

BUILDING IDEAS

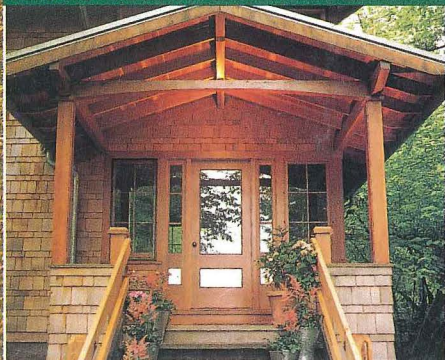
FOR YOUR NEW HOME

Spring 1996
Display until April 15

Open the Door To Spring

**A sliding wall helps
this home become one
with the woods**

Cover Home P.61



SENSIBLY SUMPTUOUS

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showhouse
for practical ideas**

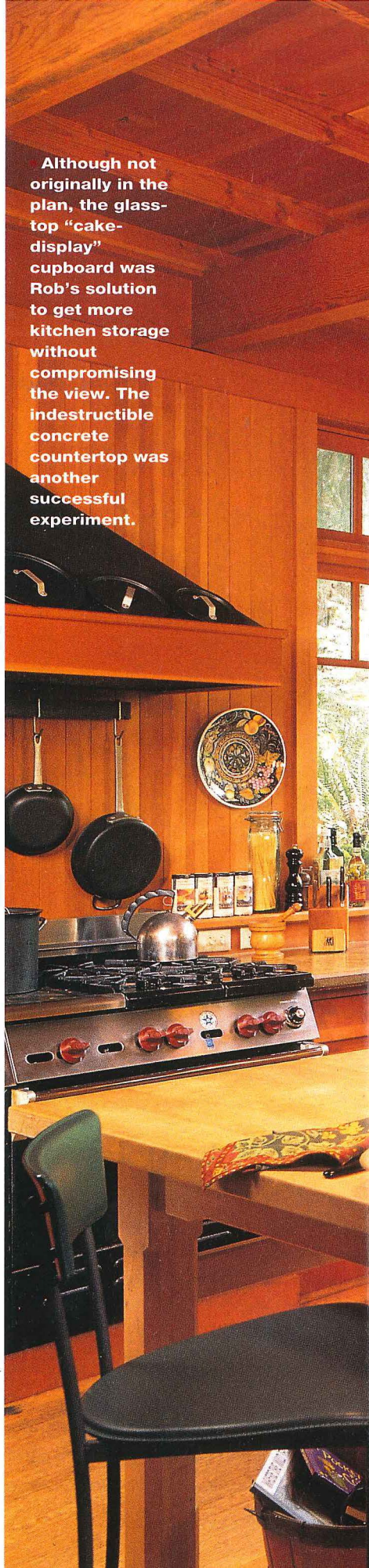
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■ **Dry-stack concrete block was used for the back wall of the living room left and kitchen to enhance the home's passive solar efficiency. In the living room, a soffit of 1×4-inch fir flooring hides heating ducts, wiring, and storage.**



Although not originally in the plan, the glass-top "cake-display" cupboard was Rob's solution to get more kitchen storage without compromising the view. The indestructible concrete countertop was another successful experiment.

Naturally COZY

■ **Inspired by restaurants' refrigerated pastry cases, Rob turned a built-in cupboard below into a refrigerator by inserting a five-sided insulated box behind doors of insulating glass. The compressor and freezer are in the service area behind the concrete block wall.**



tor tucked into furniturelike kitchen cabinetry, and the concrete countertops.

For the building site, Rob chose a level spot on a generally south-facing slope that opens into a box canyon of deciduous trees, mostly a Western variety of maple that turns golden in the fall. The open-plan living room, kitchen, and terrace also face south so in winter, when leaves have fallen, there's still ample light plus a spectacular through-the-trees vista miles up the valley. "It was all kind of hand-excavated so as not to disturb the natural landscape," says Rob, who was helped by his brother and a hired worker during the year it took to complete the home.

There are 1,700 square feet in the main house, plus 400 square feet in the guesthouse above the garage/studio. Rob estimates construction costs today would range from \$90 to \$110 per square foot, not including the property, architectural services, and site improvements such as road clearing.

He organized the floor plan around a one-story dry-stack concrete-block wall. Precisely ground faces on the blocks allow them to be stacked without mortar. Downstairs living spaces are warmed by the sunny exposure on the south side of the concrete wall. The back side is



lined with service areas, storage, and the pantry.

"We kind of withdraw to the living room in the wintertime and enjoy using the fireplace as a source of heat. The mass absorbs the heat and then radiates it slowly through the night. So you go back down in the morning, and it's still warm, even though it's quite cold outside and there's no fire," Rob explains. In the summertime, the concrete mass absorbs cold if Rob and Dee open the home up at night when temperatures dip into the 50s. The cold is released slowly during the day.

