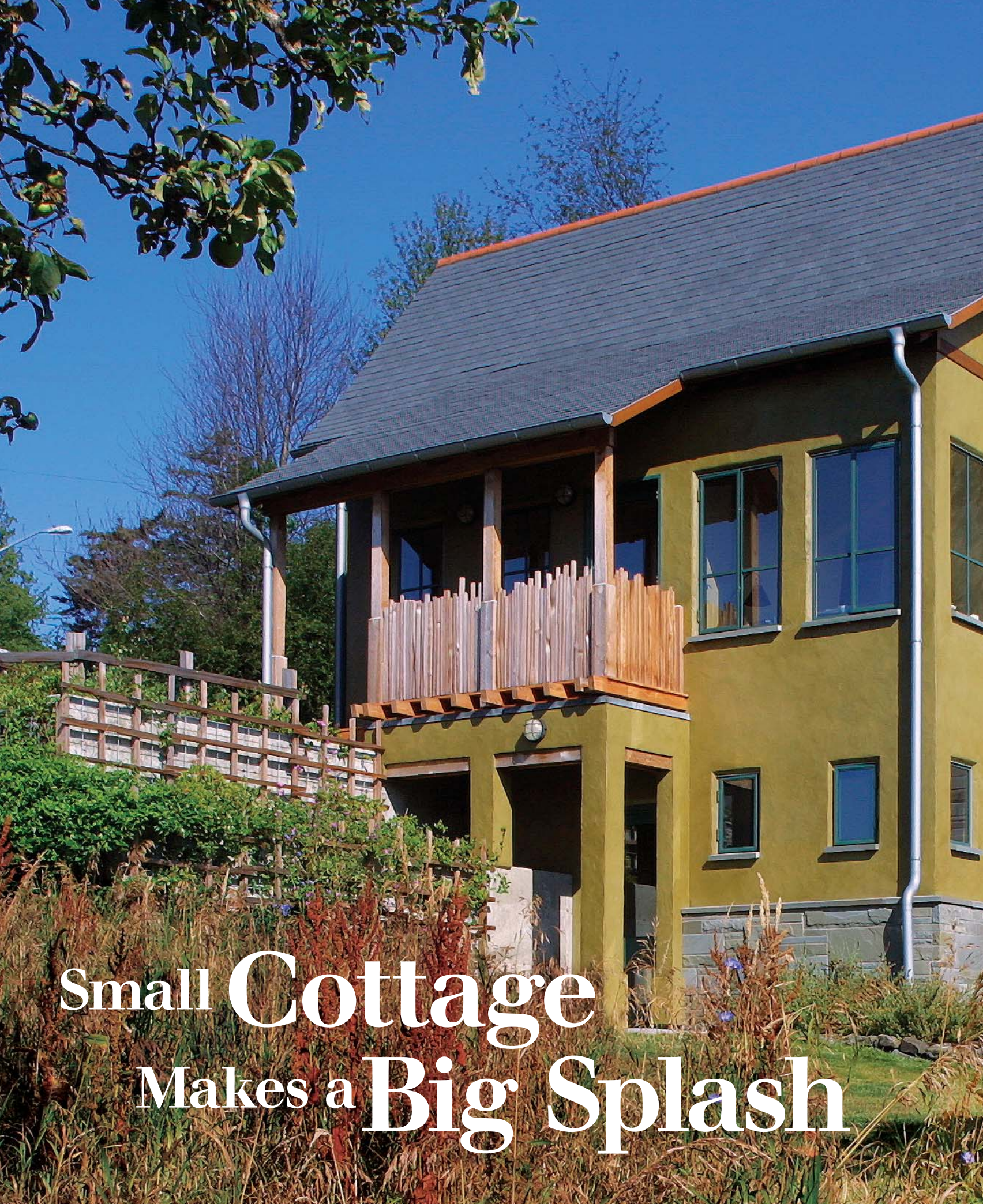


Small Cottage Makes a Big Splash

Going up instead of out makes the most of a steep lot, keeps the footprint small, and captures an incredible view

BY DAVID EVANS

A professor in architecture school once told me that good design often is measured by what's not there. This project started out as a guest house for a much grander master plan. Instead, it evolved into a simpler solution and became an exercise in seeking delight in the minimal and in keeping down the scale to emphasize the detail.

