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A RETIREMENT HOME TAKES
WING IN SEMIAHMOO

Semiahmoo is a manicured enclave of golf courses and gated subdivisions nestled on a crook of land a mile south of the Canadian border. In this realm of über-tract houses and pseudovillas, Bob and Clari Davis' home is hard to miss. In fact, whenever acquaintances ask the couple where they live, all they have to say is "the modern home" and their location is pinpointed with GPS accuracy.

Given its notoriety, the Davis house appears rather benign from the front, its bifurcated façade set well below street level, allowing passersby to glimpse the glistening waters of Semiahmoo Bay beyond. The façade is faced in light-brown cedar and capped with a butterfly roof that angles upward front and back, channeling rainwater through a valley in the middle.

But pass through the squat, glass entry hall that binds the two halves together, and the home's true bravado is revealed. The inscrutable façade gives way to soaring rear walls laced with glass that stretch upward toward the treetops. When the sun sinks low in the western sky, the upraised eaves are illuminated in a fiery glow that makes the whole house look like it's poised for flight. No wonder the Davises call the place "Wings."

Written by Fred Albert Photography by Art Grice



IN THE MASTER BEDROOM, A CRISSCROSSED LIMB MOTIF APPEARS ON THE FOOTBOARD AND FIREPLACE SCREEN. THE SAME MOTIF REAPPEARS ON THE SLIDING GLASS PANELS (OPPOSITE) DIVIDING THE DINING AREA FROM THE KITCHEN.



ONE OF TWO CHERRY ISLANDS ANCHORING THE KITCHEN, THIS ONE FEATURES A BREAKFAST TABLE AT THE FAR END. WINDOWS FRAME TREETOPS AND SEMIAHMOO BAY. THE ANGLED ROOFLINE IS SUPPORTED BY FAN TRUSSES (OPPOSITE) THAT REST ATOP A GRANITE BASE CONTAINING THE DAYLIGHT BASEMENT.



The nickname is appropriate, given Bob's 41 years of service to Boeing. (Bookshelves filled with honors attest to the retired engineer's key role in developing the 747 and other jets.) For most of those years, the Davises lived in a traditional, three-story home in Three Tree Point. But when their children left home, the place became a chore to maintain and a potential liability should either spouse develop mobility problems.

Clari had always dreamed of living on the water, so they started their search in Sequim. "But we missed a ferry and had to wait," she recalls. "Bob said, 'Forget about Sequim.'"

Their quest led them to Semiahmoo. After an ill-fated attempt to design a house for another site, the Davises acquired their present lot, with its fir-crested hilltop and a sweeping view that stretches from Vancouver Island to Vancouver's Grouse Mountain.

The Davises told Seattle architect Nils Finne they wanted more than just a change of scenery. "I told Nils I didn't want to wind up with the same house I had before," says Clari. "I wanted to do something different. I wanted a house that was built for our old age."



THE AIRY STAIRCASE (LEFT) IS CRAFTED FROM FIR, OAK, CHERRY AND STEEL, AND IS ACCENTED WITH EBONY "STITCHES." THESE INLAYS ARE ALSO REPEATED ON THE CUSTOM DINING TABLE (BELOW). FRENCH DOORS LEAD TO A TERRACE OVERLOOKING THE VIEW.



To accommodate the Davises' needs, Finne divided the house laterally, placing essentials such as the kitchen, bedroom and living room on the main floor, so that the couple could live comfortably on one level if they need to. Auxiliary spaces, such as guest rooms, an office and a rec room, are relegated to the daylight basement below. The stairway between them is augmented by an elevator.

The division between the floors is expressed on the exterior, too. Finne enclosed the lower rooms in a boxy granite base that acts like a plinth for the winged cedar structures above. Fan trusses emerging from the stone foundation support the roof both inside and out, and offer an abstract reference to the outstretched limbs of the neighboring trees. That motif is repeated in designs for the living room fire screen, the dining room pendant lights and even the couple's bed.

The main floor is dominated by a great room containing the living room,



A GRANITE FIREPLACE DOMINATES THE LIVING ROOM, WHICH ARCHITECT NILS FINNE FURNISHED WITH TABLES HE DESIGNED AND CONTEMPORARY SEATING FROM ICF. CEDAR WALL PANELING HELPS TAME THE ROOM'S SCALE.

dining area and kitchen. Oak floors, cherry cabinets and fir beams envelop the room in a warm embrace, while low storage cabinets help delineate the spaces within the open plan. A plasma screen TV rises out of one unit at the push of a button and swivels 360 degrees, so it can be viewed from either the living room or the kitchen. Sliding glass panels—embellished with the abstracted limb motif—flank the cabinet dividing the kitchen and dining area, allowing Clari to hide dirty dishes when she entertains.

The master suite is located across the entry hall in the smaller of the home's two wings. As in the great room, the sloped ceiling soars to 18 feet—seemingly weightless atop the outstretched fingers of the fan trusses and clerestory windows aimed heavenward. "Sometimes, when it's a full moon," Clari muses, "I'll wake up in the middle of the night and think, 'Oh, I'm in God's spotlight!'"

Since the Davises' traditional furniture wouldn't work in the new home, Finne designed a host of angular cherry tables to complement a selection of understated contemporary pieces. "It's almost like we're living inside a fine piece of furniture," says Clari. "We really didn't have to buy that much."

That's especially surprising given the home's dimensions; at 5,800 square feet, it's nearly 2,000 square feet bigger than their old place. And yet it doesn't overwhelm its site.

"I wanted the house to look like it belonged here," explains Clari. "I did not want an Italian villa. I wanted a natural home." ■