



Eagles' nest

Perched high above the ocean, this island homestead forges strong links with the natural environment



Cliff-top homes usually command good views – and this house is no exception. Built on a picturesque island in the Puget Sound area, the house overlooks a major waterway, frequented by migrating whales and large ships.

But maximizing the view was just part of the brief given to architect Robert Miller and interior designer William Beson. The house also needed to blend in with the surroundings, with minimal disturbance to the land – not one tree was to be removed from the site.

“The owners wanted the house to reflect a traditional craftsman influence, but they also favored the Northwest timber houses that are typical of the area,” says Miller. “This is a very architectural look, with the structural elements exposed as part of the design.”

Miller says this look was combined with a slight Asian influence, which is also common in the northwest.

“The clean lines of the roof ends and the siding, for example, reflect this influence. The chain downspouts are another

Asian element – the running water imparts a very serene feeling.”

The architectural look is enhanced by a soaring cathedral roof and heavy structural timber beams – complete with stainless steel strapping. Many of the structural supports feature four 6in x 6in fir columns, which are also strapped with stainless steel, and anchored on stone plinths.

Many of the materials for the house, including the stone for the plinths, chimneys and paving were sourced locally.

“Using local materials was another way to ensure that the house would sit naturally within the wooded landscape,” says Beson. “The house is not unlike the madrona trees in the area. These have a peeling bark that exposes a beautiful, smooth wood that stands out amid the evergreen forest. The color of the cedar on the house is very similar.”

To maximize the dramatic ocean view, the house incorporates an eagle’s nest – or whale watching tower. There is also an extensive outdoor living area, partly



Facing page: Both the design and the materials of this new vacation home were determined by its idyllic cliff-top location on an island in the Puget Sounds area. The eagles’ nest tower to the left of the chimney was built to maximize the ocean views and to allow the owners to watch migrating whales.

Above: From the front, the house has a simple, cabin-like appearance. Architect Robert Miller says the design was influenced by Northwest timber houses. Key structural elements are exposed.

Left: A stone retaining wall supports a terrace, 400ft above sea level.



supported by a 14ft-high stone retaining wall, which Miller designed as an amphitheater. Paving on the terraces is an extension of the Mica stone flooring used inside the house. Pathways also feature the stone, which gradually opens up to become stepping stones across the grass.

"Merging the outdoors and indoors was an essential element of the overall design," says Beson. "We wanted the house to be of the earth – hence the use of natural materials both outside and inside."

In keeping with this desire, the front



Facing page: French doors open directly to the main living areas of the house, where the ceiling soars to a height of 30ft. More than 100 lights are suspended from hanging rails, appearing like stars at night.

Above: All rooms are positioned to enjoy the ocean views. The formal dining table, from Dakota Jackson, features ribbon mahogany laid in a Diamond pattern and finished with 40 coats of lacquer.

Left: The den, adjacent to the kitchen, has its own fireplace. Furnishings include a zebra-wood side table and sofas and chairs covered with a Clarence House fabric.



entrance is subdued, and gives little indication as to what lies beyond.

"The entry feels like a small A-frame cabin, but once inside, the interior opens up to expose the dramatic scale of the house, and the magnificence of the view beyond" says Beson.

Glazed walls follow the soaring roof line and allow plenty of light into the vast open-plan living space.

"It was important to have that volume, particularly as the light fades quickly in the northwest in winter," says Miller.

To help contain the space visually, two different colored wood types were used for the ceiling – fir and cedar.

"These help to make the space more intimate," says Beson. "We have also introduced alder wood around the doors and windows. This has been stained a warm chocolate color, but you can still see the grain."

Large furniture pieces were chosen to fit the scale of the house, with an emphasis placed on both color and texture.

"The house itself is a combination

Facing page: The random stone flooring is a continuation of the paving outdoors, and reflects the designers' desire to merge the two areas visually. The main living area incorporates a large kitchen, with alder wood cabinetry, stained to match the wood trim elsewhere in the house.

Top left: Four columns anchor the stairwell, which features stainless steel railings and a central light well.

Top right, above left and right: Other rooms include a powder room, master bedroom, and a glass-walled bathroom, cantilevered out from the cliff.



Above: Described by the architect as an amphitheater, this terrace is positioned to take advantage of the extensive views and afternoon sun. As with the stairwell inside, stainless steel railings add a contemporary touch to the traditional stone walls.

Right: The terrace includes an open fireplace and barbecue area.

Facing page: Traditional Japanese chain downspouts collect rainwater, which is held in large tanks.

Photography by Tim Maloney



of smooth and textured surfaces – the polished wood, and the smooth stone floors versus the rough stone chimneys. This theme continues in the furnishings,” says Beson. “The cream-toned sofas, for example, feature a bouclé exterior, but have mohair velvet seats.”

To further contrast the textured elements, Beson introduced furniture made from rare and exotic woods.

“It’s a question of balance. These highly polished surfaces provide a shot of clarity amid all the textures.”

Rugs in the house were all custom designed and manufactured, with colors inspired by the local stone. Made from wool and silk, these also provide a mix of textures. Some wallcoverings, such as those in the main bedroom, are also textured.

Beson says quality and simplicity were the key to determining the decor.

“We wanted to reinforce the zen feeling, and in this situation, less really is more. It was also important to let the view speak for itself, without interference from an overly bright or cluttered interior.”

Architectural designer: Robert Miller, (Coeur d’Alene, ID)
Interior designer: William Beson, ASID, IFDA, William Beson Interior Design (Minneapolis)
Kitchen designer: Mary Jane Pappas
Main contractor: Jensen Homes
Structural engineer: Pinnacle Engineers
Construction manager: Rood Improvisation
Carpentry: Mancuso Construction
Masonry: KDC
Landscape design: Steve Schramm, Island Gardens
Decorative metal: Blue Rock Studio
Siding: Cedar from Horz; Sikkens from Cedar Tone
Roofing: Andgar metal, standing seam shingle panel

Window and door joinery: VG fir from Loewen
Flooring: Mica stone; custom wool carpets by Aubrey Angelo from Fabrica; Ventana
Wallcoverings: Carolyn Ray; Bergamo Lavera; Donghia
Paints: Benjamin Moore; Pratt & Lambert
Lighting: Bruck Lighting Systems; Boyd; Terzani
Furniture: Lucien Rollin; Dakota Jackson; Bernam Rosetti; Donghia; Baker; Knapp & Tubbs; Christian Liagre (through Holly Hunt); Leavit Weaver; Corbin Bronze
Lamps: McGuire
Kitchen countertops: Santa Cecilia granite
Oven and cooktop: Wolf
Bath and bathroom basin, faucets: Kohler
Bathroom tiles: Jura Beige limestone