Although labels are convenient, says Rob, the home doesn't fit a particular style. Some people see an Arts and Crafts influence in, for example, the custom-designed windows, cabinetry, and wood detailing. Others see elements of Scandinavian, even Prairie, architectural design. Rob acknowledges a European influence because he has studied residential design in Scandinavian and other European countries. More important, he says, the home reflects "regional characteristics that make it work in this climate and this locality."

The steeply pitched roof—"partly a tradition around here ... and partly my preference"—sheds frequent rain and occasional snow. Eaves are angled to protect the walls but not block windows. The cedar-shingle siding requires minimal maintenance and weathers for a natural appearance. Dominant windows face south to maximize the home's passive heating and light needs.

Opening living spaces to the outdoors is just good psychology here. "The summers are very beautiful. They're ideal weather ... low humidity, highs 70s to low 80s almost every day. That's a well-kept secret," Rob explains. "When that happens, people who have been kept inside by the rain for nine months want to be outside. Being outside, sitting outside and eating, is a kind of social activity we really enjoy."

Tall windows that bring more light into rooms are also a traditional element



■ **The den/guest room right is small but lives big with a three-way view and such custom built-ins as the flat file drawers for Rob's architectural blueprints. The window seat doubles as sleeping space.**





■ In the master bedroom left, the steeply pitched roof dictates the curve of the ceiling, paneled in 1x6-inch tongue-in-groove resawn fir stained white. Windows throughout the home are in-swing, single-glaze casements with double-glaze storms.



prompted by the area's vintage buildings. "I think there's lots of verticality about the area with all the trees and mountains, so buildings in wooded settings look good with some vertical characteristics. For example, the window proportions are vertical rather than horizontal," he says.

Rob made the kitchen roomy because he loves to cook. He borrowed some design details from one of his favorite client projects, a big family farmhouse kitchen. "This is a great kitchen. I don't call myself a gourmet cook or anything," says Rob, "but we have friends who are consummate cooks who also say this a great kitchen. I took some cues from them." Today it works just as efficiently for a family of two cooks and two kids—Carter, 2, and baby Claire.

Since the kitchen and living room are essentially one big room, Rob balanced the space with the fireplace at one end and a commercial-grade stove at the other. A glass-top cupboard is jokingly dubbed "the cake-display cupboard," although a cake has never graced its shelves. It was a clever way to boost storage without blocking windows. Making an inconspicuous space for the refrigerator was a problem until Rob invented his own inside built-in fir cabinetry.

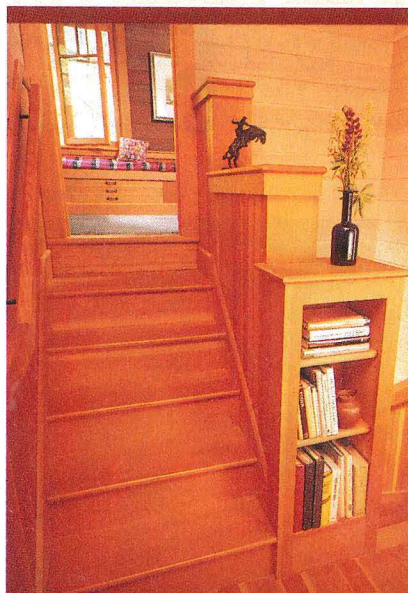
"I spent so much effort and money to make it a really beautiful room—it's the main room in this house—that I couldn't just get this regular old refrigerator and slam it in there," Rob recalls. "There's really no big trick to it."

Customized built-ins such as the window seat/guest bed in the den are just one example of the architectural principles Rob and Dee use to help clients identify design problems, research options, and come up with solutions. Built-ins enhance space just as windows do and, says Rob, "One of the advantages is you can put the cost of them on your mortgage instead of buying furniture." Putting windows on at least two walls in each room and locating the terrace on the sunny south side to make it more inviting are other applications of their design strategies.

When the five-section living room wall

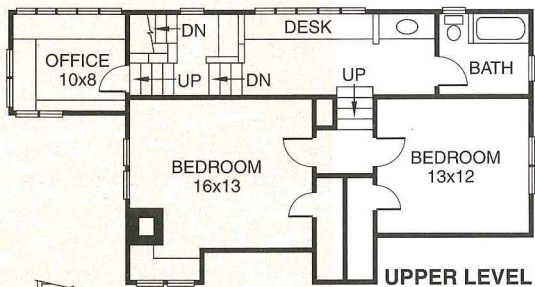
Naturally COZY

■ Rob designed handy bookcases into the stairway below to create visual interest and to keep this narrow space from feeling cramped. A bonus is display space atop the bookcases.

