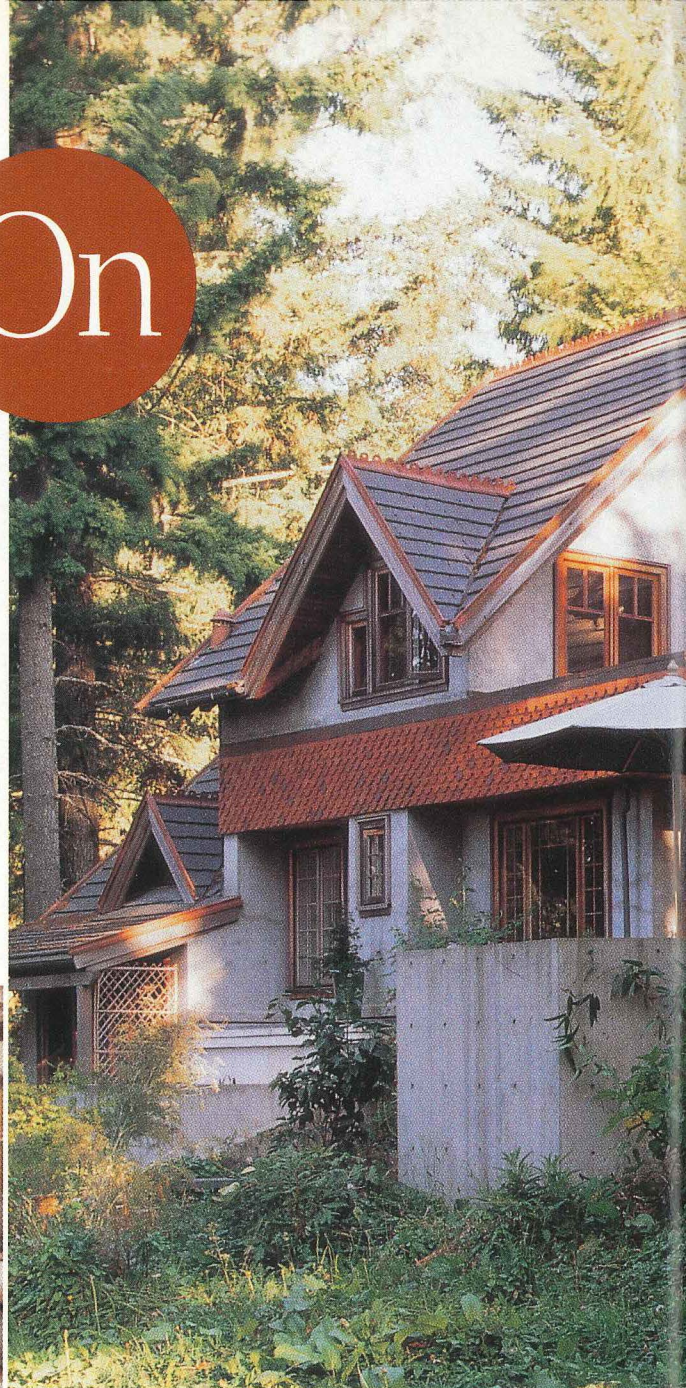
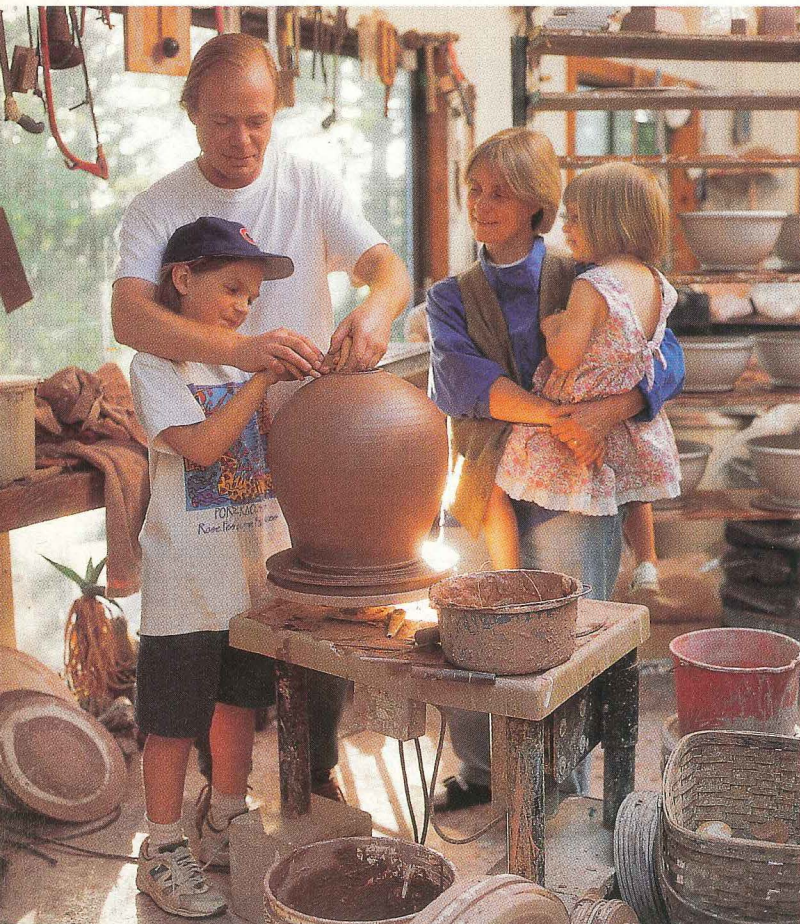


