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Pod-tastic!

Free-standing structures build privacy into a new family retreat on the McKenzie River

12

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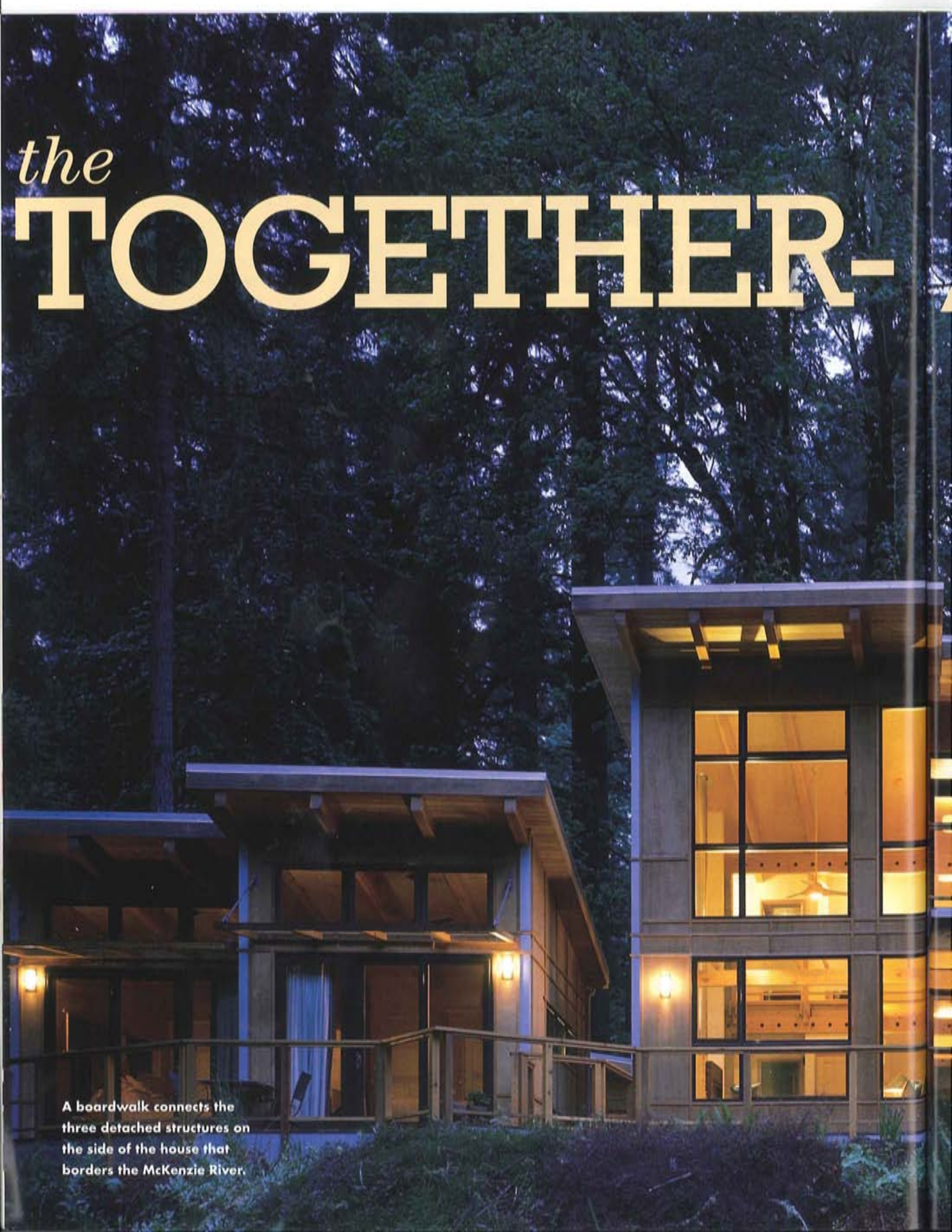
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DISPLAY UNTIL SEPT. 20, 2010

PERIODICAL

the TOGETHER-

A photograph of a modern house at night. The house features large glass windows and doors, some of which are illuminated from within, showing interior spaces like a kitchen and living areas. The house is surrounded by dense trees, and a boardwalk connects different parts of the property. The overall scene is dark, with the house's lights providing the primary illumination.

