



A Big Little House on the Ridge



A handrail forged in fire. Sinewy, vinelike tendrils of hand-tooled steel wrap around the railing to the upper level. Glimpsed from the path, the Kimball house (top photo) is the epitome of a shelter in the woods: a gable roof and a chimney. Photo taken at A on floor plan.

Nestled among cedars and firs, this cabin packs multiple levels, a fireplace nook, and plenty of room for guests into 800 sq. ft.

BY JONATHAN WHITE

Jay and Sue Kimball had dreams of building a pair of houses on a ridge overlooking the sheltered bay that occupies the heart of Washington's Orcas Island. One house would be the primary residence, and the other a Craftsman-style cabin for visitors. With architect in hand, they set about designing the guest cabin first. But midway into the building process, an unexpected change in Jay and Sue's work life turned everything on end. As a result, they moved to the island sooner than they had anticipated, putting plans for the main house on hold and making the cabin their primary residence.

As it turned out, the cabin became a lesson in efficiency. It has no wasted space, offering

lessons on how any small house can make the most of the space under, and in this case, next to its roof.

The roof is more than just a lid

To get the project off to the right start, architect Roy Lundgren asked Jay and Sue to write a narrative describing their vision of the guest cabin. In their detailed and lively articulation, Sue described open, light-filled spaces clad in wood and serving multiple functions. She wanted room to dance and nooks to nestle into with a good book. Jay felt strongly about building the house with as little disturbance to the land as possible.

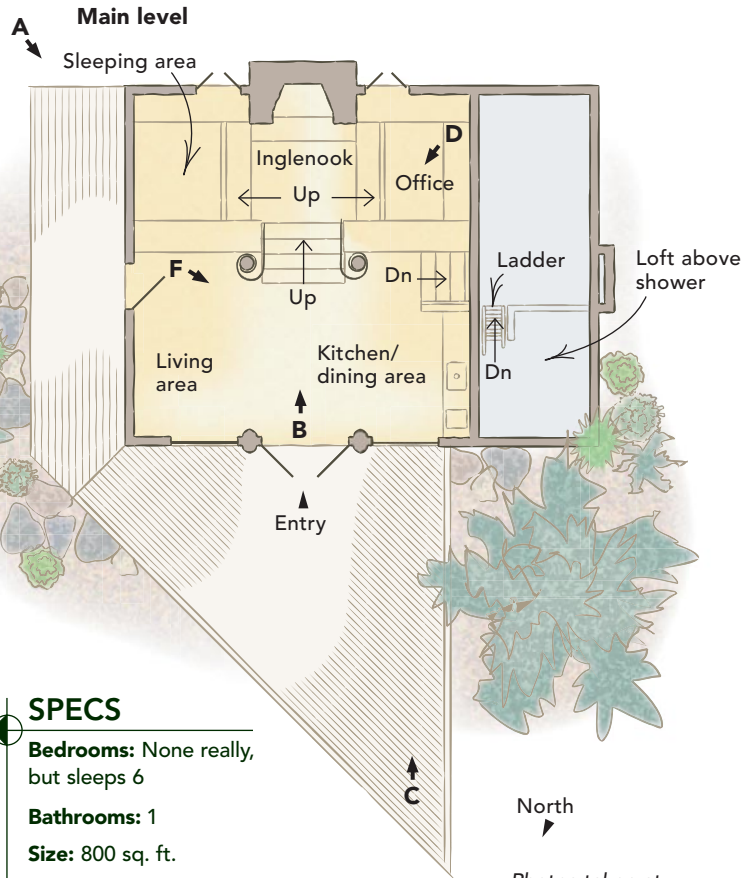
The first impression of the Kimball house is all roof (pho-

to above). Visitors park about 50 steps away and descend on a winding footpath through mature trees and mossy nurse logs. The roof's long overhangs, thick-butt cedar shingles, and stone chimney emulate the textures of the forested hillside. The true complexity of the roof, however, is revealed only moments before you knock on the front door. "Let the bones show," asked Jay, and indeed they do.

