



# ISLAND IMMERSION

A second home in the San Juans envelopes a Kirkland couple in nature



PREVIOUS PAGE: ARCHITECT VASSOS DEMETRIOU USED A COMBINATION OF CEDAR, CONCRETE AND COR-TEN STEEL, WHICH ACHIEVES A CEDARLIKE RUST COLOR WHEN EXPOSED TO THE ELEMENTS. THE MATERIALS ECHO THE SURROUNDING EVERGREENS AND ROCKY BEACH. THIS PAGE: THE DINING AREA AND KITCHEN CONVERGE AT ONE END OF THE OPEN FLOOR PLAN, PROVIDING AN IDEAL SETUP FOR FORMAL OR INFORMAL ENTERTAINING. A RUSTED STEEL WALL BISECTS THE KITCHEN ISLAND, CREATING SEPARATION BETWEEN DINING AND FOOD-PREP AREAS—AND HIDING THE KITCHEN SINK AND ANY DIRTY DISHES IT MAY CONTAIN FROM GUESTS' VIEW. OPPOSITE PAGE: FRAMING THE LIVING SPACE, EXPOSED STEEL COLUMNS IN A DARK CHARCOAL FINISH RESEMBLE TREE TRUNKS, MAKING THE HIGH CEILING FEEL LIKE A WOODED CANOPY. "[THE COLUMNS] GIVE A STRENGTH TO THE INTERIOR THAT'S AMAZING WHEN YOU WALK IN," THE HOMEOWNER SAYS. "IT'S AS IF YOU'RE SITTING IN THE FOREST BUT FROM THE COMFORTS OF HOME."



People don't head to the Islands to be cooped up inside. So when a Kirkland couple decided to build a part-time residence on a secluded beachfront site on San Juan Island, they wanted a contemporary-designed space that would celebrate the serene natural backdrop of bay and verdant forest—not upstage it—and connect them with the outdoors in all seasons.

The less-than-one-acre site covered in evergreens and fronting a rocky beach along Haro Strait gave architect Vassos M. Demetriou, AIA, of Demetriou Architects an inspired setting for this 5,000-square-foot, two-story, four-bedroom abode. "I wanted it to be distinctive yet responsive to the environment," he says of his design. "The home shouldn't imitate nature, it should take cues from it."

To accomplish this, Demetriou chose materials for both the interior and exterior—including cedar, steel and concrete—that echo the surroundings but don't imitate them. It was all a means to creating an end

result that felt at home on its site and allowed the homeowners to take full advantage of the outdoors.

Exterior cedar planks soften the steel roof and walls of concrete and rusted steel. Landscaping is minimal, with native plantings, such as Oregon grape and salal, to keep the focus on the site's natural beauty. Even the driveway—made of small blocks of concrete, spaced to allow grass to grow between them—creates a subtle approach to the home.

Viewed from the road, the home appears enclosed and private, but when visitors step through the main door, they immediately see a wall of view-oriented windows framed in island fir. Exterior materials transition inside: A cedar ceiling echoes the warm hue of Brazilian cherry floors; interior accent walls are made of concrete and rust-colored steel.

To maximize the home's living space, Demetriou designed an open floor plan for the main living area. The kitchen and living, dining and media rooms are all oriented toward the bay-facing wall of windows. From any room, the visitor's gaze is drawn past the slate deck to the rocky



beach and peaceful water beyond. The homeowners ordered blinds for those windows but never installed them. "We didn't want to create a visual barrier from the outside," the wife says.

In the center of the living space, a concrete fireplace towers up through the 17-foot ceiling; its commanding presence is balanced by minimal furnishings. Interior designer Lisa Behringer kept the color palette rich and warm to complement the variation of reds and browns in the cherry floor. The A. Rudin custom-designed sofa and chair and a half—a cozy version of a loveseat—are upholstered in durable natural hide leather. Two Dakota Jackson salon chairs complete the simple seating arrangement. "We wanted to keep things consistent with the elegant surroundings, while still providing a casual place for the homeowners to put up their feet and read a good book," Behringer says.

