



# FITTING IN

## COSMETIC CHANGES ADD COASTAL CHARACTER TO A

### SAN JUAN ISLANDS HOME

Written by Fred Albert Photographs by Laurie Black

Doug Rasar remembers the first time he visited the San Juan Islands vacation home he'd been asked to decorate. Arriving at the private island aboard the owners' skiff, he spied what amounted to little more than a glorified A-frame nestled in a grove of fir trees. The pedestrian architecture was just a prelude to the interior's chopped-up floor plan, mismatched finishes and prosaic furnishings.

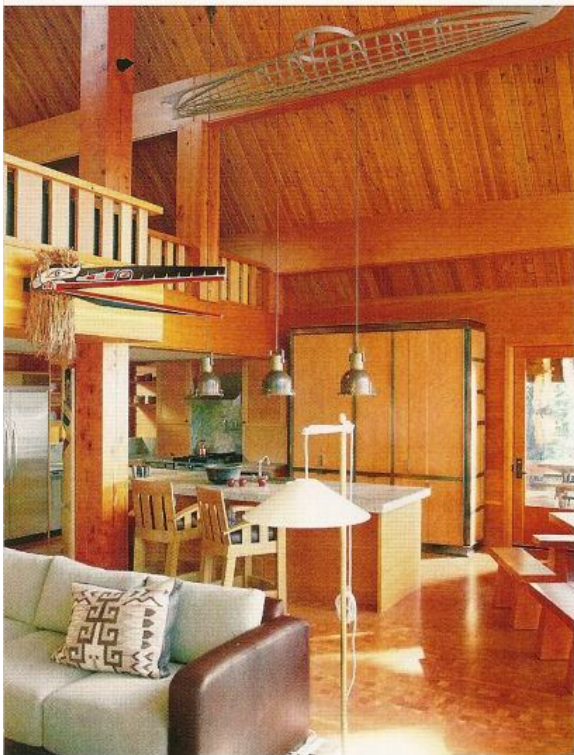
"There were some obvious problems," acknowledges the interior designer with characteristic diplomacy, "but the bones were good."

Although the home's architecture didn't do justice to its setting, the owners felt great affection for the structure and were reluctant to make significant alterations. Instead, they asked Rasar and Seattle architect Geoff Prentiss to perform a cosmetic makeover, bringing unity to the home's finishes and making it feel more attuned to its rugged coastal setting.



NORTHWEST COAST MOTIFS (OPPOSITE) FIGURE PROMINENTLY IN THE HOME'S TRANSFORMATION FROM SUBURBAN A-FRAME TO RUGGED RETREAT. DESIGNER DOUG RASAR'S STOCKY LEATHER SEATING (THIS PAGE) CRADLES DOWNY COTTON CUSHIONS; A BLOCKY CEDAR MANTEL DRESSES THE 1980S FIREPLACE. A TV RISES FROM THE FLOOR IN FRONT OF THE CHAISE.

“The hard part was trying to figure out a theme for it,” says Prentiss, who was assisted on the project by architect Johanna Schorr. “What was the thing that was going to tie this together?”



The Eastern Washington-based owners had long collected Northwest Indian artifacts. Inspired by this and a recent visit to British Columbia's Queen Charlotte Islands, Prentiss proposed modeling the 4,000-square-foot house after a traditional Haida longhouse. Under the architect's direction, Ravenhill Construction covered the interior walls with fir

channel siding and concealed flimsy posts inside stocky fir columns. Undernourished ceiling beams were shrouded in satiny fir plywood, doors and windows were reframed in stout trim, and floors were covered with blocks of rugged end-grain fir.

Outside, Prentiss traded suburban-looking painted shingles for chunkier board-and-batten siding, adding a copper roof and a bump-out entry that relieves what was formerly a shady, unarticulated façade.

The tribal theme is established at the broad front door, which is adorned with a Scott Jensen carving executed in the Northwest Coast style. A translucent Inuit rain parka (fashioned from seal intestines) stands sentry in the entry hall; a new cloakroom gives guests a place to shed their bags when they arrive. Contemporary totem poles flank the approach to the great room, where a pair of teak canoe frames (left unsheathed to reveal their sculptural quality) dangle overhead.

The original kitchen sat smack in the middle of the great room, impeding circulation and sightlines. To free up views out the IMAX-size window wall, the design team shifted the kitchen to the side, augmenting vertical-grain fir cabinets with a free-standing pantry framed in nickel-plated steel. Nautical lights illuminate the granite counters, where the owners often prepare salmon and crab plucked fresh from the ocean. Meals are served around a custom

dining table fabricated from a slab of old-growth fir. Benches take the place of chairs to accommodate the phalanx of guests who fill the home's seven bedrooms.

Given the structure's setting and scale, Rasar opted for furnishings that felt “more Eddie Bauer than Nordstrom.” In the living room, stocky spruce lounge chairs from Mimi London are paired with a custom leather sectional fitted with extra-plump cotton frisé cushions. (“Sofas can be kind of cold if they're all leather,” concedes Rasar.) Throw pillows were fabricated from vintage Navajo blankets, while the pinstripe carpet underneath was woven from undyed wool, underscoring the emphasis on natural materials.

The seating group is centered around a rugged stone fireplace—a relic of the home's original 1980s design, now augmented by a cedar mantel supported by blackened steel brackets. When the owners tire of the granite hearth, they can savor the electronic one: a 42-inch plasma-screen TV that rises out of the living room floor at the touch of a button.

A second plasma screen occupies the loft above, where the owners' teenage children and their friends can congregate without disturbing others, thanks to headphones that plug into the custom coffee table. One of the bookcases in the corner of the loft swings open to reveal a hidden bedroom popular with the owners' son.



ONCE DIVIDED INTO SEVERAL ROOMS, THE LOFT NOW BOASTS A COMMUNAL TV AREA WITH BASS WIRED TO THE SECTIONAL FOR SURROUND-SOUND THRILLS. BARE CANOE FRAMES DANGLE OVER A KWAKIUTL RAVEN MASK IN THE GREAT ROOM (OPPOSITE), WHERE THE KITCHEN HAS BEEN MOVED TO THE SIDE AND EQUIPPED WITH NAUTICAL LIGHTS AND A FREE-STANDING PANTRY.



THE HOME (BELOW) IS APPROACHED FROM THE WATER. IN THE ENTRY HALL (ABOVE), A SCOTT JENSEN CARVING FLANKS AN INUIT RAIN PARKA. THE CONSOLE TABLE WAS DESIGNED BY DOUG RASAR AND BUILT BY GULASSA & CO., AS WERE THE DINING TABLE (OPPOSITE) AND THE HANGING LIGHT WITH HANDMADE PAPER SIDES.



PERINISS ARCHITECTS

The bedrooms are furnished with custom-made beds topped with Pendleton “spirit” blankets and nightstands fashioned from tansu chests—a marriage that echoes the home’s Pacific Rim sensibility. In the master bedroom, the owners opted for a hand-carved Scott Jensen bed. A partition divides the sleeping area from the bathroom, where sumptuous slabs of *Rosso Damasco* marble wrap the showers and tub in a swirl of russet, olive and ocher.

From the tub, you can hear the sound of a carillon drifting over

from a nearby island and watch boats (and the occasional porpoise) traverse the bay. Naturalistic plantings of ocean spray, huckleberry, ferns and salal flank the new stone pathways outside.

Early on, the owners confessed that one of their favorite things about the house was the way the windows radiated a warm, welcoming glow when they pulled up to the dock at night.

The glow’s still there. Only now it doesn’t end once you cross the threshold. ■