Gazing upward, the eye is captured by a fabric of timber that forms the roof's underbelly. Soaring overhangs—8 ft. at the eaves and nearly 12 ft. at the gable—are supported by hefty cantilevered rafters. On top of these structures rests a lacework of purlins and cedar planking, each layer woven perpendicular to

NO WASTED SPACE

In this floor plan, discrete spaces for specific functions abound. Their boundaries are level changes, circulation paths, and even the placement of the beams that carry the rafters near the ridge. Because the spaces are open to one another, there is no sense of confinement in this house. Built-in cabinets divide the living area and kitchen from the sleeping area and office, doing double duty as half-walls and storage.



SPECS

Bedrooms: None really, but sleeps 6

Bathrooms: 1

Size: 800 sq. ft.

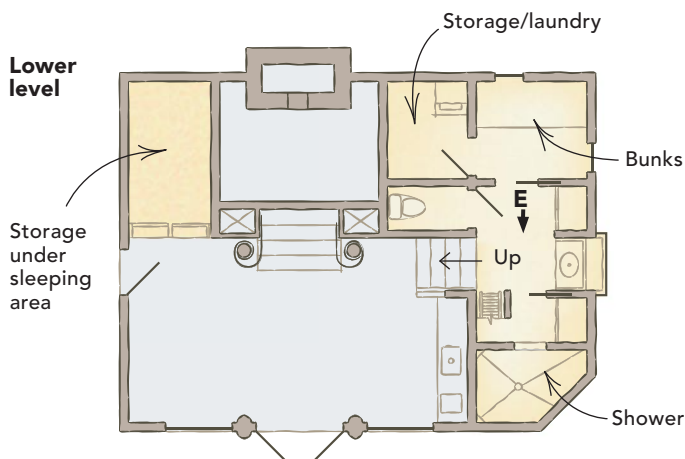
Cost: \$431 per sq. ft.

Completed: 2002

Location: Eagle Ridge, Orcas Island, Wash.

Architects: Street, Lundgren & Foster

Builder: White Construction Co.; David Klein, foreman



Complex on the inside. Centered on the ridge, a skylight pours raking light across the stone chimney and hearth. Note how the rafters cantilever over the beams adjacent to the chimney, eliminating the need for a light-blocking ridge beam. Photo above taken at B on floor plan.



Floor-plan drawings: Paul Perreault

the last, and each descending in size. Inspired by Japanese architecture, the result is a cabin with a visual field of ever-changing light and depth.

“Long roof overhangs create a strong sense of shelter,” Lundgren says, “which is really what a house is all about. They invite you in and enhance the feeling

of protection.” In mild and rainy climates such as that of Orcas Island, large overhangs also extend the living space and protect the house from weather.

Below the front gable, a triangular deck pokes out and over a precipitous west-facing slope. Thoughtful pruning gives the feeling of privacy and safety

while creating corridors of dazzling views.

The secrets to a function-packed floor plan

The heart of Sue and Jay’s house is a 24-sq.-ft. space with a cathedral ceiling that rises to 16 ft. in the center (photo below). Within this symmetrical room

are a number of discrete areas for a home office, a living area, a dining space, a kitchen, a master bedroom, and a carpeted inglenook in front of the fire (floor plan, facing page).

The main floor includes the kitchen, dining area, and living room. Exposed rafters topped with tongue-and-groove pine



A roof that shelters inside and out. A 12-ft.-deep overhang at the entry is composed of layers of rafters and purlins inspired by Japanese architecture. The roof overhang makes the deck an all-year outdoor room. Photo taken at C on floor plan.

planking mirror the rustic details of the exterior. The conventional ridge beam is absent, leaving the interior peak sharp and uncluttered, and allowing the massive fireplace chimney to rise directly through the center of the building (inset photo, p. 84).

The gable at the entry is tall and made mostly of glass, enabling the expansive views and unobstructed sunlight to chase away a sense of separation between inside and out. Double doors in the center of this wall beckon toward the deck.

Five steps lead from the main floor to the loft. The stairs are flanked at their base by a pair of Douglas-fir columns, salvaged from the bottom of the Columbia River. These rough, deeply checked logs stand out in contrast to the adjacent refined surfaces of vertical-grain fir and glass. A steel handrail, fashioned by Steve Gropp of Salamander Forge, spirals up these columns like the tendrils of a climbing vine (bottom photo, p. 83).