A Hands-On Experience

With little money and no experience, these homeowners undertook the job of a lifetime—well, nearly. For 11 years, they labored to build their own house. When the job was complete, they had a home they wouldn't sell for the world.

BY MOLLY REID SINNETT



■ The couple considered their 4.3-acre lot for years before deciding exactly where to put the house *above*. They wanted to make sure it could benefit from passive-solar energy, as well as fit nicely into its natural surroundings.

■ Because working with their hands is a daily task for potters Mick Marineau and Barbara Jensen, *left*, they decided to build their own house. Both of their children, Jensen and Betsy, arrived during construction.

PHOTOGRAPHER: STEPHEN CRIDLAND
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CONNECTION TO THE EARTH

A house feels isolated from the nature around it, unless its floors are interleaved directly with the earth that is around the house.

—*A Pattern Language*

If you're one of the millions of people who have become frustrated with the process of building your own house, imagine how Barbara Jensen and her husband, Mick Marineau, feel. They actually built their home in Portland, Oregon, with their own hands. And after 11 years of toil and trouble, they have an amazing custom-fit masterpiece to show for it.

The 2,500- to 2,700-square-foot house (they're not exactly sure how large it is) is filled with handmade tiles, warm woodwork, and cozy corners.

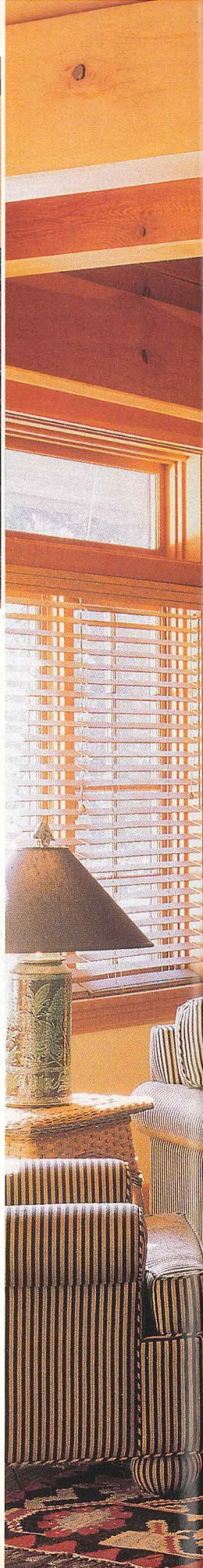
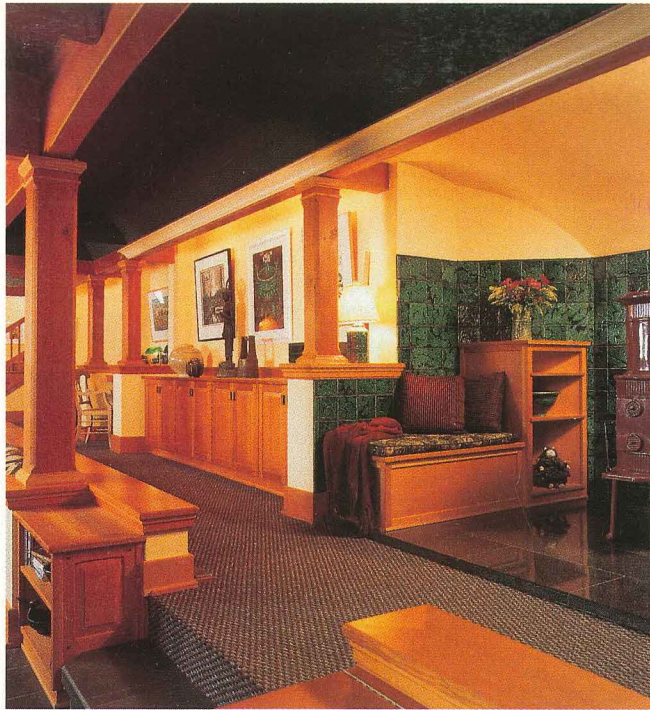
Mick and Barbara, both potters by trade, spent years living on their land in a trailer trying to design the perfect plan for the site and their lifestyle. Things did not truly come together until they stumbled across *A Pattern Language*, a book by Christopher Alexander and other architectural scholars. It became the anchor of their design and building practices.

