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RETHINKING

A SENSE OF HISTORY

BY SANDY DENEAU DUNHAM
PHOTOS BY STEVE RINGMAN

ON ITS OWN, "history" implies mementos, milestones, heirlooms. But put "family" first, and suddenly it suggests cherished connections: the togetherness you all treasure, the experiences you all share, the backstory you all know by heart.

Jeanie Ketcham's starts with her great-grandparents' Bainbridge Island getaway.

"In the late 1800s, a small group of Seattle men who shared a love of sailing Puget Sound and its islands 'discovered' Restoration Point," she says. Entranced (understandably), they bought 5 acres.

Next came one big, simple weekend cabin, with separate bunkrooms for the wives and children. By 1900, each family had its own little cot-

tage, dotting the spectacularly scenic bluff facing

Mount Rainier. "My great-grandpar-

ents' rambling cottage grew

quickly to accommodate

their five children,"

Ketcham says.

Four generations of family gathered there for summers and for vacations — 12 or more cousins at once, plus extended family, aunts, uncles and dogs, all overlapping to celebrate her grandmother's Aug. 1 birthday. "During the

Depression, my dad's family lived here," Ketcham says. "It got so cold,

Dad and his two brothers would dress in their beds on winter

mornings to keep warm. Several other families

moved here to live full-time then." ►

After fire destroyed a beloved family home, a Bainbridge Island woman rebuilds on a foundation of treasured memories

Jeanie Ketcham's new home, designed by principal architect Steve Hoedemaker and project architect Tori Masterson, of Hoedemaker Pfeiffer, and built by Schultz Miller, is made up of three separate pavilions, all splayed toward the astounding water view and joined via lower, smaller-scale connectors. "It's a big house," says Masterson. "We play with that to feel smaller, so it's not an ominous presence. We scaled up the windows bigger than most, but human-scale. And on the exterior, larger-format shakes are the size and texture more of a cottage sense."

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Ketcham, left, and her daughter Kate Jacobson play chess in the sleeping porch, which is reminiscent of a similarly peaked and wood-filled room in the previous home — except that one was open to the outside. “One of our goals was to have three exterior walls for each space so you’re surrounded by light for all the main spaces,” says Masterson. “It’s hard to look away from the view.”

As the home expanded, so did the family photo collection: Teenagers dangle their legs off wide planks that served as a cliff-top deck. An amazingly adorable toddler plops on a step with an open book, and the world’s sweetest smile. Different rooms were painted different colors — the green room had wicker; the blue a flowered theme — and there was so much wood, everywhere, “In the summer, you could smell the warming of the wood and the saltwater,” Ketcham says.

In February 2012, two of Ketcham’s three grown children, her daughter’s fiancé and another young couple were sleeping there when a violent fire ripped through the home. The fire chief declared it a total loss, and structurally, that was accurate. Ketcham’s family, though, was blessedly intact — and determined to rebuild.

“That was my responsibility, my job,” Ketcham says. “The house was given to me by my father. I was in a position to rebuild ‘the big house’ so it could again be a family generational home.”

She couldn’t re-create the historic home,

of course — nothing remained but a pair of andirons, a thick slab of wood and tiny bits of teacups dotting the foundation — but she could, and did, articulate exactly how it felt.

Her longtime architectural ally, Steve Hoedemaker, of Hoedemaker Pfeiffer, along with builder Schultz Miller, captured those feelings brilliantly in a brand-new retreat that’s at once reminiscent, and forward-looking.

“The loss of the family home, their soul home, was really emotionally charged,” says Hoedemaker. “Building a new house was difficult, emotional, challenging: to avenge that loss and create a new stage for family, life, love, memories and history.”

In the translation of old to new, key words emerged: Charming. Playful. Maybe a little haphazard.

Hoedemaker understood. “The overall form is a collection of smaller vernacular forms that could have been built over time, each space maximizing light and views,” he says. “The house that was there had a sense of something that’d been built over time, in stages, and then added on, so we worked to re-create something with a rambling quality.”

Ketcham’s daughter Nancy Sullivan reads to her daughter, Evie, on an extra-wide window seat in the reading loft/hallway that leads to a private guest wing. “People who come with kids can use this space and shut it off for themselves,” Ketcham says.



That starts right inside the entry, with subdued natural wood, generous window seats (and windows) and “lots of ways in and out,” says project architect Tori Masterson. “You have to explore and discover the view when you walk in.”

And that stunningly detailed staircase straight ahead (which holds a hide-and-seek hidy-hole) feels awkward on purpose, Hoedemaker says: When you get to the top, it keeps ▶

In the master bedroom, with built-in corner cabinets, “We can keep an eye on everybody from up here,” Ketcham says. Adds her friend, Reid Swick: “The submarine from ‘The Hunt for Red October’ went by, and we’ve seen the ferry to Bremerton do a U-turn, and planes from Sea-Tac.”



The wood-paneled kitchen was "conceived as its own cottage, an intimate scaled space: You can go out on a cold winter's night and feel like the house is scaled to you," says Hoedemaker. "Its other ability is to hang out with friends and family while you're preparing a meal."

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stepping in two opposite directions. "I really wanted to create something that felt not as tidy and perfect as a staircase that somebody does from bottom to top: a sense of childlike discovery you get in a funky, rambling house."

Elsewhere, resonant elements were re-created in a contemporary new light: The living room is in the same location, still anchored by an impressive brick fireplace, but now with a puzzle table, two sitting areas and lots more flexibility. There's still a sleeping porch, but it evolved from total outdoor exposure to a wood-filled room with walls of accordion windows. Dishes and china displayed in the dining room recall an elaborate collection of Willow Ware and glasses that melted in the fire. And a cozy sunken sitting room, one of several intentional level changes, facilitates a familiar sense of ▶



Marble fills the master bathroom, where, Ketcham says, "You can stand in the shower and look out to the water."



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The sunken sitting room "gives Jeanie a space for family not so far removed when she's in the kitchen," says Masterson. "By stepping it down, it brings it closer to the outdoors and feels like an outdoor room. And, Jeanie can stand at the sink and look over." Virginia Stamey Interior Design selected finishes and fixtures and helped with the furniture, Masterson says.

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togetherness — and a knockout view — from the updated kitchen.

"That part of the house as much as any references the old house, for as big as the house was, the family really lived in the kitchen," Hoedemaker says. "What we wanted was both that reference and a sense that even though the house may accommodate 20 for dinner, sometimes only two people are there."

Like the allover wood, and a family's history, "Woven throughout the house is a sense of gathering," Hoedemaker says: a thoughtful collection of small and large spaces, and connections. ■

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