

# inhabit

THE BEST OF PACIFIC NORTHWEST

INSIDE

HOMES

FOOD

WINE

GARDENS

TRAVEL

A person stands on a modern, light-colored concrete deck, looking out over a large body of water. In the background, there are forested mountains under a sky with scattered clouds. The scene is framed by a large, dark metal grid structure that appears to be a skylight or a covered walkway. The lighting is soft, suggesting late afternoon or early morning. The overall aesthetic is clean, modern, and minimalist.

ARCHITECTS  
OF WONDER  
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# SEEING THE LIGHT

*With glorious views all around, a house opens up to drink it all in*

"The idea was all about the outdoor spaces, with a ring of activities around them," says architect Peter Cohan of the angled configuration of rooms opening to the terrace and lawn.



The entry sequence is all about topography because the house gently steps down the slope to the front garden. "The roofline was conceived as a means of collecting water, like one big scupper or gutter," explains Cohan of how he met the strict drainage requirements for the steep site.

A SIGNATURE of Northwest architecture is a certain transparency between indoors and out. Perhaps it's the Japanese influence here on the West Coast that inspires such an affinity for landscape. Or maybe the immediacy of mountain and water vistas lures architects to build with glass and more glass. To alleviate light deprivation in our dull, gray climate, architects here are masters at opening up buildings to scoop in as much illumination as possible.

Despite this regional prowess, I've never before seen a house open so widely and seamlessly to garden, water and sky as Liz Welch and Sam Wasser's new home above Lake Washington. The oversized glass sliders appear to peel open as slickly and cleanly as if rolled with a key like the lid of an old-fashioned sardine tin.

Architect Peter Cohan designed the clean-lined cedar and concrete home for the couple and their four children. It hunkers onto the lot, angled to embrace the ▶

The oversized Quantum doors have no fixed end so they can slide either way, making for a seamless transition between indoors and out. Interior designer Elizabeth Stretch chose a neutral palette of rugs and furnishings to keep the focus on the view. Interior floors are oak, the terrace is Texas limestone, and the dining table was made by Urban Hardwoods from an American chestnut felled on the property during construction.





Upstairs are bedrooms, baths, a study and three decks. The deck at left provides a lookout over the terrace, as well as steps down to a hot tub and swimming pool. The chaises on the terrace are from Ikea.

### Collaboration was key

- ▶ Liz Welch and Sam Wasser chose University of Washington architecture professor Peter Cohan because "he seemed so thoughtful and strategic we stopped looking," says Welch. Cohan gives credit to the architecture firm of Hutchison and Maul, which came onboard during the design-development phase and handled the construction documents.
- ▶ Cohan designed all the cabinetry and hardware; Warmington and North built the cabinets, shelves and paneling.
- ▶ Welch sums it up: "The team effort felt really wonderful. Sam and I made a contract with ourselves to be decisive. It took Peter's vision, (interior designer) Elizabeth's knack, (contractor) Schultz Miller's implementation, and our own decision-making to achieve such a great collaborative outcome."

view, its 5,500 square feet minimized by a low profile and horizontal cedar siding.

Cohan set the house back from the steep bank to allow for active outdoor space. He conceived of the terrace and lawn as the most important "rooms" of the house, encircling them with a ring of activities. Breakfast room, kitchen, dining room, all less than 14 feet deep, plus the more cavernous library, are strung along an interior spine and oriented out to lawn and view. "I love the way the house and lake interact," says Welch. "The house lets the lake in."

The line between indoors and out is further blurred by pale oak flooring indoors mirrored by the creamy Texas limestone terrace just outside. Then there's the ship-like prow of the upstairs deck jutting off the master bedroom. With the glass doors wide open, it's as if the solidity of the home's corner dissolves away, leaving the deck hovering above the terrace.

Interior designer Elizabeth Stretch kept the color scheme monochromatic to emphasize the view. Furniture and rugs are in soothing shades of grays, taupes and creams, with a pop of orange cushions and

### ▶ SEEING THE LIGHT



The glass doors in the master bedroom open so wide the room appears as if it's cantilevered out over the water. The master bath is slate and cedar; the wood wraps up onto the ceiling for the feel of a sauna.

a rough stone fireplace. Upstairs, where the largest deck is given over to a Ping-Pong table, the kids chose their own furniture and fabrics in bright colors from Ikea.

"Liz and Sam bought this lot and realized a traditional house just wouldn't suit," says Cohan. Welch, formerly of Microsoft and now a consultant, owned a home in Broadmoor. Wasser, a conservation biologist at the University of Washington, moved from a Craftsman in Phinney Ridge. Now the family lives in a house with an open floor plan and a sleekly modern kitchen. The exterior is slanting planes of a metal roof, concrete as well as cedar walls, and rotund concrete cisterns to hold the water that runs off the roof.

This couple journeyed farther than a few miles north. They leapfrogged in architecture from the early 20th century to the new millennium.

"I grew up in an Eichler house in Northern California with lots of glass and radiant heat," says Welch. "When the sun pours in here it feels like a trip back, and not such a departure." ■

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