A boardwalk connects the three detached structures on the side of the house that borders the McKenzie River.

APART *retreat*

Portland loft dweller Marilyn Cross wanted her second home on the McKenzie River to function as both a meditative space for one *and* as a destination for her extended family. Take a look at the new modern getaway that she and Richard Shugar of 2form Architecture in Eugene, Ore., dreamed up.

BY DAVID SHARP
PHOTOGRAPHY BY SALLY SCHOOLMASTER



WHO SAYS YOU CAN'T STEP INTO the same river twice? For Marilyn Cross, the trout-teeming McKenzie River that flows by her vacation retreat conjures up girlhood memories of outdoor adventures with her grandfather. It also reminds her of long-ago summers spent with her parents and two brothers at their cabin elsewhere on the McKenzie, and of return visits when her mother and late father owned a 1950s A-frame on the exact spot where this newly built, 2,742-square-foot getaway now stands. A river runs by it, and a multi-generation tradition runs through it.

"My grandfather Cross was an Englishman who moved west to become a cowboy for a while, and he used to bring me fishing with him in this river when I was tiny," says Cross. "And my father would go out at dawn and catch enough trout that we'd have trout for breakfast."

This house, which was completed last August, represents a homecoming for Cross in more ways than one. Having spent her working life in the eastern U.S., she recently retired to Oregon and completed work on this dwelling not merely to reconnect with the landscape of her youth but, more importantly, to reconnect with her relatives, most of whom live



Cross

in the region, including her mother, her brothers Sheldon and Stewart, their wives Barb and RoseAnn, respectively, and their children and grandchildren.

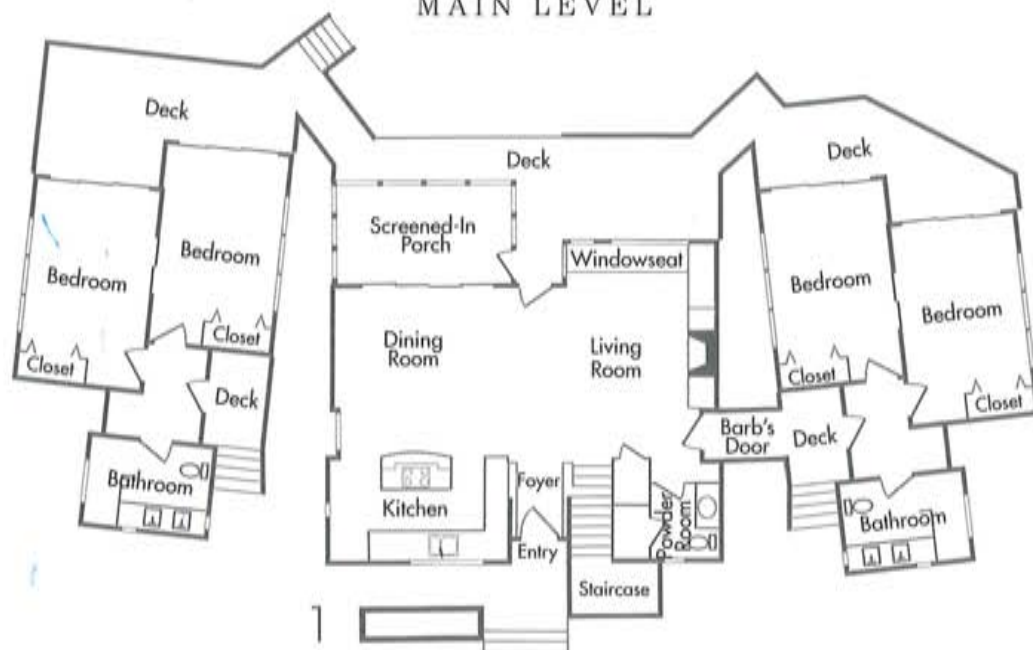
With its awkward floorplan and only one bedroom, the existing A-frame lacked the capacity to host family get-togethers.

"There was a separate building that had another bedroom and bathroom in it, but I refused to even *enter* that one, the mold was so thick," she says.

