



Island Organic

Miniscule by modern standards, but custom in every detail, this island home off the coast of Oregon has a furniture finish.

Built on the site of an old pumphouse, this 517-sq. ft. waterfront home is the primary residence for a young San Juan Island native. “All she wanted was a nice, small, intimate place to put her money into,” says Geoffrey Prentiss, the home’s architect.

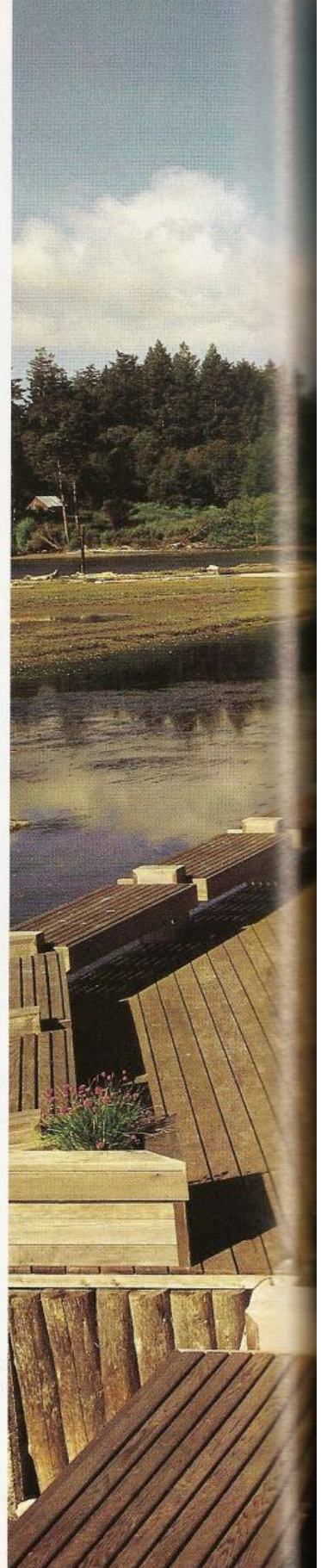
Local builder Peter Kilpatrick of Ravenhill Construction took on the project at the architect’s invitation. “It was our third project together,” Prentiss explains. “We have good communication, and he has a crew that I can depend upon.”

“There wasn’t room for error,” says Kilpatrick, a 20-year custom building veteran with a fine arts background. “In houses this small, every square inch counts. It’s more like building furniture.”

The home took seven months to design, seven months to build, he explains. “The time frame is not reflective of the size of the house. A house four or five times bigger would take just as long.”

Enlarging the triangular footprint of the original structure

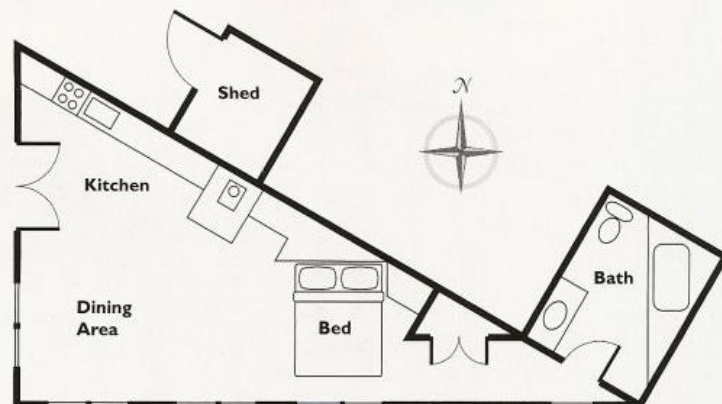
BY MARIE TUPOT STOCK



Photography: Rich Ziegner, Tom Wolfe, Geoffrey Prentiss

Only the hypotenuse of this triangular structure rests on the land. The remainder sits on cedar posts with the floor joists inches above the tide. A curved fountain (opposite, top) located in an adjacent arbor recirculates rainwater.







was not an option. A grandfather clause prevented any expansion over the water, and the homeowner did not want to build behind the original site.