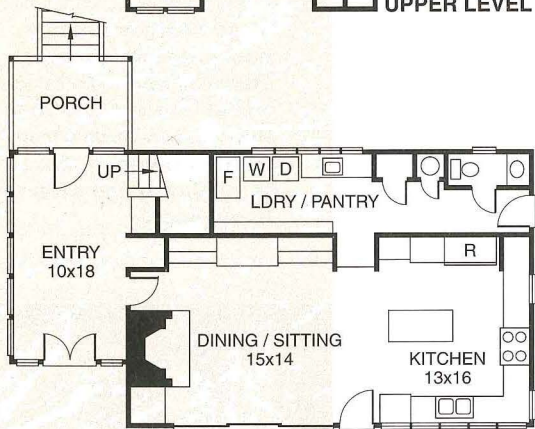




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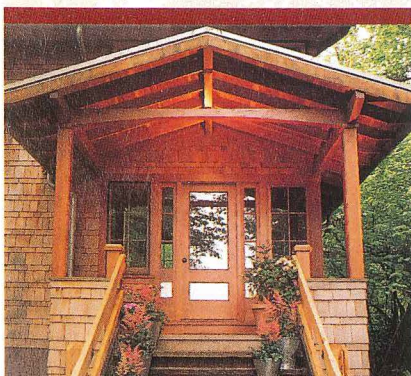


UPPER LEVEL



MAIN LEVEL

■ **The entrance left is reached after a steep climb made easier by a deck where visitors can pause to enjoy the view.**



■ **With its strong indoor-outdoor link, family fun inevitably spills out onto the terrace, lushly landscaped around hand-set pavers. Here, Dee and Rob take a break with their 2-year-old son, Carter.**

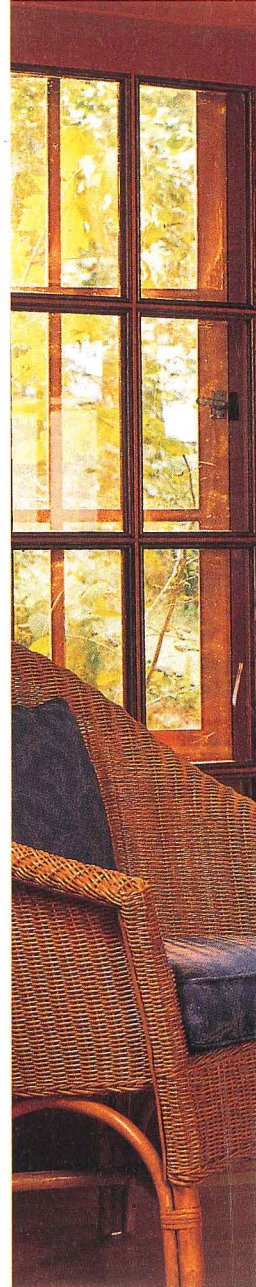
storage unit they'd meticulously designed was delivered, the couple had another problem: The two shelf units were too short. Their solution was to add a shallow riser section at the bottom of each unit to create handy "magazine cubbies," an idea they say they would never have imagined had there been no problem.

The fir wall unit is stained a deep green with cream interiors. "I love color. I really pushed to get some color into the house. There's so much wood that I really wanted more color," says Dee, describing their decorating style as "kind of simple, but with some formality."

The family has just about outgrown their two-bedroom retreat, and when the couple designs their dream home together someday, features like the airy kitchen are certain to make an encore. But for now, it's hard to beat a summer's day with the living room wall wide open, the fare for their annual lamb roast sizzling in the terrace-side fire pit, and 70 friends on hand for the potluck.

"It's wonderful for entertaining," Dee says. "The flow of inside to outside is just terrific." □

**BUYING GUIDE INFORMATION
ON PAGE 98.**



■ **An airy spot for child's play, summer dining, or an afternoon read, the entry room above houses the home's front door opposite the French doors leading to the terrace. The ceiling is lower here than in the main living areas for contrast.**



MATERIAL MATTERS

Staying on budget was as important to Rob, an architect building his own home, as it is to his clients, and he succeeded by using common materials creatively and expensive materials for visual impact.

- Although the fireplace is made entirely of concrete block, blocks in the surround were smoothed to give them a different color. The surround is mortared in, but the flanking columns are dry blocks stacked vertically.
- Concrete blocks that comprise the thermal-mass wall on the first floor have chamfered edges for a cleaner, more refined look. The blocks are made with an aggregate that includes a form of local volcanic stone, which gives the wall a pinkish cast.
- A material that was heat-resistant and inexpensive with no grout lines or grooves to clean was Rob's requirement for the kitchen countertops. "When I laid all those requirements out, the only thing I could think of was concrete," Rob says. "It kind of fell into my lap." He filled in the top

of the cabinets with a smooth, level surface of plywood and finished the backsplash in fir. Over the plywood, Rob layered tar paper and wire mesh and built wood forms for the leading cantilevered edge. Although he used pea gravel in the regular concrete mixture, other aggregate choices could be used to add more color. It's finished with several coats of a floor sealer similar to polyurethane.

- In the main living areas downstairs, floors are oak. Upstairs, less expensive fir is used for the floors, paneled ceiling, and wainscoting.
- Durable in the damp Oregon climate and inexpensive, the galvanized sheet-metal roof was inspired by older buildings in the area. "Partly it was expense; partly it was just an experiment to see if it made a good roof. It turns out people who have researched the use of roofing materials from an environmental point of view look to galvanized tin as the very best," Rob explains.