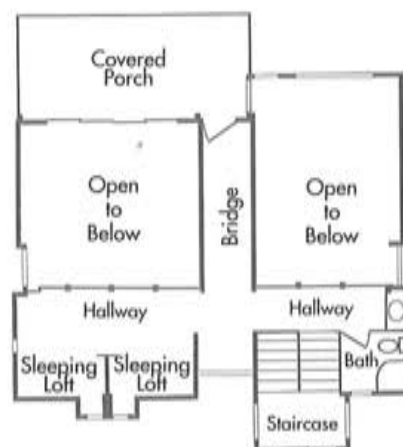
As an alternative, she considered replacing those structures with a manufactured home. She even traveled from New York City, where she was living at the time, to Vancouver, B.C., to inspect some stylish examples on display at a home show. She invited along her older brother Sheldon, a retired civil engineer. He expressed concern that the type of manufactured home she had in mind—one assembled from pre-fabricated modules—might be impossible to haul onto the building site without chopping down prized trees. Reluctant to do that, she decided to talk with an architect about building a house from scratch.


On a return trip to Oregon in 2007, she accomplished more in a single weekend than most homebuyers pull off in an entire year. During that whirlwind trip, she purchased a loft in Portland's Pearl District to serve as her main residence. She also met with Eugene, Ore.-based architect Richard Shugar, the principal of 2form Architecture, whom she heard about through word of mouth. Their first meeting convinced

MAIN LEVEL



UPPER LEVEL





"Once I get the bunkbeds built on the upper level, each bunkbed will have its own little square portal," says Cross of the grid of four windows that accent the left side of the house's facade. The house is sited to maximize its views of Eagle Rock, which rises directly across the river.

PUBLIC MEETS PRIVATE

THERE'S NOTHING LIKE FAMILY TOGETHERNESS TO MAKE PEOPLE CRAVE A little solitude. Marilyn Cross' vacation retreat offers plenty of both, thanks to its innovative use of detached "pods" that break up the living space into public and private realms. Within those pods, architect Richard Shugar, the principal of 2form Architecture in Eugene, Ore., and Cross found ways to balance privacy with conviviality. Here's how they did it:

Individualize the bedrooms. It's impossible to feel *fully* at home if you stay in a different bedroom each time you visit. To help everyone settle in, Cross and her siblings have designated bedrooms to call their own. "I sent old black-and-white snapshots of my parents, my two brothers and me to some friends in New York who own an art business," says Cross. "They did a gorgeous job of putting them together in collages and framing the collection of snapshots. So each bedroom has a collage of that sibling hanging in it. My little brother is much younger than I am, and I only had one really great photo of him when he was little. It shows his dimples, and he's just adorable. I had that one framed by itself. The collages are one of the things that personalizes each bedroom a little bit."

Make the private spaces flexible. Pocket doors separate the two side-by-side bedrooms in each sleeping pod. When only one bedroom in a particular pod is in use, the pocket doors can be left open to create a larger master suite. "Just open the pocket doors, and you can have a sitting room on one side and your bedroom on the other," says Cross. "Each pod also has a big bathroom with double sinks and a soaking tub-shower that certainly could become a master bath if you wanted to turn one of the pods into a master bedroom or live here full time."

Make every view a great one. There won't be any squabbling in *this* house over which relative gets the pod with the best view. The reason: Shugar made sure that every pod looks out at Ansel Adams-worthy scenery. "If you look at the floorplan of the three pods along the river, none of them is parallel to each other," the architect says. "They're all intended to have a great view of Eagle Rock, but each one is skewed a bit because of its proximity to the river. When we were designing the residence, we used the word 'dancing' to describe the pods' relationship to the river. We wanted the little pods to dance along the river rather than be parallel to each other. They are free-floating in the landscape to take advantage of the views, the setting and the natural light, which we wanted to maximize. There's really no hierarchy between the pods, and each one even has its own deck."

Create kid-friendly spaces. The middle pod's sleeping loft—intended for children—abounds with summer-camplike togetherness combined with individual nooks. The space will eventually be outfitted with four custom bunk beds. "Richard designed little cubbyhole windows where each of the bunk beds will be so that kids can store their personal belongings and have a view," says Cross. "The bathroom is configured with the shower and toilet in an enclosed room, and the sink is in the open area. So if you have a passel of kids, one can brush his or her teeth while someone else goes to the bathroom." Panels of translucent resin (above) serve as privacy partitions between the second-floor sleeping loft and the public spaces below.