A tall basement for a steep lot

Located in a small historic town on Puget Sound in Washington, this house was to be a second home for my wife and me, with hopes that it would become our permanent dwelling. After a long search, we found a site with many wonderful features—along with some daunting challenges.

The corner lot in an old neighborhood had been overgrown and neglected for years. But it was blessed with panoramic views of the Sound over the neighbors' rooftops (photo below). More thorny issues were that the lot sat next to a major crosstown street with a fair bit of traffic noise and that the site sloped steeply downhill toward the views (photo left).

To maximize the views, we located the house in the highest corner of the lot. I oriented the long dimension of the house in the direction of the slope, which maximized solar gain. Unfortunately, though, the grade in this corner sloped 14 ft. over the length of the house. The city required that auto access be from the side street, which put the driveway and garage on the lowest part of the lot (sidebar p. 92). A 12-ft.-tall

Sloping toward the views. *A 12-ft.-tall walk-out basement puts the main floor high enough to enjoy the panoramic views of Puget Sound. The low-maintenance stucco exterior was applied directly over walls of concrete and foam. Photo left taken at A on floor plan.*

TAKING THE GALLEY OUT OF THE KITCHEN

A curved soffit and an angular peninsula open the kitchen into the dining area to make it seem larger (photo to right, taken at B on floor plan). Although tiny in area, this galley uses space judiciously to create a full working kitchen. A dish caddy that lives in the blind corner of the peninsula rolls over to the small but roomy dishwasher for quick unloading (photo below). The other blind corner is home to a hamper that opens to the bathroom (floor plan, facing page). In addition to other space-saving appliances, the narrow-profile range hood switches on when it's extended (photo above).

To make use of a small footprint, this house stacks two floors on top of a tall walk-out basement. The lower level houses the garage and utilities as well as a small auxiliary bunkroom. The public spaces on the main level are blessed with views of Puget Sound. The house's story-and-a-half design makes the upper level feel like a converted attic.

foundation houses the garage and walk-out basement, and it places the main floor of the house at the right level for the upper grade of the lot.

A house of small additions

I put the entrance on the main level where it would relate better to the street. Boosted by the tall basement, the public spaces on this level now look out over the neighboring rooftops to the Sound. However, a third floor above the main level would have grown the building to over 34 ft. from the lowest floor to the peak of its 15-in-12 pitch roof. Rather than present such a tall facade to the street, I decided to make the house a story-and-a-half tall. This height gives the house better proportions and makes the loft level feel like a converted attic.

To blend in the house with the established neighborhood, I used antique materials and designed the house to look like it had been added on to over time. I started with a simple rectangular footprint (floor plans, right). A small bump-out addition to the south houses a stairwell, with a lower entry and bunkroom on the garage level. On the main level this addition expands to include a lean-to entry porch, the entrance vestibule, and a sunny sitting room off the living room.

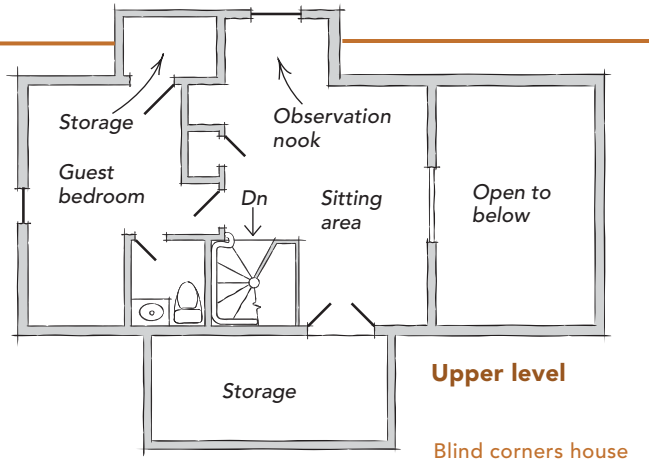
Another addition on the north side helps to break up the tall and unrelieved elevation (photo above). This dormered addition makes space for a utility area in the garage; a large, compartmentalized main-floor bathroom; and an observation nook on the upper level.