The book, along with its siblings, *The Timeless Way of Building* and *The Oregon Experience*, describes the elements that comprise the building process—from the broad aspects of erecting a town to

the smallest details of building a home. *A Pattern Language* considers the relationships between home and homeowner, incorporating concepts that have satisfied world cultures for decades.

"What [the book] really does is help accommodate the people living in the house, and makes them more comfortable, and makes their interactions more enhanced," says Barbara. Mick and Barbara used the patterns to create a home that was child-friendly and comfortable for themselves and guests, whether interacting in small or large groups.

■ **Generous hallways, right, are packed with display space and storage areas. The wood stove, surrounded by handmade tile in a cozy alcove, is the primary source of heat for the Oregon home.**



■ **Many of the natural fir beams and rafters in the living room far right were milled from trees that grew on the site. Barbara and Mick found a recipe for a natural sealant, which they used to preserve the wood.**

Suggesting everything from varied ceiling heights to extended hallways and staircases, *A Pattern Language* strays from conventional profit-minded, cookie-cutter homes built today. It explains the why and how of creating space that is comfortable for certain activities. It was exactly what this couple needed.

“*A Pattern Language* liberated us, in a way, because there were all these things that we knew we wanted, but we wouldn’t let ourselves have because it didn’t fit into the rules we’d given ourselves,” says Barbara. “[The book] gave us permission to put in alcoves, and it gave us permission to have a sheltering roof. It helped expand our vision of what would be right. And I need practical reasoning.”

Gazing at the house it is difficult, if not impossible, to tell that rookie builders constructed it. It conforms effortlessly to its 4.3-acre wooded lot, nestling snugly into a hill to employ passive-solar benefits. The concrete-shingled roof keeps out the hot sun, and an upstairs bedroom opens to a roof garden. The exterior details—special siding shingles, vent

covers, and a chimney pot—blend the house with its surroundings, because each piece was made from clay excavated from the site. Trees from the site became beams in the interior.

Almost the entire house unfolds with a step into the main entry. The open floor plan, which is tied together with natural fir and handmade green tile, allows the family of four to interact throughout the day. Whether Jensen, 9, is putting together his train in the family room or Betsy, 5, is playing with blocks near the inglenook, the family is always close.

“There’s a flow through the rooms that keeps you connected with people,” Barbara says. “The spaces are very fluid and adaptable. And as the kids change in ages, the house accommodates their activities really well.”

A favorite spot for the children and Barbara is the inglenook that houses the wood stove. Two benches with bookshelves flank the alcove, providing a cozy, warm place to read or chat. In the mornings, Betsy and Jensen stumble, half asleep, into the inglenook where they’ve claimed their own benches. They rest there as their parents start the day in the nearby kitchen. Creating alcoves such as this one and the one the family calls the “phone booth” is an integral part of *A Pattern Language*. The book suggests

A Hands-On Experience

ALCOVES

To give a group a chance to be together, as a group, a room must also give them the chance to be alone, in ones and twos in the same space.