—D.S.



her to look no further. "I just liked him," says Cross. "I never even interviewed another architect."

Cross gave Shugar some general guidelines to keep in mind when designing the house, but she also gave him ample freedom to be creative. For starters, the house should function as a fun rendezvous destination for family, yet also provide everyone with an opportunity for solitude. "I didn't want anything like a master bedroom, because I didn't want the bedrooms to be where people would

spend all their time, so those rooms didn't need to be big," says Cross. "But I did want everyone to be able to get away from each other and have some privacy. I wanted to be able to put a reading chair in each bedroom so if people wanted to just go and quietly read some place, they could."

A fan of contemporary architecture, she wanted that aesthetic preference reflected in the design. What's more, Cross felt strongly that the house should incorporate as many green-building strategies as possible and should sit so lightly on the land that a nearby cluster of giant firs would remain unharmed. What's more, her future retreat had to do justice to its eye-popping setting. Bordering the north bank of the picturesque McKenzie River, the woodsy, three-acre parcel enjoys a front-row-seat view of a towering basalt column known as Eagle Rock and boasts old-growth Douglas firs.

Though she didn't mention it to Shugar, an idea that she'd come across while researching manufactured homes intrigued Cross. In place of a single, larger house, why not create a grouping of smaller, detached cabinlike structures that would let guests either socialize or carve out some privacy, whichever they preferred? "I thought, *That's kind of a cool idea*, but I hadn't said a word about it to anyone," she says.

When she met again with Shugar and



"The whole house is oriented around capturing the views of Eagle Rock," says Cross. Shugar designed the indoor trellis above the windowseat to keep the scale of the living room cozy in the 21-foot-high space. The Whole 9 Yards in Portland fabricated the custom windowseat cushions.



"The only thing in the new house that was salvagable from the old A-frame that once stood on this property is this huge structural beam that you see above the kitchen," says Cross. Eugene, Ore., glass artist Annah James crafted the fused-glass breakfast bar. The stools are from Ikea. Advance Cabinet Designs Inc. in Eugene, Ore., built the maple cabinetry.

staff designer Jenna Fribley to see the concept they came up with, "I could tell they were very nervous," says Cross. "They laid out their ideas for the house, and lo and behold, here is this house with pods!"

Shugar had broken up the living space into three detached cabinlike structures, or "pods," plus an additional building for the garage. Cross was thrilled. "My jaw just dropped, and they thought I hated it," she says. "I was like, 'No, no, no, you don't understand.' They created those pods from that very vague direction I gave them. Does that ever tell you that I picked the right architect?"

The synergy went both ways. "Working with Marilyn and her siblings was a joy," says Shugar. "She was amazing. I'll be fortunate to have another client like her in my lifetime in terms of her willingness to come to the table without preconceived ideas. She really thought about what we were trying to accomplish with the new house, and how we would accomplish it. Marilyn also was willing to explore sustainable design practices. Actually, she wasn't just *willing*; she really encouraged it. Her enthusiasm for the project along the way was contagious. It kept us inspired and pushing ourselves to do our best work. Largely I judge the success of a project based on the experience with the client, and this one was wonderful."

The pods solved the seemingly contradictory goal of creating a residence that fosters family bonding *and* alone time. "It was the idea of a retreat within a retreat," says Shugar. "When family members get together on a retreat, they're retreating from their daily lives, of course. But even when they're together, there's a point

where they need to have their own retreat, their own individual place. We felt that there was an opportunity to build smaller, more discrete elements that would feel cabinlike rather than end up with a very large building in the landscape, which could've happened if we'd lumped all the square footage together."

The middle pod serves as the central socializing space, so it features a communal kitchen, a living room, a dining room, and a powder room on the main level. On the upper level, which is largely open to the floor below, there's a full bath and a convivial sleeping loft that will one day be filled with four custom bunkbeds for kids and grandkids. A catwalk-like bridge leads from the loft side of the house to the river-facing side, where a porch allows you to watch the McKenzie roll by.