The media room is tucked behind the open stairway that leads to a fitness room and two second-floor guest suites. Glass sliders can be pulled across to close off the room—providing a perfect spot for grand-

kids to watch cartoons, sprawled on the I-shaped Ligne Roset sofa. An office, hidden from the main living area behind the fireplace, allows the homeowners to telecommute on long weekends away from the city.

In the kitchen-and-dining configuration, American cherry cabinets, granite counter tops, a slate floor and stainless steel appliances create a minimal yet refined look. Bar stools offer casual island seating for four, and a custom-designed dining table for 12—made of reclaimed wood bridge planks and a stainless steel base—with carved-wood Dakota Jackson Ocean side chairs adds a classic touch of formal sophistication.

The homeowners' favorite space is a simple seating area in the master suite, where two Ligne Roset TOGO chairs face the awe-inspiring view. Mornings, husband and wife sit with their two Portuguese water dogs by their sides and binoculars close at hand, sipping homemade lattes and watching boats glide through the calm strait. "There are times when it's perfectly quiet out there, and you hear nothing but the waves and the birds," the wife sighs. "To me, it's perfect." ■



THE ARCHITECT WAS PARTICULAR ABOUT CREATING PRIVACY FOR THE HOME AS SEEN FROM THE ROAD, BUT TO CONNECT IT WITH NATURE HE DESIGNED THE ENTIRE WATER-FACING SIDE WITH FLOOR-TO-CEILING WINDOWS, FRAMED WITH SAN JUAN ISLAND FIR. THE WINDOWS ENABLE THE HOMEOWNERS TO ENJOY NATURE DURING THE EVENINGS AND COLDER SEASONS, WHILE IN WARMER MONTHS THE LOW-BANK WATERFRONT ALLOWS EASY ACCESS TO THE BEACH—A PLACE TAKEN ADVANTAGE OF BY THE COUPLE'S GRANDCHILDREN. "DESPITE THE FACT THAT THE WATER IS 55 DEGREES, THEY'LL PLAY IN IT FOR HOURS," THE WIFE SAYS. THE BEACH SERVES ANOTHER PURPOSE TOO. THE DEPARTMENT OF ECOLOGY WAS SO PLEASED WITH DEMETRIOU ARCHITECTS' BEACHFRONT DESIGN—USING NATIVE ROCKS AND VEGETATION AS OPPOSED TO A CONCRETE BULKHEAD—THAT THEY ASKED TO USE THE SITE AS A MODEL FOR IDEAL WATERFRONT PROPERTY TREATMENT.



THE SEAMLESS FLOW BETWEEN INSIDE AND OUT IS ESPECIALLY DRAMATIC IN THE MASTER SUITE. THE EXTERIOR CEMENT WALL TRANSITIONS IN AND SERVES AS THE BED FRAME, WHILE A PRERUSTED STEEL WALL (DESIGNED TO REPLICATE THE COR-TEN STEEL ON THE EXTERIOR) OFFERS A WARM ACCENT. THE CEDAR CEILING SLOPES UPWARD, EMBRACING THE NEARLY 13-FOOT-TALL VIEW-ORIENTED WALL OF WINDOWS. "WE LOOK UP AT NIGHT AND SEE THE MOON, THE TREES, THE WATER," SAYS THE WIFE. "IT'S LIKE WE'RE SLEEPING IN THE TREES."



## design details

### Architecture

Vassos M. Demetriou, AIA, project architect; Jeffrey R. Barnett, project manager, Demetriou Architects, (425) 827-1700, demetriouarchitects.com

### Contractor

Dan Lowe, Lowe Construction, (360) 378-2287

### Landscape Architecture

Steve Schramm, Island Gardens Company, (360) 378-5161

**For resource information, see page 79.**