Prentiss initially conceptualized the project as a remodel. But as the project unfolded, the team could only salvage a concrete retaining wall and some floor bracing, along with a limestone barbecue. All other structural components had deteriorated.

EARTH BOUND

The home is virtually invisible upon approach. A lilac grove shields it from the land above, and to further camouflage its extrusion from the bank, Prentiss specified a sod roof.

"We had done a few sod roofs before," says Kilpatrick. "Nothing surprises us. There's a lot of custom building going on here. The phase of the project when you have to get all the dirt on the roof is interesting. The guys push wheelbarrows right down to it."

The architect notes that the earthen roof also adds an extra layer of insulation—and it requires virtually no maintenance. "We didn't put too much soil on, or else the grass would grow too much," he says. "We also chose a seed that doesn't grow quickly. It's not too water dependent, and it's resilient to drought. It's a no brainer up there."

EBB AND FLOW

"We had to do a lot of work at low tide," says the builder. "High tide went right underneath the house. Luckily, the tide went out for quite a few hours. It's just one of the joys of working on an island." It directly affected the electrical contractor, the plumber and the insulator.

Prentiss adds, "The nice thing about the island, in general—and with this contractor in particular—is that multitalented craftspeople are available."

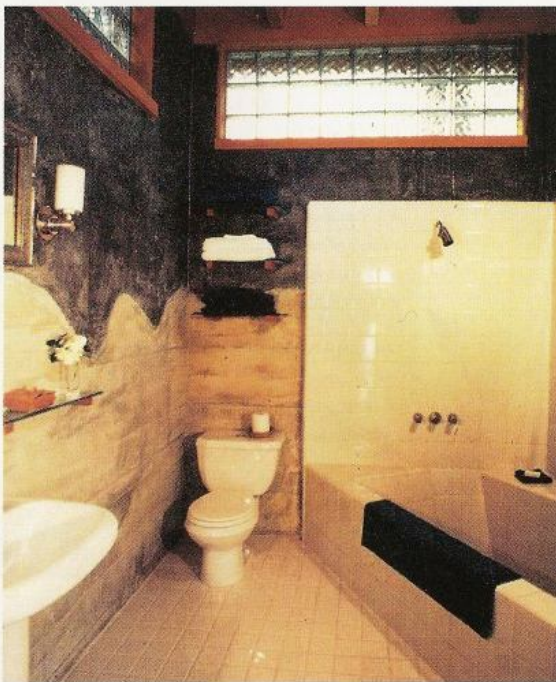
Among them, woodworker Giovanni Giustina created the pine cabinetry in the house. He also built the exterior light fixtures, as well as the cedar arbor and the curved laminated beam around the fountain. Having a few subcontractors with multiple skills simplified scheduling, Kilpatrick says—a great benefit when working in such a small space.

To increase the perception of interior space, Prentiss angled the home's roof up toward its widest point, and gradually decreased the size of the beams to enhance perspective.

Essentially one-room living, the architect insisted that everything but the dining table be built in. He also designed cabinetry in the kitchen and bedroom areas for maximum storage and minimal intrusion.

Custom divided-lite windows face the water, rhythmically opening the south wall. "We were going to have all French doors," explains Prentiss, "but they were too difficult to make weathertight. By doing windows instead, it was easier to seal. Raising the wall up off the floor

For ventilation, a fan replaces one of the 8x8-in. glass blocks near the top of the bathroom walls. Opposite: A graduated ceiling height ranging from 8'9" to 11'9" called for 6-ft. tall custom windows.



by about nine inches—and not calling it a doorway—gave us a tighter fitting opening."

A local company made the windows. "They are an especially important part of this building on the island," Kilpatrick notes. "Custom mullions visually pull the project together."

A cedar deck spans two-thirds of the perimeter of the house, allowing living space to spill outside during good weather. The surrounding arbor adds a sense of protection.