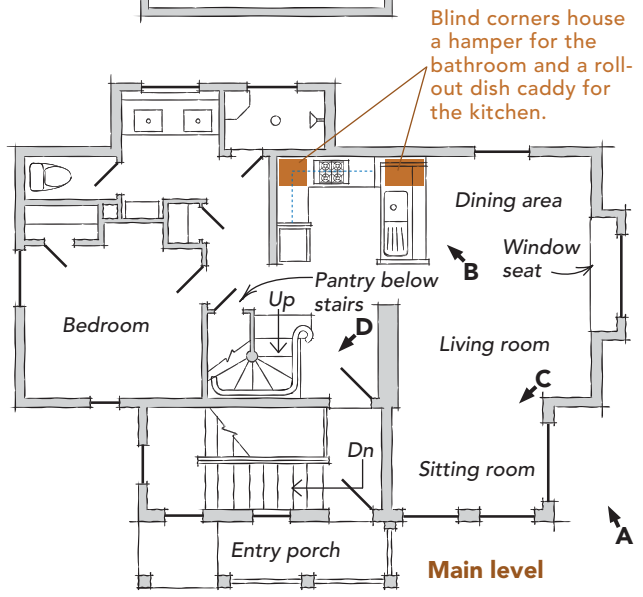
ICF walls address seismic concerns

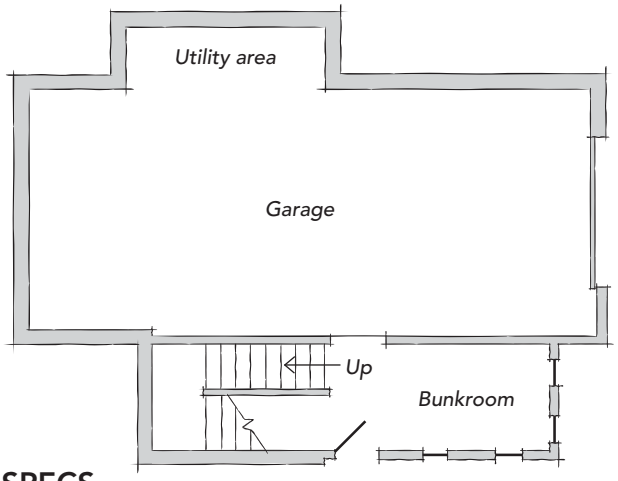
Building tall and narrow in the northwestern part of the country always raises seismic red flags. A wall system of insulated-concrete forms (ICFs) (ICS Building Systems; www.3-Dpanelworks.com; 912-264-3772) deals with this issue. This system is very strong and resistant to earth movements. But strength is just the beginning.

In the extreme coastal environment, rot and deterioration due to weather are a constant worry. The insulated-concrete wall system eliminates wood in the exterior walls. We veneered the outside of the ICFs with bluestone to lend visual weight to the lower level. Integrally colored stucco applied directly to the insulated forms gives the rest of the walls a durable low-maintenance finish. The walls also even out interior temperature swings between day and night. As a side benefit, the thick walls also help to mitigate street noise.

I chose steel-sash windows for their low maintenance. Instead of wood trim, we beveled the edges of the forms around the window







SPECS

Bedrooms: 2
Bathrooms: 1½
Size: 1200 sq. ft.
Cost: N/A
Completed: 2001
Location: Washington
Architect: David Evans
Builder: Starwest Construction

Photos taken at lettered positions.

0 2 4 8 ft.

North

Drawings: Paul Perreault

Sunny sitting. *To keep a sense of openness in this compact house, the public spaces open into one another. Here, an arched opening provides a visual separation for a sitting room off the living room. Photo taken at C on floor plan.*

and door openings to create stucco returns on the outside and plaster returns inside. The only trim pieces are the heavy bluestone sills inside and out for each window.

Recycled roof completes the cottage look

I wanted a roof as low-maintenance as the exterior of the house. Authentic Roof (905-529-6818; www.authentic-roof.com), a recycled rubber product, looks like slate but is much easier to install and costs much less. I capped the ridges with clay tiles from Great Britain.

The exposed rafter tails actually are 4-ft.-long pieces of 3x5 cedar spliced onto the conventional 2x10 rafters and evenly spaced across the eaves. Fir 2x4s finish the exposed roof deck. The rafter tails were set at a lower pitch to give the roof a more relaxed look at the edges.

The cottage appearance is enhanced by the large half-round zinc gutters and downspouts. The eave and rake trim, along with the oversize gable vents, are made of cedar in a simple Asian pattern.

Living compact

Living in the confines of a small house is appealing because, by design, it creates a feeling of closeness and intimacy. The galley kitchen opens into the dining and living areas to enhance the spatial flow while reinforcing a sense of community in the house.

