

# Privacy and Light on a Small Lot

BY DAVID HALL

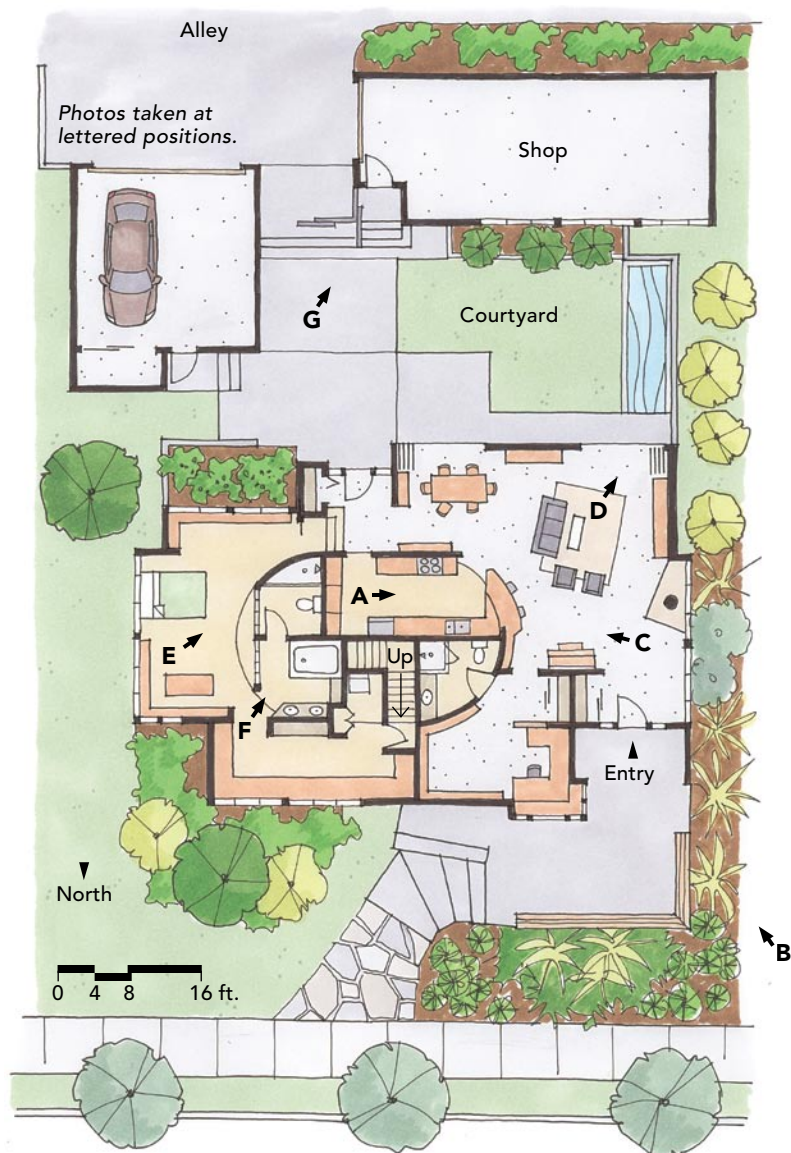


With a durable exterior and a surprising daylight interior, this neighborhood home remains private even as its walls fold open onto a neat courtyard

When Sue Mason and Richard Roth decided to leave Anchorage and move south to the Lower 48 for their retirement years, they didn't stray far from the sea. Experienced mariners, they decided to build a home on a vacant lot they owned in Anacortes, Wash., gateway to the San Juan Islands. Minutes from Puget Sound, the 75-ft. by 100-ft. lot is tucked into an established neighborhood. After living on boats, Sue and Richard were accustomed to getting maximum use out of every available bit of space. That's exactly what we would have to do to squeeze a sunlit house, a two-car garage, a woodshop, and an outdoor room onto this small lot.

Like the proverbial ring of wagons creating a protected zone at its center, the house, the shop, and the garage encircle the yard (drawing facing page). The house fronts the street, while the two-car garage and the 600-sq.-ft. woodshop





## OPEN PLAN WITH A HARDWORKING CORE

Spaces that demand the greatest connection to the outdoors are arranged around an oval core, the nucleus of this house. All the rooms that require plumbing are here, as is the stairway to the basement under the master bedroom. At the hub of the house, the kitchen enjoys long views through the west-facing gable-end windows, and interior views of the front door, the fireplace, and the entertainment center. Inset photo taken at A on site plan; exterior photo taken at B.

border the back of the lot, accessed by an alley. In between lies a sheltered courtyard. On sunny days, Sue and Richard swing open the folding doors in the dining and living areas to mingle house and yard. A fountain plays water music to muffle neighborhood sounds.

