lights, which are visible through the windows and cast a glow on the surrounding foliage. The sky is a clear, pale blue, suggesting a bright day.

The soaring second floor of the house, clad in semi-transparent-stained cedar shingles, sits atop the granite-sheathed lower level.



Retirement Plans

# Top Flight

An age-in-place custom home lands on a Pacific Northwest shore.

**F**ar in the northwest corner of Washington state, about as close to Canada as you can get without crossing the border, sits the perfect house for an airplane buff. It perches on the edge of Semiahmoo Bay, which is part of Puget Sound, like a plane that's just touched down. Its inverted roof spreads across the site like a pair of wings, opening gracefully to the bay and views of the Strait of Georgia.

Fittingly, owner Bob Davis spent 40 years designing and building planes as an engineer at Boeing. He and his wife, Clari, had finished raising their children, and he had just retired. They envisioned a house with most of the main rooms on one level and plenty of windows to counteract the gray Pacific Northwest weather.

## Retirement Plans

Fresh air and light stream in through the clerestories on the home's west side. A massive granite fireplace anchors the living room.





They tapped Seattle architect Nils Finne, whose blend of Modern-leaning style and reverence for natural materials is strongly influenced by Scandinavian design. Finne's collaborator, builder Stan Starr, happens to have his own passion for planes—he's an amateur pilot. He and his partner at Emerald Builders, Bill Miers, pride themselves on their ability to execute jobs with a high degree of difficulty.

"If you can design it, we can build it," Starr says.

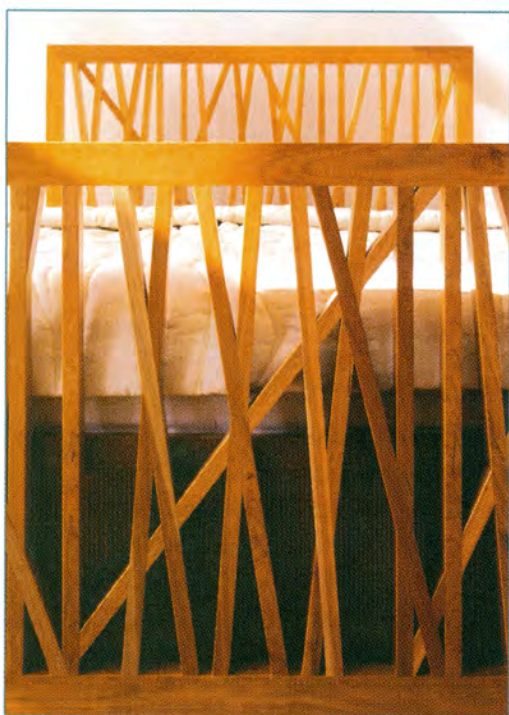
Finne's design put that claim to the test. The house is located in a subdivision on a half-acre lot. In order to comply with mandatory setbacks, the Davises' needs, and the constrictions of the sloping site, he designed the second floor of the house, the main floor, to be slightly smaller than the first. The first floor starts at the front of the house as a foot-high granite plinth that gradually increases to 10 feet at the back. It serves as a table of sorts, with the second, cedar-clad story resting on top of it. Two rows of fan trusses march across the house, supporting the roof. An 8-foot-high band of clerestory windows wraps around the rear second floor, feeding

## Details: Fine Furniture

If the furniture in the Davis residence seems to mesh particularly well with the architecture, it's because FINNE Architects designed them both. Nils Finne and project co-architect Scott Huebner designed the dining room table, master bed, coffee table, end tables, light fixtures, and a fireplace screen, taking advantage of a rare opportunity to extend their talents to furnishings.