In a more controversial move, the house is equipped with only one full bathroom. But to make that bath accommodate two people at once, the shower and toilet each have their own separate compartments. Two sinks allow for simultaneous grooming as well.

Despite its size, the main floor boasts many different places to settle. In addition to the living- and dining-room areas, an arched opening leads into a sunny sitting room (photo left). A built-in seat in front of the tall arch-top window is the perfect spot to relax and watch the sailboats on the Sound in the distance (bottom photo, p. 89).

We paid special attention to maximizing the storage in our limited space. The kitchen is a perfect example (photos p. 90). We chose compact appliances and a low-profile retractable range hood that use a minimum amount of space. To solve the blind-corner cabinet problem, I designed a dish-storage caddy that can be wheeled to the dishwasher. The other blind corner becomes a pullout hamper that is next to the bathroom.

A showcase for fine craftsmanship

Inside the main entry, all of the major interior materials are introduced in the vestibule: creamy yellow hand-troweled plaster, mahogany, yel-

A driveway that you mow

With our house sitting at the top of the slope, the city was concerned about runoff ending up in the neighbor's lot downhill. Our solution was a product called Grasspave2 (800-233-1510; www.invisiblestructures.com), which produces a drivable grown-in turf surface. We literally turned our lawn into a driveway and parking area.

Grasspave2 is a porous paving system that creates enough load-bearing capacity for a large vehicle while providing a

STAIRS AS ART

The centerpiece for the fine craftsmanship in this house is the stairway to the upper level. A tree carved in relief grows out of the stair skirt and wraps around a small closet pantry. A serpentine mahogany railing caps off the wrought-iron balustrade and then winds its way to the upper level. The center newel is carved to look like a tree trunk breaking down. Bottom photo taken at D on floor plan.

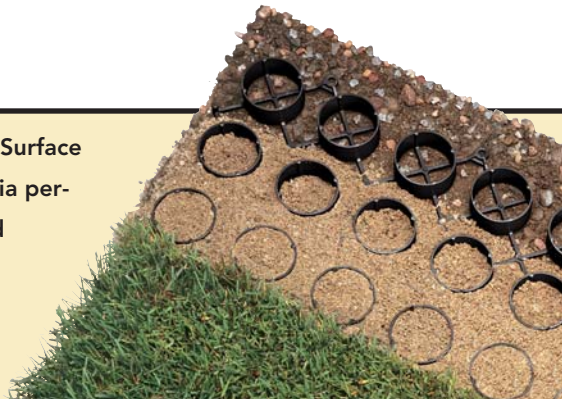
low cedar, and Douglas fir. This simple palette is repeated throughout the house to unify the compact spaces and to call out special elements crafted by local artisans.

The custom cabinetry in the kitchen and bathroom features simple mahogany frames with flat Douglas-fir panels. A dramatic curved soffit above the kitchen peninsula ushers the eye into the vertical expanse of the living and dining room. A surprising periwinkle-blue Italian plaster ceiling carries down onto the walls in a playful, undulating pattern. To enhance the drama, the outer face of the kitchen peninsula and a thick battered wall adjacent to the kitchen angle as if leaning into the living and dining room.

From the main entry, a heavy mahogany and fir door leads to an artful staircase that winds to the upper level (photos right). Conceived of more as a piece of cabinetry than as a staircase, the project resulted from a long collaboration between local woodworker Gaylen Marrs and me. Infill panels around a pantry closet feature a carved tableau of a local coastal pine. The wood details are complemented by an exuberant wrought-iron railing that was hand-forged by local blacksmith Steve Lopes. A sinuous mahogany handrail slithers from the iron volute below to the gooseneck at the top. Marrs carved the top of the newel at the center of the stair to mimic a deconstructed log. □

David Evans has a design practice in Boulder, Colo. Photos by Roe A. Osborn, except where noted.

medium for growing grass without compaction. The key ingredient is a ring-and-grid mat that sits on a layer of gravel and sand. The mat comes as square-meter or quarter-meter sections assembled into rolls. It cost $3 per sq. ft. for the system installed. The mat is filled with sand for proper drainage, and grass grows in the sand. Surface water drains to the middle of the site via perforated drainpipe. The lawn we planted obscures the mat. The rest of the yard was seeded with a wildflower mix for a low-maintenance natural look.



Bottom photo: Courtesy of Invisible Structures