With a ceiling height that exceeds 21 feet, the middle pod also offers a show-

stopper of a view of Eagle Rock on both floors. "The height of the room makes it possible to experience Eagle Rock from its peak down to the river," says Shugar. "And it brings in as much natural light as possible. From the loft space, the bridge takes you across the dining room and living room area to an upper-level outdoor porch. And from that deck you can actually see fish in the water."

The other pods provide more secluded quarters, with each structure having two side-by-side bedrooms and a full bath. Shugar divided each pod into "dry" and "wet" zones. Clad in wood panel and bat-

ten siding, the dry zones include the living room, dining room and bedrooms. Resting on steel-reinforced concrete piers, these spaces almost seem to float above the ground, creating a sense of lightness as the landscape flows between the piers. "There are places where you don't even

have to bend over too far to walk beneath the house," says Cross. Unlike conventional foundations, the concrete piers pose no harm to the roots of nearby giant Doug fir trees. Facing away from the river, the wet zones (which include the kitchen and the bathrooms) are built of Ground Face concrete block that echoes the solidity and permanence of Eagle Rock's weathered surface. In contrast with the maple flooring elsewhere in the house, the wet-zone floors are poured concrete.

"The concrete goes right into the ground, and the tubs are actually formed in the concrete," says Cross. "They're sunken bathtubs. Each bathroom also has a concrete vanity with maple cabinetry mounted to it."

The bathrooms' "tile" walls are actually a shower-suitable glazed version of



A Stephen Pentak riverscape sets the dining area with a make-it-a-lazy-day vibe. A random mix of Flor rug tiles keeps the palette to earth tones.

the same concrete block that appears on the home's exterior. "We used concrete block, because the size and scale of a concrete wall is broken down into smaller components," says Shugar. "It's a polished block, called Ground Face, so it doesn't look institutional. The grounded face brings out the aggregate and the warmth in the concrete."

In fine-tuning the layout, Cross factored in the reactions of relatives to the design. "My brothers didn't react very positively to the pods at all, because the whole concept of having to go outside to go to bed was weird," says Cross. "When the floorplan was first laid out, there wasn't a single side door in the house. You went either out the front door and around to the sleeping pods, or you went to your pod through the backdoor and across the decks. The reaction from my sister-in-law Barb was, 'Uh, no.' So we put a door and bridge over to the pod that my brothers and their families sleep in. That door leading into the main pod from the sleeping pod is known as Barb's Door."

Cross also turned to Barb, a gourmet cook, for help in completing the kitchen. "When I bought the appliances, she came down from Tacoma, and she checked out the layout of the kitchen and helped me pick some of the storage functionality that's in it," says Cross. "We're a big bunch of eaters, and we love to cook, so I wanted a kitchen that was big enough for three or four people. It has two ovens. One is a microwave as well as a conventional oven, and the other one is a convection oven and a regular oven."

In addition, her brother Stewart and his wife RoseAnn sprang for the cost of

adding a sauna, since they were the only ones likely to use it.

When it came time to build, Cross enlisted Dennis Coduti, the owner of Dennis Coduti General Contractor, based in Vida, Ore. Assembling the pods required extreme precision, because the dry and wet zones had to fit together as exactly as puzzle pieces. "On each pod, there are two individual structures—one supported

the other, so we had to be precise with these window units, which were two stories high in the main pod."

Cross marveled at Coduti and his crew's attention to detail. "They did a stellar job," she says. "Typically the way Dennis cuts anything, and the way he has everybody who works with him do it, is you measure it, and then you cut it slightly bigger than you know it needs to be. Then you bring it

in and fit it, and if it's a little tight, then you go back and shave it off, and *then* you put it in. It came together beautifully, and it's the most solid house. The craftsmanship is amazing! You know how hardwood floors sound creaky sometimes, even in a new house? These floors *never* creak. The house is just so unbelievably solid."

The pods also abound with green-building features. Three large cisterns filled with rainwater collected from the roofs provide the water that flushes the toilets. Rather than install air conditioning, Cross relies on ceiling fans and operable windows to cool the house in summer. The home's matte-black countertops are made of PaperStone, a durable material made of recycled cardboard. "They feel as solid as Corian, and they're supposed to take temperatures as high as 350 degrees," says Cross.

