

A Cabin on the

This small home on San Juan Island is tied closely to its landscape through smart and creative design solutions

BY GEOFFREY PRENTISS



Coast

Sheltered. The cabin, which is accessed by a simple two-track drive and a short walk, is nestled into a small ravine for protection against the elements and to provide solitude and privacy.



Our client Sandra is a thoughtful woman who carefully considers what she surrounds herself with. Her ethos has always been to live a minimalist life: to have one nicely considered possession rather than lots of options; one handsome jacket rather than a closet full of them; one lovely vase; one small, well-designed house rather than an excessively large one with extra rooms she may never use. She believes in quality in all things over quantity in anything. A great deal of patience is necessary to achieve this lifestyle. So when it came time to build her own home, she could either have built a home quickly with lesser-quality materials and construction, or have been patient and built the finest home she could as she garnered the resources. She chose the latter. To do so, she lived for years on this five-acre site on the west coast of Washington's San Juan Island in a 16-ft. camping trailer, which rocked in the wind as her new home slowly came together.

Suited to the site

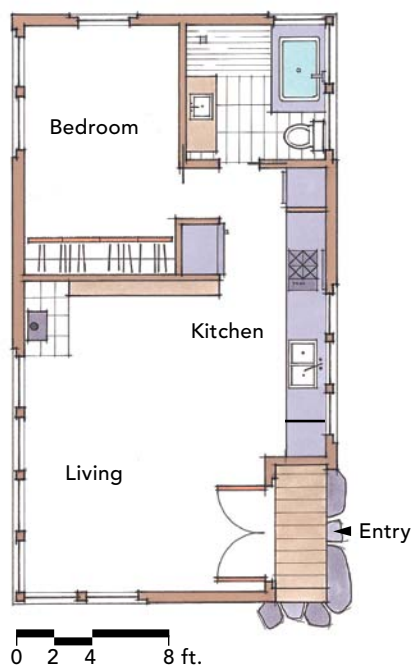
Sandra cherishes the western part of the island for its calmness and tranquility. Far removed from the crush of summer tourists that frequent other parts of the island, this new home is blasted by winter storms and charred by the summer sun, but it feels much like the San Juan Island of old, prior to the substantial development in the past decades. This ruggedness conjures a vital connection between the home and its natural setting.

Despite the area's remoteness, development has been encroaching slowly. Numerous summer houses sit on the most prominent pieces of land with almost no cover of vegetation. In order to achieve a wonderful sense of



GRACEFULLY PLANNED

Carving the eastern corner out of the rectangular footprint created a sheltered and welcoming entry into the living room. The kitchen and bath occupy the north side of the home, allowing the sole bedroom to have western views and daylight access.



SPECS

Bedrooms: 1

Bathrooms: 1

Size: 632 sq. ft., plus a 320-sq.-ft. storage and laundry room

Cost: \$315 per sq. ft.

Completed: 2012

Location: San Juan Island, Wash.

Architect: Prentiss Architects

Builder: Giovanni Giustina



Open living. The living room captures a southern ocean view through large windows that help condition the space through solar gain and make it feel expansive through increased daylight and extended sightlines.

being alone in the wild, we tucked the new house into a small ravine. From here, Sandra could still take in the magnificent site without the distraction of the nearby houses. Because this is her primary home, it was also an asset to nestle the structure into an area protected from extreme weather.

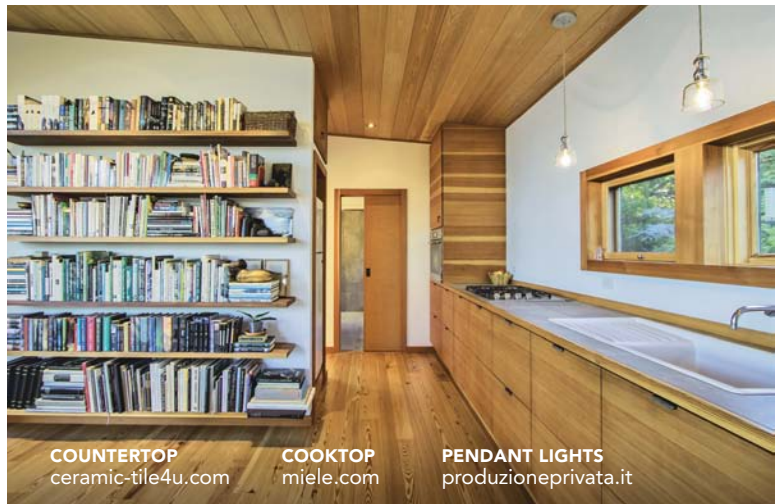
Due to the unique siting of the house, we had to plan carefully how Sandra and her guests would approach and enter the home. We created a narrow path to the front door that twists up from the parking area over a rock ridge, then over rock formations and between low-hanging, whiplashed Douglas-fir branches and clumps of snowberry. We used a temporary construction road to build the house, which then was returned to native shrubs after completion of the project. This allowed the entry route to be nothing more than a path that the deer would make. No

gravel, no imposed materials—just a narrow footpath winding over the natural landscape.

Expansive by design

For reasons of cost and aesthetics, we decided to keep the footprint a simple, small rectangle. By using the natural drop of the land to the north, we were able to grab 320 sq. ft. for basement storage and laundry. However, we could not provide internal access to the lower space, as that would have taken up too much room and added additional expense.

The most budget-friendly arrangement meant constraining the kitchen to a single line on the back wall, which allowed the single main room to be open. We borrowed all we could from the outdoors to make the small rooms feel spacious. For instance, we designed floor-to-ceiling windows that wrap the corners of the home to enhance views to



A linear layout. The kitchen, with its simple and abundant base-cabinet storage, extends past the living room to create a nook for the oven and refrigerator and to create private entries for the bedroom and bathroom.

Small luxury. The four-piece bathroom feels far larger than it is due to the windows that wrap its outside corner and a barrier-free shower surrounded by curtains rather than fixed walls.

the outside, provide daylight inside, and enable long sightlines through the interior. We also designed a mono-pitch roof angling up toward the view to evoke a sense of openness.

Organizing the floor plan, which is divided into three primary areas, was simple in some ways and complex in others. The bedroom and bathroom could not open into the main room, but there was no space for a conventional hall. I also didn't want the fridge to face into the main room. We resolved these challenges by extending the kitchen and using the resulting nook as a transitional space, with the bedroom door tucked behind the fridge and the bath door beyond.

Low-impact living

Small homes are already more energy efficient by not having to keep excess square footage at a comfortable temperature. Additionally, Sandra's intention was to live lightly, which led us to create a home that has an environmental and energy impact as unobtrusive as its form. Its solar gain in the winter is significant enough that Sandra rarely uses the radiant heaters or the woodstove. The 8-in.-thick walls and a living roof help make for a consistent and comfortable climate inside. Sandra chose recycled Douglas fir for the floor and ceiling, an on-demand water heater, and triple-glazed windows on the north side of the house. The cedar siding, which Sandra is allowing to age naturally, requires little maintenance and provides a natural-looking home that blends into the landscape. □

Geoffrey Prentiss is the principal of Prentiss Architects in Seattle. Photos by Adam Michael Waldo.



TUB, SINK, FAUCET
vola.com
SCONCES
pnduzioneprivata.it
TILE
ceramic-tile4u.com