

Going with the flow

Rebecca Teagarden, Seattle Times Pacific Northwest Magazine, December 3, 2006.
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BEHIND THE PLAIN concrete exterior and wide steel door sits a home like no other to be found among the proud Tudors and mid-century Moderns of Broadmoor.

Open that door and there sits an oasis of contemporary architecture and landscape design. A tranquil place where the outside meanders in, the inside wanders out. Where architecture lends itself to art, and the art of it feeds the architecture. A big house, not only in size but in strength.

This is an important house. It is a George Suyama house. A place of balance, simplicity, flexibility and transparency. The one Suyama admits is most like his own.

But it is home to Laurie and George Schuchart.

"I kept saying, 'I don't want a museum. I want a home,'" Laurie says. "We have kids and dogs. We watch football games. We have birthday parties."

And so begins our tour of Suyama's art and Laurie's home.

1

The exterior walls are sculptural, offering privacy and serving as part of the garden enclosure.

"I love that it's not imposing," Laurie says of their low-slung 3,400-square-foot contemporary. "Our neighbors are thrilled we kept it one floor. And the landscaping is different on each side to work with the neighbors. We could do that because of the collaboration between the landscape



Suyama designed the king platform bed and wall unit in the master. "We now are doing full interiors for our projects," Suyama says. "We have in the past done a lot of furnishings that bridge the gap between architecture and interior-design furnishings. The furniture we design has architectural elements, sometimes not completely built-in nor completely free-standing. Built-ins need to really respond to the architecture and the energy of the space." Photo by Benjamin Benschneider / Seattle Times



The plain exterior "is all about privacy," says architect George Suyama. "What is behind the wall? It gives a sense of entry where entry is not usually thought of. This is the front door to the house, yet as soon as you enter you get the outside. But that really is part of the house. Behind the door is the outside foyer." Photo by Benjamin Benschneider / Seattle Times

designer, contractor, interior designer and architect. The best thing that happened was that everyone got involved instantly. And we didn't micromanage our architect. I didn't go see every faucet out there. We got a good product because they know what works."

2

Suyama does not battle the elements — he reveres them. Interior and exterior terrace materials are the same, and oversized sliding and pivoting glass panels welcome the connection of interior and exterior spaces. The family room, with interiors by Michael McQuiston, and kitchen are wrapped with a water feature that starts at the entrance of the home and seems to flow through it.

"We *live* outside. The doors are open all the time. It's not that cold well into the fall and spring," Laurie says. "We're on a place along the golf course where balls usually don't hit us, but if they do, they come in hard. So we took three glass samples down to the golf pro. He shattered the first two, but the third one took the ball like a backstop. We bought that one."

3

Lowering the grade of the lot brings the green of Broadmoor Golf Club into the living room. The temperate climate, central fireplace, radiant-heated floor and large overhanging roof extend the house to the terrace. Suyama designed the chocolate mohair couch, the big round glass-topped coffee table and the two wood chairs. The couch fits into a blackened steel-and-old-growth-fir frame, creating tables on either side.

"You almost feel like you're sitting in the garden," Laurie says of the living room.

4

The Schucharts wanted a Northwest house, and Suyama used custom-cut clear cedar on



"The project is inherently about the space between the site's topography and its architectural forms," Suyama says. "I've worked with Bruce Hinckley [of Alchemie] a lot. We're very closely aligned in our philosophies with space and place. This view is all about the sense of shelter, and about the sense of landscape and architecture tying together in a completely positive way." The house contains a living-dining pavilion and three boxes; one the kitchen and family room, another the master suite, and a third two bedrooms, bath and powder room. Photo by Benjamin Benschneider / Seattle Times



The reflecting pool off a bedroom, "it's always this opening and connecting to nature," Suyama says. "In small spaces it reinforces that connection. Water is such an important element. If water wasn't in that small space it would have a lot more difficulty having as much power as it does." Photo by Benjamin Benschneider / Seattle Times

the walls and Douglas fir on the ceiling and beams. The house is built of three big boxes. The family room-kitchen box is wrapped in horizontal cedar. The exterior is separated, as often as possible, only by glass.

"The dinner table seats 18, but we got in 20 last Christmas," Laurie says. "The chairs are called Arc by Altura with this wonderful Italian chenille fabric called Truffle from Gary Glant."

5

The house is revealed in stages. The street-front door opens to a courtyard with a reflecting pond. Rocks, here as elsewhere, sit with solid authority in water features, against concrete garden walls, on terraces. When glass panels are open it is often difficult to tell what is inside and what is outside. The large, pivoting-glass front door is the destination at the end of this walk. The transition from outside to inside is subtle. Inside the house is a piece of the outside in the form of a basalt boulder. "We love the sound of the water. It's such a welcoming sound," Laurie says. "And (landscape designer) Bruce Hinckley placed all those rocks himself."

