

No Dreary Days

This unassuming island home combines abundant windows for light and views with inviting nooks for cloudy-day refuge



EDITOR'S CHOICE AWARD

This year's editor's choice award goes to a well-crafted new home on Orcas Island, Wash., designed by Stoltz Kau Architects. Perched on a precipice 1200 ft. above sea level, this charming home is equally suited to its natural surroundings and to its owners' distinctive sensibilities. At once, it is subtle and sophisticated.



BY BRIAN PONTOLILO

Susan Stoltz and David Kau's clients, Cary and Linda Moore, had a simple request: They wanted "no dreary days" in their new home. But this is Orcas Island, off the Washington coast, where over 28 in. of rain falls annually, where summers can be cool and foggy, and where winter temps dip into the 30s.

Cary and Linda had some other requirements for the project, too. One spoke to their history (a *hiki'e*, a type of traditional Hawaiian daybed), another to the spectacular site (the house sits lightly on the land), and another to their lifestyle (the kitchen's cooking arrangement is quite unique). But to achieve "no dreary days," Susan and

David had to make the home's open spaces luminous and the views abundant when the sun is shining. And when the sky turns cold and gray, they had to provide comfort, charm, and character to warm the soul. Susan and David achieved "no dreary days" and much more on this project. Their brilliance is apparent even before you enter the front door.

The approach to the house is a natural stone path that meanders through a landscape of rocks, native shrubs, and moss. At a glance, the prevailing single-story gable on the public-facing elevation imparts a modest feel. Sitting softly beneath a towering fir tree, the house is clad



A COOKING KITCHEN

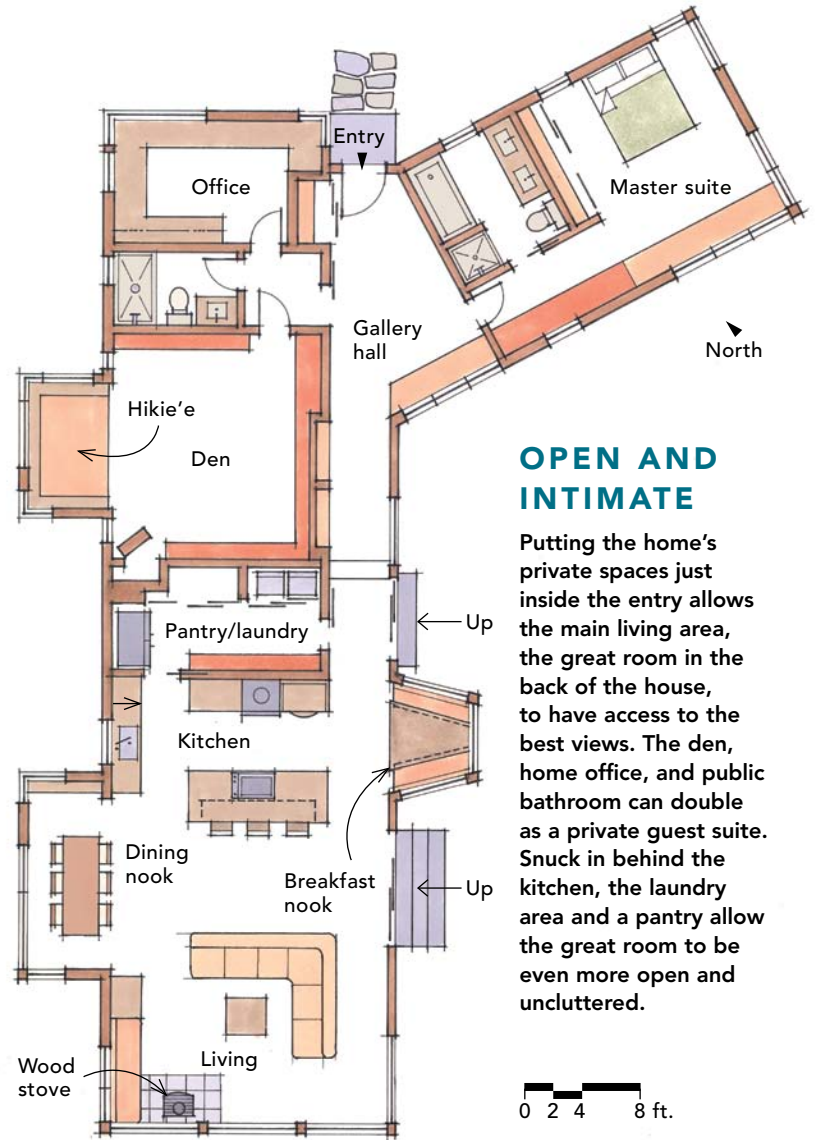
At a glance, this kitchen has all the essentials, but a closer look exposes an arrangement that is particular to how the homeowners cook. A pantry tucked behind the kitchen means less cabinetry in sight, leaving the sink wall free of uppers. Even the fridge is tucked slightly out of the way. Lit with plenty of daylight from two skylights, the island provides a worksurface and an entertaining and serving hub, and it distinguishes the kitchen from the great room.