■ For the bed's cherry headboard and baseboard, they abstracted the imagery of the home's fan trusses into a hypnotizing, branchlike pattern. The same pattern appears on the copper kitchen and dining room light covers, the copper fireplace screen, and

the etched glass panels that slide to separate the dining room and kitchen. In some cases, the pattern was actually cut by a computer-aided laser that traced Finne and Huebner's drawings onto the finish material. ■ Pieces of steel slice through the cherry coffee and end tables, providing a contrast that highlights the properties of both the metal and the wood. The dining room table is the showstopper, though. Its inlay of Richlite, a black, synthetic material that resembles ebony, forms two diamonds that echo the V-shape of the table legs. More strips of the same material delineate the sliding panels under the tabletop that contain an extra leaf. The table encapsulates the fine craftsmanship that permeates every square inch of the house. "It's like living inside a very nice piece of furniture," says owner Clari Davis.—M.D.



The reedlike pattern of the sand-blasted glass panels between the kitchen and dining room echoes that of the copper lampshades.

light deep into the home's interior. Because of the different floor plates, the trusses, and all the glass, Finne's plan had to be very carefully engineered. One false move by Starr, and the entire frame could be thrown off.

But neither Starr nor the Davises doubt that Finne did the right thing. Light pours into the cherry-trimmed main level, thanks to the clerestories accommodated by the inverted roof. "One wing faces east for the morning sun and the other faces west for the mid-

day and evening sun," says Bob Davis. "So we get a lot of light." The fir posts and trusses define different areas within the large central living space, eliminating the need for light-blocking walls. They also combine with the red oak floors and cherry cabinetry to create a warm, cozy atmosphere—no easy feat where lots of glass and 18-foot ceilings are involved. Finne feels that natural materials like wood and stone help make Modern design more approachable. "When we'd talk about the house with the Davises, we kept



coming back to the emotional value of the materials,” he says. “The stone has a heavy, weighted quality; it grounds the house both physically and emotionally. The Davises were slightly nervous about going Modern, but I think the way we were talking about materials reassured them.” His office built models of the project, which helped the couple visualize the end result and feel more comfortable with the design process.

Another assurance the clients wanted was the knowledge that

they’d always be able to get around their house easily. “I was 65, so that was a factor,” says Bob Davis. Finne complied by making every doorway 3 feet across, wide enough for a wheelchair. The master bedroom and laundry room are on the same floor as the main living area, which encompasses the kitchen, living, and dining rooms; the master wing connects to the public spaces through a glass-backed entry hall. The Davises and their visitors can access the three downstairs guest bedrooms via an elevator installed discreetly next to the

## Retirement Plans

The master bedroom is on the same level as the main living areas—part of an age-in-place plan that includes an elevator and door openings wide enough for a wheelchair.





front door. A wheelchair ramp leads from the garage into the entry hall. “We don’t need any of it now, but it’s nice to know it’s there if we ever do,” Clari Davis says. Radiant-floor heating helps keep her asthma in check, since it doesn’t blow dust around the way forced-air heat does.

The Davis house is a showcase of custom details—the fine ribbing on all interior doors, cabinets, and molding; the copper light fixtures and fireplace screen; and the intricate, wood-and-metal open-riser staircase. Thick cherry mantelpieces provide suitably sturdy counterparts to the two granite chimneys. And the bathroom floors incorporate a methodically planned configuration of Brazilian slate, Chinese slate, and glass tile.

Exterior detailing also consists of copper, chosen for the rich patina it acquires with exposure to the elements. In fact, all of the exterior materials, such as cedar shingles finished with a semi-transparent stain, granite quarried from nearby Fox Island, and custom concrete pavers, stand up quite well to wind and water. “For me, time is an enriching agent,” Finne says. “I think a house should work with it rather than against it. You can’t get away from the natural environment, and if you try, it will find you.” The house will age comfortably, just as its occupants will. —*Meghan Drueding*

Builder: Emerald Builders, Bellingham, Wash.; Architect: FINNE Architects, Seattle; Structural engineer: Monte Clark Engineers, Issaquah, Wash.; Geotechnical engineer: GeoEngineers, Seattle; Energy consultant: Ecotope, Seattle; Landscape designer: Star Nursery & Landscaping, Seattle; Living space: 6,500 square feet; Site: .5 acre; Construction cost: Withheld; Photographer: Art Grice.



Main Level



Lower Level