The A-frame's appliances were donated to a family whose house burned down. The A-frame itself was then dismantled, and Coduti refashioned its salvaged Douglas fir roof beams into beams for the new middle pod. "Dennis did a gorgeous job of milling them down," says Cross.

"We really wanted to salvage something from the house, not just to be good stewards of the environment, but also for

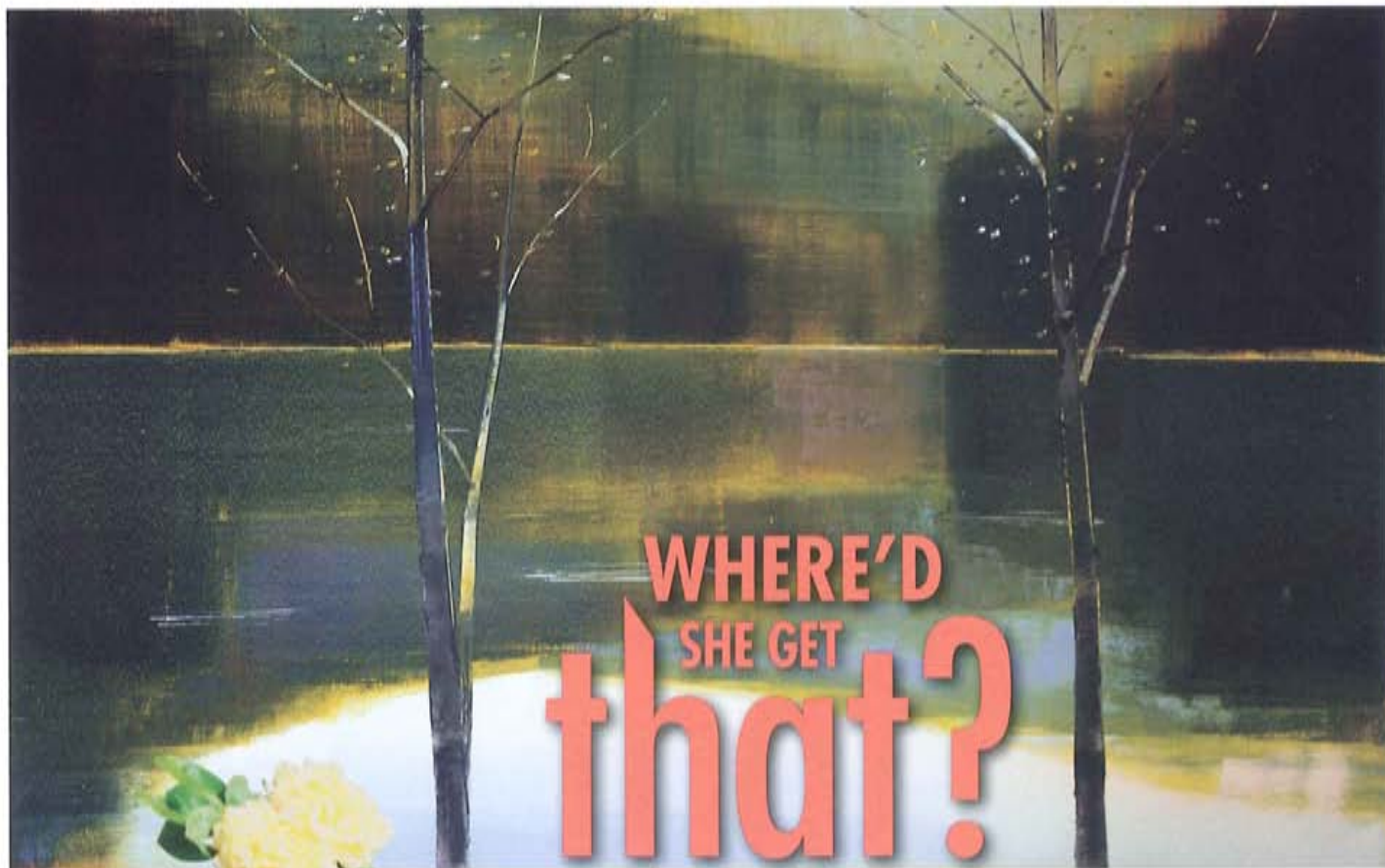


Each sleeping pod has a bathroom finished off with concrete vanities and his-and-her sinks. Undercountertop maple cabinets hold guests' toiletries.