"For durability, all the outside metal work is copper," Prentiss explains. "The light fixtures have copper mounts. We used copper gutters and copper flashing."

BUILDER:

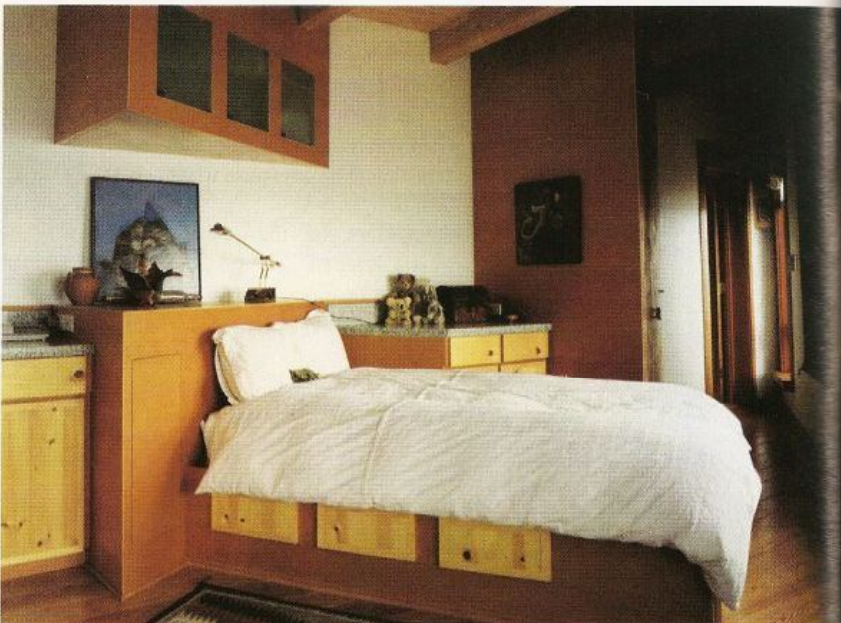
Peter Kilpatrick
Ravenhill Construction
Friday Harbor, Washington

ARCHITECTURE:

Geoffrey Prentiss
Prentiss Architects
Seattle, Washington

CUSTOM WOODWORK:

Giovanni Giustina
Friday Harbor, Washington

**ENVELOPE**

ROOFING: EPDM

INSULATION: Thermax (rigid R-30)

WINDOWS/DOORS: San Juan by Window Craft (custom)

DOOR HARDWARE: Sargent

WINDOW HARDWARE: Blaine

MECHANICAL/ELEC.

HVAC: Cadet

INTERIOR LIGHTING: Dornbracht (bath)

EXTERIOR LIGHTING: custom

KITCHEN

REF: Sub-Zero

RANGE: Sterling

WOOD STOVE: RAIS

SINK: Kohler

COUNTERTOPS: granite

CABINETS: knotty pine

BATH

FIXTURES: Barclay, American Standard

FAUCETS: Dornbracht

BATH: tile over concrete (custom)

TILE: American Olean

OTHER

FLOORING: recycled pine

GLASS CANOPY: Architectural Glass (custom)

A drawer angled into an acute corner and an undercounter fridge maximize function in the kitchen (top). In the sleeping area (bottom), craftsman Giovanni Giustina fashioned the bed and storage cabinets from clear fir and pine.

The entire home had to be replumbed. "The kitchen sink is where the bathroom used to be," recalls Prentiss. "The current bathroom was the five-foot-ceilinged pump room, below water level." Kilpatrick remembers its construction as one of the project's most challenging moments, "We had to jack-hammer through a one-foot concrete ceiling."

Once the team demolished the concrete, they raised both floor and ceiling. Reflecting the home's nautical setting, a wave in the bath wall identifies where the old concrete meets the new.

The homeowner's special request can be found in the kitchen—a Sterling range from England. Not until the range arrived did anyone realize it would not work with propane gas—the only kind available on San Juan Island. The new custom order took six more months, but the client says the new range—and the house on the island—were worth the wait. ■