At the top of the stairs stands the centerpiece of the house: a massive Rumford fireplace. By day, a ridge skylight spills natural light down its rusticated face of edge-cliff stone; by night, dimmable pendants provide a sharper focus of light and shadow. "Because we have a lot of overcast days in the Northwest," Lundgren says, "our local light tends to be soft and gray. I find that natural light from a skylight, far more than a window, reveals the true form of the interior space."

Built-in seats on each side of the fireplace are carpeted with black wool and serve at times for reading or eating by a warm fire, and at other times as steps to the adjacent platforms. The one to the right of the fireplace is used as an office, and the other is just big enough for Jay and Sue's sleeping futon. Below the futon platform is a storage room, which is



accessed by a secret door in the living-room bookshelf.

The kitchen takes up a scant 8 ft. of wall space, but within these confines, Sue got what she needed. The cabinets are grain-matched clear fir, the floors are Spanish cherry, and the countertops are black Corian with an undermount stainless-steel sink. A mirror backsplash gives the illusion of windows that are located under the upper cabinets (photo facing page).

To maximize counter space, Jay and Sue installed Sub-Zero refrigerator drawers and a two-burner cooktop. Without the flexibility of a typical four-burner stove, they have adapted to a more efficient approach to cooking, which works fine for the two of them. For dinner parties, though, they expand op-

erations to the gas grill and the big worktable on the deck under the eaves. For baking, they rely on the multitasking GE Advantium wall-mounted oven (sidebar, photo facing page).

Bunk beds and the bath round out the lower level

Stairs that are off the kitchen lead five steps down to the tiled floor of the bathroom, which is adjacent to and below the spaces for guests.

A loft above the shower is a favorite sleeping nook for visiting nieces and nephews. On the lower level, a second pair of bunk beds accommodates more guests. Behind the bunk room, the walk-in closet includes a stacked washer and dryer.

After two years in the house, Jay and Sue have few complaints. "I miss a bathtub," says

Upper-level bedroom and office. Carpeted benches on each side of the inglenook lead to the bed alcove on one side and to the office on the other. Built-in cabinets throughout the house maximize storage while minimizing the need for space-consuming furniture. A small sofa, two end tables, and a narrow dining table are the only freestanding furniture in the building. Photo taken at D on floor plan.

A bathroom of many parts. Reached by way of a ladder, a sunny loft over the shower is illuminated by its own skylight. Photo taken at E on floor plan.



Sue, "and privacy with overnight guests can be a challenge. But I've come to value the small size, aesthetically, practically, and environmentally. The house brings together a sense of calm—like what I feel in a small chapel—and a tree-house-like playfulness that comes from our location in the woods. There's a wonderful sense of discovery here." □

Jonathan White is a builder and writer based on Orcas Island, Wash. Photos by Charles Miller.



Cooking with the GE Advantium 120

Our kitchen has limited space, so we installed a new kind of electric oven: the GE Advantium 120. At 15½ in. deep by 30 in. wide by 16½ in. high, it fits comfortably into the upper cabinets. The Advantium plugs into a standard 120v outlet and includes an exhaust vent that clears the air for both the cooktop and the oven. But we didn't appreciate the Advantium's most important attributes until we actually used it.

The Advantium has three cooking modes: convection, microwave, and Speedcook. In Speedcook mode, the oven heats with the speed of a microwave and broils and browns like a conventional oven.

The Advantium uses interchangeable turntables—one glass, one metal—depending on cooking mode. To use our 13½-in. by 21-in. casserole, we remove the turntable, set the oven on convection mode, and simply rotate the casserole halfway through cooking. We've used the Speedcook feature and can verify that it will bake a potato with crispy skin in 12 minutes. But truth be known, we mostly use the oven in the convection mode.

The oven is a compact workhorse. We routinely prepare meals for six or more people. A quick Google search reveals that the Advantium 120 is available at a street price of \$700 to \$800.

—Sue and Jay Kimball

A mostly indoor kitchen. At 8 ft. long, the kitchen packs a lot of function into a small space. Two under-counter refrigerator drawers are on the left side. A two-burner cooktop and an Advantium oven in the upper cabinets anchor the right side. When more firepower is required, the gas grill on the deck is pressed into service. Photo taken at F on floor plan.