### The fight for light

In the Pacific Northwest, famous for its cloudy days, sunlight is a powerful tonic. We used a variety of tricks in this house to give Sue and Richard their fair share. A 22-ft.-long ridge-top skylight ([www.crystaliteinc.com](http://www.crystaliteinc.com)) illuminates the home's oval core, which includes the kitchen and the master and guest baths.

In the master bath, translucent fiberglass walls—2x4 framing sandwiched between flexible 1/4-in. fiberglass panels ([www.dipcraft.com](http://www.dipcraft.com))—keep things bright

### SPECS

**Bedrooms:** 2

**Bathrooms:** 2

**Size:** 1960 sq. ft.

**Cost:** \$305 per sq. ft.

**Completed:** 2006

**Location:** Anacortes, Wash.

**Architect:** David Hall

**Builder:** Dykstra Construction Services





**Open plan opens up.** Under the ridge-top skylight, the kitchen spills smoothly into the living and dining areas, where a quartet of doors can be folded open to mingle courtyard and house on sunny days. Photo taken at C on site plan.



**Folding doors and falling water.** The concrete retaining wall required along the southwest corner of the backyard created an opportunity for a lively water feature that can be enjoyed from both inside and out. Photo taken at D on site plan.

while providing privacy (photo facing page). At each gable end, triangular clerestory windows admit morning and late-afternoon light deep into the interior.

The rooms that most benefit from natural light and views, such as the living and dining areas, are situated along the exterior walls. The walls of the kitchen, meanwhile, are peeled back, with the oval defined not by full-height partitions but by the arc of a two-tiered breakfast bar and the curved transition between the kitchen's rubber-tile flooring and the polished concrete of the open-plan dining/living space.

The expanse of south-facing windows in the living and dining areas combines with the dark concrete floors to create a passive-solar system, giving an assist to the radiant-heating system embedded in the floor. In summer, on those rare sweltering Northwest days, the folding doors can be opened wide to let in a breeze. Overhanging eaves provide shading from the sun. Year round, the house is filled with natural light, augmented by the light reflected off the outdoor pool.

#### **Spare detailing and marine-grade materials minimize maintenance**

Sue and Richard have a collection of modernist furniture and contemporary art, and they came to the drawing board wanting a house that reflected their sensibility. It had to be open and uncluttered, with a presence and personality established by materials and structural components rather than by historical precedent.

The open-plan layout is emphasized by a high gabled ceiling running along the spine of the house. Beams from salvaged timbers provide structure and accent in the living and dining areas. The floors in the living, dining, and guest/office spaces



are exposed concrete with a ground-and-polished finish. Zinc control joints help to minimize cracking, and they add visual interest. The master bedroom—which is raised 18 in. above the ground floor to allow light into the cellar below—has oak flooring with radiant heating installed between the joists.

Marine-grade Douglas-fir plywood finished with four coats of spar varnish clad the gable ends of the house, the walls adjacent to the entries, and the bay window fronting the street. The amber warmth of the fir is heightened by its partner in exterior finish: gunmetal gray U-panel steel roofing ([www.metalsales.com](http://www.metalsales.com)), installed horizontally as siding with custom-fabricated battens. Although selected primarily for their aesthetics, both materials were relatively inexpensive at about \$10 per sq. ft., leaving room in the budget for a standing-seam metal roof and folding window walls in the living and dining areas ([www.quantumwindows.com](http://www.quantumwindows.com)).

Incidentally, the metal siding and roofing are coated with Kynar-based paint. In my experience, it has proved to be the most-durable, colorfast paint for exterior metal applications that are exposed to salty seaside air.

Galvanized wide-flange steel I-beams held aloft by galvanized pipe columns are the structural bones of the entrances and the sliding gate off the back alley. We left these rugged and simple steel elements exposed to lend their character to the modern style of the house. Commercial-grade aluminum windows and storefront entry doors ([www.arcadiaproducts.com](http://www.arcadiaproducts.com)) complete the exterior palette. At the front door, the glass is frosted for privacy, and the aluminum frames are anodized gray so that they look at home next to the steel siding.

It may be landlocked in an Anacortes neighborhood, but Sue and Richard's house is nevertheless shipshape, marine-grade, and detailed for the long haul. □

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**Two kinds of privacy.** In the master bedroom, a bank of windows facing south overlooks a sheltered courtyard formed by the garage and the shop. The curving wall of the central core includes translucent fiberglass panels that admit light from the bedroom to the master bath, and vice versa. Photos taken at E and F on site plan.

## CIRCLE THE OUTBUILDINGS

The house, the shop, and the garage are arranged to create a secluded outdoor room with southern exposure between the alley and the street. Steel panels covered with Kynar-based paint are used as both roofing and siding on all three buildings. The galvanized posts and beams, and the concrete steps, planters, and retaining walls are equally suited for long exposure to the elements without maintenance. Deciduous trees along the western edge of the yard complete the sense of enclosure. Photo taken at G on site plan.