6

Private rooms are quiet and comforting. Low ceilings and another large, pivoting-glass door opens to a small reflecting pool off the guest bedroom. The trickling sound contributes to the home's tranquil mood. Next to the pool is a large Guy Anderson painting.

"Everybody *loves* sleeping in this room," Laurie says. "We bought the Guy Anderson for our 25th wedding anniversary. It is of mountains and water. We must have known we would have a house like this for it."



The fireplace, stretching 14 feet to the ceiling and shared between the living and dining rooms, is one of three in the home. "This one, it almost becomes the indoor campfire for your elemental shelter," Suyama says. "Everybody has these favorite shelters that they build fires in. That's what it wanted to feel like, a primitive fire in a primitive shelter. It's gas starting, but takes huge logs." Photo by Benjamin Benschneider / Seattle Times



There was some debate about the shower window. The Georges, Suyama and Schuchart, wanted it. Schuchart, Laurie, did not. "We said, Laurie, there's nobody outside to see you," Suyama says. "You have a private courtyard and the sun would come in in the mornings from the east. What a beautiful way to start your day." They compromised with a precision-cut steel shutter, created by Tod VonMertens. The stone is cottonwood limestone. Photo by Benjamin Benschneider / Seattle Times

7

The master bedroom has a private courtyard, but the Schucharts can also hear the sound of water here.

"The water lulls us to sleep at night," Laurie says. "And outside the window on the other side of the bed is the moss garden. We look at it at ground level. It's so peaceful."

8

Laurie Schuchart wanted a bright, light shower, but privacy, too. And so the long window is shuttered with stainless-steel panels.

"Ohhhh, the shower," Laurie says. "George Suyama designed the shower so you could look out at the garden. My husband loved that idea. I said no way! Somebody will be working on a roof or in the yard. So they came up with the steel shutters by Tod VonMertens."

9

The soaring fireplace in the living-dining room helps fulfill one of the Schucharts' few requirements for their new home: that it have lots of light, be organic and include fire and water.

"He's the guy with the eye," Laurie says of Suyama. "He knew when to let concrete floors meet wood floors. Let your architect do what you hired him to do. Notice that we don't have a workout room. You can go outside and run. There's no media room. Read a book. It's a home.

"People get so carried away with spaces you have to have. You don't."



The dining table is a giant "piece of wood we got from Kim Holting on Whidbey Island. Basically we designed a steel base for it and had it finished. The table became an extension of the topography outside," Suyama says. Photo by Benjamin Benschneider / Seattle Times



The big pivot doors at the entrance "really increase the sense of connection inside and out. That water element appears to flow through the house connecting the front of the house to the golf-course side of the house. All of the center vistas are somehow connected to water," Suyama says. "That view is one of my favorite views — to turn around and see where you've been: You turn and see the water element as the beginning of the water source for the whole house." Photo by Benjamin Benschneider / Seattle Times

Suyama Space

George Suyama long has been an advocate for art. He has worked to advance the arts in Seattle through volunteer positions and appointments to local arts organizations, including Henry Art Gallery, On the Boards, Seattle Arts Commission, Downtown Seattle Transit Project Arts Committee and the Pike Place Market Commission.

In 1998 Suyama Space, curated by Beth Sellars, was created at the offices of Suyama

Peterson Deguchi Architects. It is dedicated to exhibiting contemporary works of art.

Suyama Space, 2324 Second Ave., is free and open from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday.

To see more of the firm's architecture and learn about Suyama Space go to www.suyamapetersondeguchi.com.

The team

Architects: Suyama Peterson Deguchi Architects. Team: George Suyama, Chris Haddad, Jeff King, John Phillips

Structural engineering: Swenson Say Fagt

General contractor: Schuchart/Dow. George Schuchart, co-owner

Landscape architect: Alchemie, Bruce Hinckley

Lighting: Brian Hood Lighting Design

Metal fabricators: VonMertens Metalworks, Tod VonMertens; Gulassa & Co.

Interior design: Michael McQuiston Interior Design; Suyama Peterson Deguchi Architects

Landscaping general contractor: D.M. Ohashi Landscape Services

The Schuchart residence recently won a 2006 Award of Honor from the American Institute of Architects Northwest and Pacific Region. In 2005 the Schuchart home received the only Honor Award for Washington Architecture from the AIA Seattle.

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