Where a fridge or perhaps wall ovens might have been in a more conventional kitchen, there is a wood-fired pizza oven from EarthStone Ovens (earthstoneovens.com). A hearth and wood storage below hark back to the days when fireplace cooking was common. Though the kitchen island has a four-burner induction cooktop from Wolf (subzero-wolf.com), beneath the hood, the main cooking surface is a high-heat wok burner from Viking (vikingrange.com).

in fiber-cement and corrugated-metal siding and has a metal roof. These materials were chosen for their ability to withstand the harsh island environment. The clean lines and subtle exterior trim suggest simplicity, although a closer look at the house reveals a much more sophisticated design.

A bump-out around the western corner of the front-facing facade hints at a recurring theme of the plan: inviting nooks for various activities. All around the foundation, cantilevers come into view, a measure taken to disturb as little of the landscape as possible. For the same reason, all excavation was done from within the home's footprint.

With the cantilevers, corner windows on both sides of the house and on the bump-out conspire to create the illusion that the house is floating above the slender ridge on which it dwells. Eventually, it becomes clear that the east wing of the house is not square to the gable end. It



OPEN AND INTIMATE

Putting the home's private spaces just inside the entry allows the main living area, the great room in the back of the house, to have access to the best views. The den, home office, and public bathroom can double as a private guest suite. Snuck in behind the kitchen, the laundry area and a pantry allow the great room to be even more open and uncluttered.

is set at an obtuse angle to preserve a fir tree behind the home and to position the master suite for the best views. Even more subtle is the use of a shed roof over this wing rather than another gable. This allows the home to maintain a low-profile to the public while rising toward the expanse of ocean, islands, and mountain peaks beyond.

Finally, at the entry, where an angled column and single beam support the roof and mark one's arrival, a view clear through the house to the landscape beyond is provided by a glass entry door.

Cary and Linda call the house *Lanihuli*, which in Hawaiian means "swirling heavens," because the house is a great place to watch the island weather stir. And it's true: There are stunning views throughout this house. But the details inside are no less inspiring—from handsome trim elements to distinctive custom hardware to a variety of unique ceiling treatments. You don't have to



Do not disturb. Though one goal of this project was to disturb as little of the landscape as possible, a small outdoor space was inevitable. The natural stone and organic shape of the patio blend well into the surroundings. Trellises overhang the windows to offer shade.



Dinner in the forest. The large windows wrapping three sides of the breakfast nook and dining bump-out (top) bring the surrounding scenery to the table.

go any farther than the entry to get the essence of what makes this home special.

Just inside the front door, Susan and David provide a preview of what's to come by pairing eye-level windows for views of the landscape with a set of windows placed high on the wall for views of the sky. A live-edge slab, milled from a Douglas-fir tree that was felled on-site, provides a place to sit and establishes another material theme—you'll find similar slabs in the master bedroom and in the kitchen. In fact, by the time you have seen the entire house, you'll have noticed six different local wood species used for flooring, cabinets, tables, counters, benches, and ceilings.

Susan and David describe Orcas Island as an architect's paradise, where first-rate builders and craftspeople thrive. It was because of one of these talented islanders, the local blacksmith, that the pair was able to incorporate one of the home's more elaborate details. Two rolling doors separate the entry from adjacent multi-purpose spaces. Handmade by Jorgen Harle at Orcas Island Forge, the 37-ft.-long track and custom rollers are delightfully ingenious and functional.

From the entry, the home branches out in three directions. Through the rolling doors to the west are a den, a bath, and an office that can serve as a guest suite when needed. To the east is the master suite. Finally, a distinctive Douglas-fir ceiling detail—described by Susan as loosely inspired by Japanese architecture—draws you into a gallery hallway opening into a great room that includes the kitchen, dining nook, and living area.



SPECS

Bedrooms: 1

Bathrooms: 2

Size: 1935 sq. ft.

Completed: 2012

Location: Orcas Island, Wash.

Architect: Stoltz Kau Architects

Builder: White Construction & Co.



DESIGN VIDEO

For an inside look at this home and those behind its design, visit FineHomebuilding.com/houses.



A warm welcome. The entry is celebrated with warm wood tones in the doors, cabinetry, and hallway ceilings. A live-edge bench hewn from Douglas fir reflects the natural surroundings and offers a place to sit. One-of-a-kind rolling-door hardware delights the craftsman in all of us.



Hawaiian for "daybed." The bump-out bed in the den is inspired by the large, fixed couch known in Hawaiian as a hikie'e.

Critics of modern houses, with their large expanses of glass and open spaces, call the style cold and unwelcoming. Though the southern gable wall of this great room has nearly floor-to-ceiling windows that wrap both corners with views, the space is warm and comfortable. In fact, one of the most brilliant moves in this design is the placement of the woodstove. Sitting quietly in the corner of a panoramic aperture with an inboard inglenook at its side, it shifts the atmosphere from expansive to intimate.

There are two more intimate nooks around the great room—both for dining—and many more elements that create a sense of warmth and space. Perhaps most significant are the ceilings. The cathedral-style main ceiling is grounded by a pair of hefty custom trusses and horizontal hemlock paneling that draw attention to the view on one end of the great room and the kitchen on the other. Both the breakfast nook and the main dining area are bump-outs whose lower ceilings help to distinguish them within the open space. Each has unique details that make it special, from the madrona tree-trunk pedestal and live-edge top of the breakfast table to the display shelves and corner window in the dining area.

Susan and David successfully established the themes of big views, quaint spaces, and special details in the entry and the great room, then carried them into the den and the master suite, where they continue to delight the homeowners and guests and to honor the island landscape. □

Brian Pontolilo is editorial director. Photos by Rob Yagid.