

fire work with me

Four Seattle architects heat up home design with custom hearths for every look and lifestyle. | by Juliette Guilbert



Inside Outside

Materials Steel cabinet with gas flame

Architect George Suyama, Suyama Peterson Deguchi Architects

EVEN ON SEATTLE'S soggiest days, you won't catch architect George Suyama complaining about the weather. In fact he believes local buildings should inspire us to spend more time in what he calls our "benign climate." So when it came to designing a home for his family, Suyama worked to create a strong connection to the elements and avoid clear delineations between interior and exterior. A long ledge runs the length of the house—built on waterfront property

in West Seattle—from the garage to the western deck, unifying a series of indoor-outdoor spaces: patios, gardens, and an open-air living room warmed by a built-in gas fireplace. The materials in the room are spare: There's a concrete floor, a fir timber ceiling, and walls of cement plaster, horizontal cedar planks, and white plastic laminate. "When people see a photograph of the space, they sometimes say, 'Well that's an interesting living room, but it doesn't have a lot of stuff in it,'" he says. "So it worked—it felt as if it were inside as well as outside."

Into the midst of this serene chamber bursts a bright jet of flame, emerging unexpectedly from the low steel cabinet that runs along one wall. The design offers high

drama, but including a fireplace was also essential to making the area usable during cold months. Although it is sheltered from the prevailing westerly winds and protected by glass skylights from the rain, the room faces north and lacks the heat buildup that would come with southern exposure. The warm glow of the gas fire, so quickly and easily lit, allows the Suyamas to hang out here year-round. "We use it spontaneously, even in February," says the architect. "We go out with a coat on, light the fire, and we're out of the wind and rain. We're warm."

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