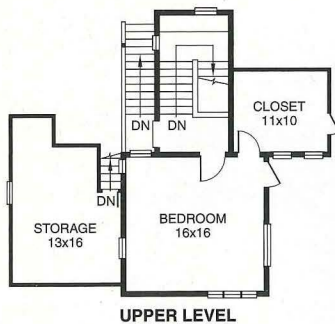
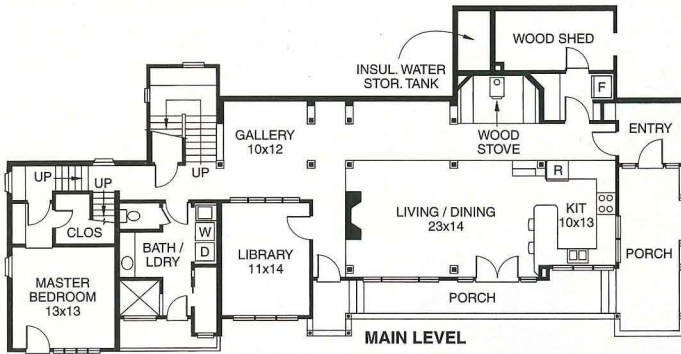
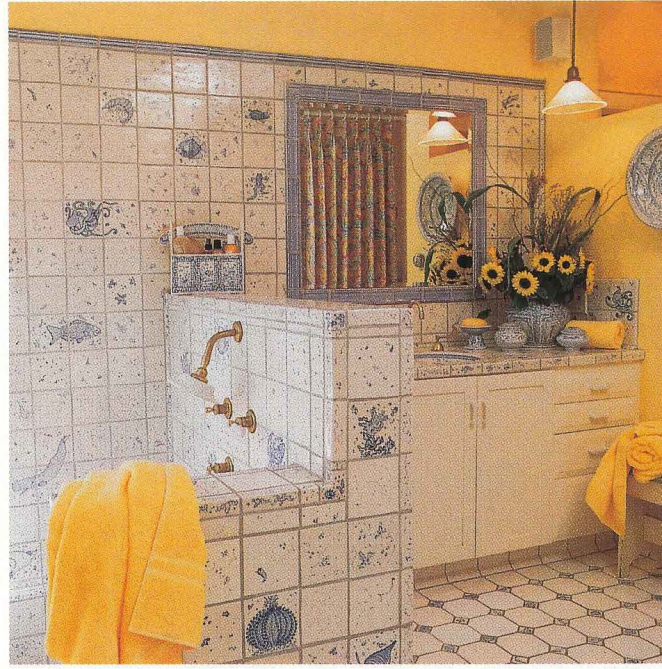
—A Pattern Language



PLAN TOUR

- Entry vestibule has a window seat.
- Through traffic is confined to perimeter hallway.
- U-shape kitchen with peninsula keeps work triangle isolated.
- Nooks and wall space provide seating and built-in storage.

■ Yellow, blue, and white distinguish the colors in the bathroom right from the rest of the home's earth tones. The handmade seascape tiles lead bathers into a 4-foot-deep sunken shower-bathtub combination that also welcomes soakers.



backsplash and the inglenook walls.

The core of the home's decorative earth tones can be found in the living room. Ethnic fabrics and rugs, collected over the years, marry the abundant natural wood, tile, and slate. "We wanted to use all natural materials and let the materials show their true nature," Barbara says. "The quality and nature of the materials are part of the unity."

The decor alters slightly at the far end of the first floor. The family's only bathroom is bathed in blue, white, and yellow. Tile made in the couple's studio covers most of the bathroom's walls and the floor. Asian influences led Mick and Barbara to dig a 4x4-foot hole in the floor for a soaking area. They diffused the problems of filling time and entry into the tub by adding steps that also act as benches, and displace gallons of water. Because four people use the bathroom, it is divided into compartments, with the toilet shielded by a door.

Although the house is plumbed for an upstairs bathroom should they need it, the couple opted for a single bathroom to create more family interaction.

"We might have been thinking along traditional lines before," says Barbara. "But I think *A Pattern Language* opened our eyes to a different way of looking at the room. It's actually nice for people to have to bump into each other several times during the day. There's too much

options open. Once they realized they needed more countertop space, they adapted to a U shape with a peninsula.

Various countertop heights and materials welcome nearly any kitchen task. A low, granite countertop next to the refrigerator is perfect for kneading dough, and the butcher-block insert between the cooktop and sink favors vegetable preparation. Tile dresses the rest of the counter surfaces—all except the peninsula, which after great thought, was topped with a slab of slate leftover from the inglenook.

Standing at the peninsula, Barbara and Mick can gaze across their dining room into the flames of a crackling fire in the living room fireplace. The giant fireplace is the room's main attraction. Handmade green tiles on the hearth echo the kitchen



WINDOW PLACES

Everybody loves window seats, bay windows and big windows with low sills and a comfortable chair drawn up to them.

—A Pattern Language

separation in our culture.”

At the end of the hallway, past the bathroom, is the master bedroom. The wood stove’s heat doesn’t quite reach this far, so this room is heated with radiant flooring—a backup heat source for the rest of the house. The white painted wainscoting and trim make this bedroom cozy and distinct from the rest of the house. Its yellow walls support a low, natural fir ceiling and brighten this sunny, walkout room.

A generous stairway leads to the upper-level bedroom. The grand scale of the stairs has given the landing space mul-

tipl duties. It has been an office, baby napping area, and display area, and currently serves as a sitting area.

It’s been years since the plans were drawn, but Mick and Barbara expect their house to continue evolving as their family does. “It’s unimaginable to live anywhere else,” Barbara says. “This house is so personal. Just the quality of what’s been done here has so much meaning to us. We’ve touched everything. It’s really hard to think about living in an ordinary house.”

