

# Natural Wonder

An idyllic Puget Sound retreat captures the essence of Pacific Northwest living—refined simplicity and nature's grandeur.

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Architect George Suyama's design—with its subtly tilted shed roof—gracefully introduces the 1,500-square-foot house to the forest. Opposite: The curved lines of the antique French daybed provide comfort and contrast. Christian Grevstad designed the table; the armchair is antique Louis XV; the bird on a pedestal is an original piece of art by Leo Adams (MH, May/June '03).



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For years, we had a 34-foot boat, and that was our floating home away from home," recalls Seattle-based interior designer Christian Grevstad. By the mid-1990s, however, Grevstad and his partner, Terry Draheim (principal of his own showroom at the Seattle Design Center), had busy careers and little time left for carefree sailing or nautical upkeep. They began to look among the San Juan Islands—that labyrinthine archipelago in upper Puget Sound—for a suitable site for a second home.

Grevstad spotted the property while on a local puddle jumper flight; glancing out the window at Decatur Island, he spied a meadow clearing on a ridge. "Christian really has a kind of built-in sonar," remarks Draheim. But even for Grevstad—a native of the area's Norwegian commercial-fishing community—this site was surprising. What he had discovered

was Decatur Northwest, an environmentally sensitive, 485-acre development for island housing: 97 percent of the landscape has been left wild with the remainder surveyed for a maximum of 80 homes. There are no stores, paved roads or private cars.

Grevstad and Draheim immediately recognized their new home away from home and asked Seattle architect George Suyama to design "a fantastic little house" that was sympathetic and open to the environment, with an easy flow from inside to out. They also wanted an independent guest room and a "martini tower"—a rooftop dining platform for evening cocktails. Suyama's solutions were exacting and beautifully refined. "I've worked with George," says Grevstad. "And I trust him 300 percent."

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Opposite: An unexpected angle provided by the inclined roof tops off the rectangular regularity of the freestanding concrete-block chimney. The fireplace surround and tools were all custom-made, forged by the late David Gulassa. Above the fireplace is a Shoowa kuba cloth from Zimbabwe; the large bowl beside it is a "sewing bowl," possibly from Indonesia.

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George put us in the trees," Grevstad explains, recounting the architect's inspired decision to avoid the obvious (a waterfront home perched on a cliff). Instead, he sited the new home among the ancient fir trees. In this sheltered setting, the house exerts a sense of belonging to its place. It looks across the wild meadow, with fantastic views of windswept cliffs, neighboring islands and Puget Sound's mercurial skies. The view is a land-

scape painter's dream, formally framed with both a middle ground and a shimmering horizon. The simplicity of the home's design—three intersecting boxes—somehow belies its basic poetry. Suyama introduced shifts in scale, alternating views and flexible spaces. The glass walls of the great room slide open, extending the space to the adjoining porch. Polished-concrete floors stained charcoal are

used inside and out. Within the house, the floors have been piped with a radiant heating system. The open-beamed ceilings angle slightly, ranging in height from 12 to 16 feet; the exposed wood-clad beams extend out of doors, entering the landscape as an overhanging roof. In compliance with Decatur Northwest's stewardship of the land, everything was transported to the site by barge. The

antique French armoire (above) is a piece of architecture in itself; a French dining table and daybed were purchased in the antiques market of L'Isle-sur-la-Sorgue. The woven coir rug, imported from the Philippines, echoes the durability of maritime rigging. "When I was 19," Grevstad allows, acknowledging his wide-ranging aesthetic, "I sailed around the world on a ship, and I've been traveling ever since."

The antique dining table from southern France and comfortable chairs designed by Philippe Hurel are easily dressed up or down. Like the daybed and the side chairs, the curved backs and tapering played legs of the dining chairs contribute a curving note to the room's geometry. Opposite: Draheim on the patio; a Philippe Starck chair displays a curvaceousness all its own.



**A**t Draheim and Grevstad's island home, the idea of a fixed single dining room has been translated into a movable feast. In the great room, there's a 100-year-old French table—a picnic table's handsome ancestor—set with chairs by contemporary Parisian designer Philippe Hurel.

When the glass walls slide open, this entire corner of the house opens up, and the room extends seamlessly onto the adjoining deck, thrusting out into the meadow like the prow of a landlocked ship. During the long summer evenings, dinner is served here, and the two resident canines are allowed free run. "The house," observes Grevstad, "becomes an open porch."

Each element of Suyama's design for the house reflects a harmonic sense of proportion and a modernist understanding of clarity and the integrity of materials. There are no baseboards. The support beams are visible, and their textures and earthy, woodland tones are well integrated to the setting. The great room's high glass walls provide a panoramic backdrop complete with 200-year-old evergreens, flowering wild maples and the occasional bald eagle buoyed along by a passing zephyr.

As the light, and often the weather, change dramatically throughout the day, the house is wonderfully accommodating. Another patio located just off the kitchen is casually furnished with chairs and benches that can be rearranged according to the whims of man or nature. There's a spiral aluminum stair leading up to the rooftop "martini tower," a latter-day widow's walk with a cocktail menu, an expansive platform featuring chairs for lounging, a full dining suite and unobstructed views of the waters of Puget Sound and the setting sun.



The kitchen cabinets are made of sassafras, a pinkish wood with a tendency to darken over time. "When the sassafras was being milled," remarks Grevstad, "it smelled just like root beer."

This large room, a well-considered cook's kitchen with a professional stainless-steel range and ample granite counters, is also an alternative dining room and a cozy winter parlor. A Scandinavian wood-burning stove provides heat and a warming oven. A pair of gray felt-covered armchairs offer the perfect place to hunker down with a book on a cold winter's night. The kitchen's dining table was designed by Grevstad and built by David Gulassa. Constructed of a dark, lustrous walnut, the table top is finished with an overall chiseled pattern (called "Arranche"), its incised surface reminiscent of a wood-cut rendering of ruffling waves. "First, we made sure that a glass could

balance on the table without tipping over," says Draheim, running his hand over the slightly undulating surface.

In the kitchen's sitting room, there's a large abstract painting, a modernist mandala by Guy Anderson; its colors range from moist pewter grays to browns as rich as topsoil, re-creating a Northwestern palette often dedicated to coal and ice.

The colors utilized throughout the house mirror the landscape and water, the ineffable quality of the constantly changing skies. In the guest bedroom, Grevstad picks up an antique piece of Indian silk, one of the many textiles he's collected throughout the world. "I love this color," he remarks, observing a tone as pale and complex as a twist of smoke. "Vapor," he declares, clearly at home and inspired by his surroundings. **See Resources, last pages.**

In the kitchen, custom-built cabinetry; the purity of its design is offset with honed black granite countertops; a Viking range plays against antique accessories. Opposite (from left): Sun pours in from an overhead window, flooding the white-tiled bathroom with light; an antique Japanese cloth emblazoned with a family crest serves as a bedcover.