



picking UP

A couple finds the perfect spot to build tall

MARGARET DOESN'T need me to tell her tale. People who are crazy for houses always know their own stories. And Margaret does a right fine job of it herself.

Upon seeing her future husband's college apartment for the first time: "Wow, this is the first man's apartment I've been in that didn't make me want to throw up."

Upon their decision many years later to move across the country to San Juan Island: "There are people who pick this island, and they come and leave. Then there are people who the island picks, and they come and stay."

San Juan Island picked Margaret and her husband on a visit to Friday Harbor.

"We were looking for the third chapter of our life. We were sitting out back of Friday Harbor House and my husband said, 'Why don't we come here? It's got everything ▶

"It's pretty big," architect Kirsten Murray says of the design concept for the home overlooking False Bay on San Juan Island. "They sit with intention on the landscape, but they don't overwhelm it. They're purpose-driven."

The 15-foot front door, left, does more than make a big statement. "They get strong afternoon light," Murray says. "The door is big, with the Dutch door there, too, so they can get great cross ventilation. You can cool that house off in a minute."

Immediately inside the front door are big views to False Bay. Floors downstairs are easy-to-maintain concrete.





The blackened-steel bridge overhead links an office, off to the left, and the master bedroom at the end of the walk. The white panels shielding the master bedroom slide away to reveal the views outside and the living spaces inside.



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we want.' Word for word, it was what I was thinking. When we bought this house we'd been on the island a total of 36 hours."

Sometimes you know what you know.

But Margaret doesn't mean this house, the contemporary we see here perched up tall to see what it can see across the muddy, rich-with-sealife preserve of False Bay. Although, God knows, they did try.

"For five years we worked to use the existing house. I'm not for tearing down and building a McMansion. But it wouldn't work."

It was time, 2004 to 2010, well spent with the architects from Olson Kundig, Kirsten Murray principal architect on the project.

"The open bridge, that the house is slightly elevated, the metal work, that all came out of that creative process. We wanted a house — we've got a lot of art — where anybody who came here — from artists to CEOs — would be comfortable but challenged."

Tall order, tall house.

On the spot of the old foundation, the 2,500-square-foot home has glass walls, open to two floors, to maximize views of Haro Strait. Massive exterior wood shutters, 20 feet tall, temper light and solar heat across the west facade. Deep overhangs provide shade and storm protection.

At the top of the stairs is a cantilevered steel overlook for over-the-top views inside and out. Three Rumford fireplaces do their part for comfort. Interior design by Sara Steinfeld, who melded the new with "nonnegotiable" pieces from her design-▶

"We were trying to make things kind of cozy," architect Murray says of the master bathroom. The Japanese soaking tub is stainless steel. Limestone tile walls and floors were left over from a house the owners had previously remade.



"The old house had its charms, but it didn't really fit their program," Murray says of the house the homeowners found on the property, seen here. "They wanted to be aware of each other from different places in the house, to be able to talk to each other from different places in the house."



The massive exterior shutters, 20 feet tall, close up the home, controlling light and solar-heat gain. The grounds were designed by Steve Schramm of Island Gardens. The home was built by Dan Lowe of Lowe Construction in Friday Harbor.



The home's design references an old barn once on the property. "It was a ruin at the time, and it subsequently got blown down," Murray says. "Because there was an agricultural building on the site, we thought maybe the house could be like a barn: one-roof pitch, the open interior, the loft, the height."



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minded client. All of this secure behind a 15-foot-tall, steel-clad front door.

The architecturally adventurous Margaret is well pleased with her contemporary San Juan Island home built by Dan Lowe of Lowe Construction in Friday Harbor, gardens by Steve Schramm of Island Gardens.

"We love the community, but we absolutely love the house. We're constantly saying, 'Whoa! How does that work? How'd they do that?'"

"In 29 years of marriage we've lived in 12 houses. We redid another house and this one at the same time, and for those two it was the first time we worked with an architect and a designer. And the thing about working with an architect and a designer is that you learn so much."

The couple is now retired to island life. These, however, are not retiring people.

"We're basically urban people, and there's a lot going on out here," Margaret says. "This is a major shipping channel. We see the lights of Victoria. The cruise ships that go by are like a lighted city block." ■

Rebecca Teagarden writes about architecture and design for Pacific NW. Benjamin Benschneider is a magazine staff photographer.

"It's a pretty magical site," Murray says of this spot on the edge of San Juan Island. "It's just lovely. You see whales going by, and you're very aware of the agricultural presence of the place: the way things smell, it's very coastal, but very agricultural, too."