by the concrete piers, and the other on a solid foundation with concrete block all the way up," says Coduti. "We married the two together with window units that fit in between them. You've got a little more leeway when you're fitting windows into a wood opening. But these openings have concrete block on one side and wood on the other. One side obviously reacts to weather and humidity differently from



"The floor in each pod's bathroom is a continuous-poured-concrete slab that steps down to create an integral soaking tub and shower," says Shugar. A yellow glaze over the concrete brick that makes up the home's facade creates a "tile" look on the walls. A see-through resin panel shields the countertop from shower spray. The fixtures are from Chown.



WHERE'D SHE GET that?

... the riverscape in the dining room.

From Stephen Pentak, go to stephenpentak.com. An emeritus professor of art at Ohio State University, Pentak purchased a second home in upstate New York that Cross sold before she relocated, and bartered this painting for furnishings that he wanted her to leave in the house. "I love the painting's colors and subject matter," says Cross of the piece, which is painted on birch. "This is clearly *not* the McKenzie River—the trees aren't evergreens, the water is too calm—but I love the composition. Stephen is an avid fly fisherman; he even fished in the McKenzie River when he and his wife visited *this* house."

... the colorful glass breakfast bar.

From fused-glass artist Annah James, Annah James Studios, Eugene, Ore., 541-345-6000 or go to annahjames.com. "The countertop has color cubes embedded in it, and Annah worked in the Latin names for the flora and fauna that surrounds the house, such as DOUGLAS FIR and EAGLE and TROUT," says Cross. "She used smaller chunks of glass in the upper river side and larger ones as they 'go down river.' LED lights mounted into the counter cast a spectrum of colored light through the glass onto the floor in the evening."

... the windowseat cushions.

From Amy Estrin, owner, The Whole 9 Yards, Portland, 503-223-2880 or go to w9yards.com. "They make the windowseat functional," says Cross. "Amy came out to the house and said, 'You should use a blue fabric to play off of the river and do a wool wetting in orange,'" says Marilyn. "And she was dead right!"



sentimental reasons, too," says Shugar. "So we incorporated those beams, and they're prominent in the house."

In the few months since the house has been finished, it's proven to be a powerful family magnet. "The sleeping loft has been in constant use," says Cross. "Labor Day weekend, I think we had nine people sleeping here. We had a ball! People go out during the day to hike, fish—or whatever interests them. We have a little driving tour where we take people up over McKenzie Pass and come back past Clear Lake. We spend our evenings together around the dining room table. The porch on the back deck has a screened-in section. So in summer, the sliding door in the dining room is thrown open, and it's almost like being outside when you're sitting there in the evening by the table."

Best of all, the retreat has rekindled the family tradition of gathering at the river. "The purpose behind the house was so my brothers and I would have a place to get together," says Cross. "I went for years without seeing them, because I lived in the East, and one of them lived in Germany for awhile, and one of them was in Korea for awhile. They've lived all over, too. I've seen more of my brothers through the construction and now, after the construction has been done, than I've seen in years. The house has certainly done that. My brothers love the house. In fact, I haven't encountered anybody yet who didn't love it." □



From Sheldon and Barb's bedroom in one of the sleeping pods, the McKenzie River rolls by just 50 feet beyond a deck and boardwalk that leads to the central living pod.

meet the professionals



The Architect

Richard Shugar, principal,
2form Architecture, Eugene, Ore.

Years having own firm: 9

Biggest design influence: "Seeing Eagle Rock on my first visit to the site influenced everything," he says. "My designer Jenna Fribley and I worked more hours than normal

people should just to get everything exactly situated on the site."

Contact info: 541-342-5777 or go to 2form.com.



The Builder

Dennis Coduti, owner,
Dennis Coduti General Contractor, Vida, Ore.

Years in the trades: 39

Years owning own company: 35

Favorite space in the house: "The screened porch off the dining room," he says. "It's got a 12-foot-wide sliding door that opens to the dining room, so you feel as if you're both inside and outside."

Contact info: 551-822-6287.

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