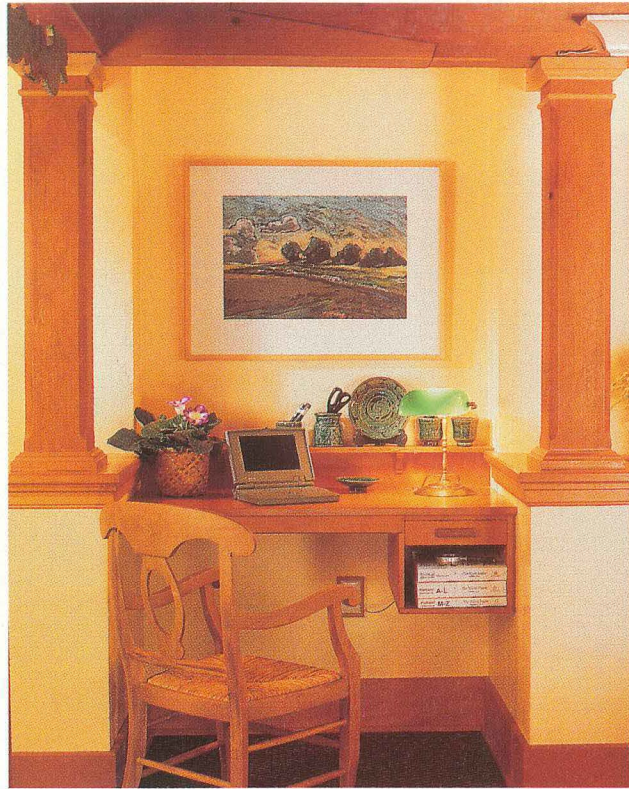
No chance that will happen soon. □

■ **The four-pane window in this lower-level room is one of many salvaged windows. None of the windows have the exact same shape or size. Those not salvaged were made by friends.**

FOR PURCHASING INFORMATION, SEE RESOURCES BEGINNING ON PAGE 98.

■ The “phone booth” alcove *right* keeps clutter contained but remains part of the greater space. Small pieces of pottery made by Mick and Barbara help organize and decorate the alcove.

■ This staircase *below right* leads to a single bedroom on the second level. The extra space on the landing creates an intimate sitting area amid the open floor plan.

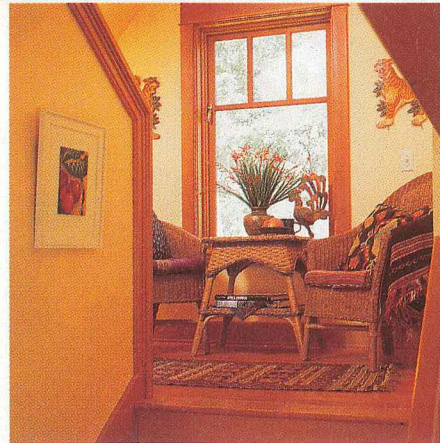


■ Keeping the kitchen bright was a must, so Barbara and Mick limited the upper cabinets to a corner near the refrigerator and above the stove *opposite*. Four different countertop surfaces and heights are capable of handling nearly any duty.

that although a large room serves a group well, it needs to incorporate smaller, intimate areas if occupants want to be alone.

A smaller alcove, distinguished by majestic fir pillars, became the perfect spot for the phone booth. Barbara and Mick decided they were tired of sorting through clutter around the phone, so they designed the phone booth to contain that clutter. The built-in desk, which sits just off the generous main hallway, has a cubbyhole for phone books and a shelf for display. “Since there’s sort of a place for clutter, you don’t mind it being there because it’s not spreading all over where it shouldn’t be,” says Barbara.

Along the hallway, between the inglenook and the phone booth, a bank of fir cabinets keeps the rest of the family clutter in check. All of the exposed wood was sealed with a homemade recipe, which protects the wood and remains clear, maintaining its natural color.



The kitchen, dining area, and family room absorb the open area opposite the hallway. The kitchen earned special attention, particularly from Barbara. After years of wheelbarrowing dinner into the unfinished house from the trailer, the kitchen needed to be spectacular. As a former chef, Barbara wanted the room to be functional as well as beautiful. The open, naturally lit room has upper cabinets only around the stove and refrigerator, leaving the other walls free for a group of transom-topped windows.

The kitchen’s design began with a country style, allowing for a table in the center. But Mick and Barbara left their



A Hands-On
Experience

WINDOWS OVERLOOKING LIFE
Rooms without a view are
prisons for the people who
have to stay in them.

—A Pattern Language



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