

# MAXIMIZING

# Minimalism

By Elizabeth Esline

RESTRAINED LINES, COMMERCIAL MATERIALS AND STRICT MINIMALISM

COME TOGETHER IN ONE WASHINGTON HOME TO PROVE THAT LESS—

AT LEAST IN RESIDENTIAL ARCHITECTURE—REALLY IS MORE.



ECONOMY, OF COURSE, is hardly synonymous with elementary thinking, and this home's self-imposed simplicity shouldn't be mistaken for the latter. Laid out in a C-shape, the residence gracefully transitions from two stories to one, from formal to personal, from private to inviting. But the front building is where it gets really interesting. There, architects Lane Williams and Jill Lewis of Lane Williams Architects gently coaxed what could've been a drab rectangle out of its box and helped it grow into a stretching, angular, nonparallel construction—and an unparalleled accomplishment.

Located in Yarrow Point just outside of Seattle, this contemporary home stands out against a backdrop of traditional architecture. Its nonconformist countenance reflects the attitudes of its occupants, who never waffled in their design convictions. In fact, the homeowners had saved magazine articles featuring two different homes exemplifying what they sought in a residence. As it turned out, both had been designed by Williams.

"It was our intention—especially my husband's—to interview at least three or four architects before we decided," the homeowner recalls. "After we met with Lane the first time, I just said, 'We can [talk to other] people, but I'm going to pick Lane, so it would be a waste of time.'"

The design process sped by in a few short months, mostly because the homeowners had a solid vision: a uniformly minimalist residence that would bring their



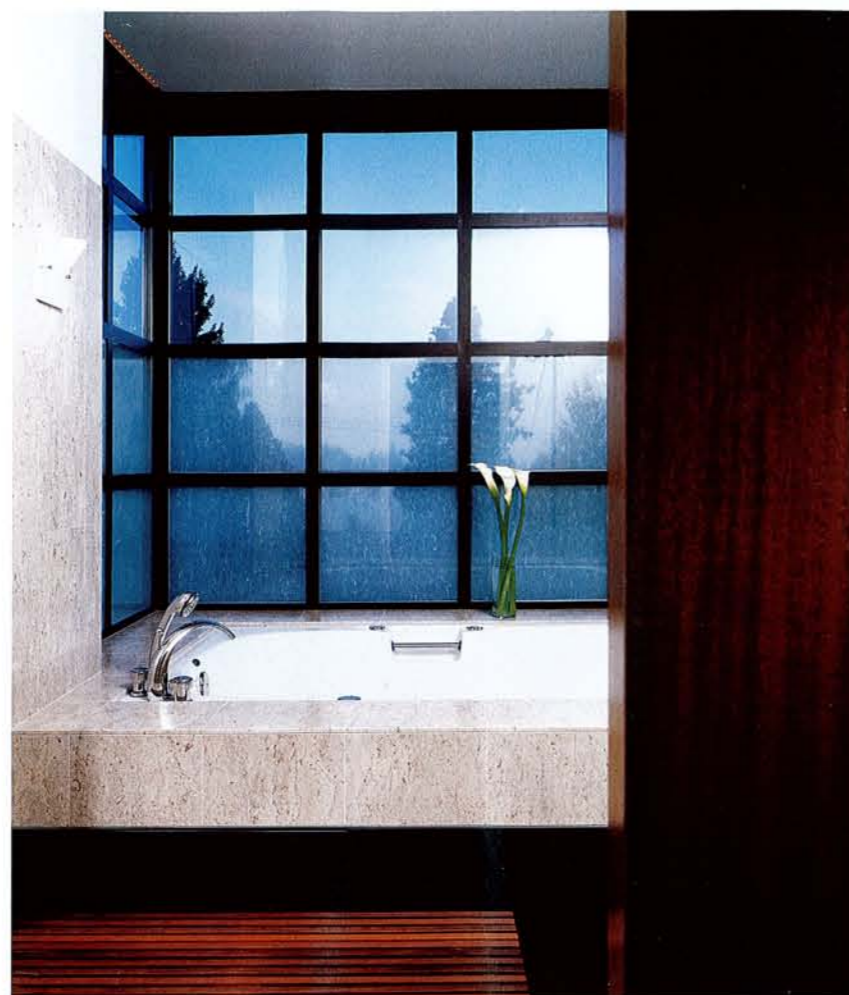
Photography by Fred House

# The Contemporary Landscape

These days, the indoor/outdoor connection is so prevalent that neglecting your landscaping is nearly equal to omitting the roof. For contemporary homes, the situation is especially delicate because the architecture doesn't dictate a particular garden style. In fact, there are at least three general approaches those homeowners can take, says Jason Morse, senior project manager for a Seattle landscape architecture firm called **THE BERGER PARTNERSHIP** (800.510.8854; www.bergerpartnership.com).

For starters, they can opt for an austere planting (Italian cypress, hedge plants) that mimics the simple lines of the house, he says, or they can fashion a bolder setting with dramatically lush plants (bamboo, hornbeam, striped bark maple). "The third approach," he notes, "and the kind that you most often see [in the Northwest], is kind of a Japanese palette [where] we see plants almost used as sculpture." Such artistic greenery often incorporates Japanese maple, katsura, Japanese sedge, Heavenly bamboo and the Thunderhead pine.

Jean Albrecht of **THE PERENNIAL GARDENER** in Seattle (206.729.7983) also suggests these options for contemporary residences: jacquemontii birches, vine maple trees, Hinoki cypresses and shrub-style euphorbias, New Zealand flax and nandinas. "Grasses are perfect for modern buildings," she adds. "They fill the space without detracting from the architecture."



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three-generational family together. "The house has a dual personality in that we did direct some windows toward the view," Lewis notes, "but [we] decided that, in form, the house would wrap around a central courtyard so that all of the spaces could have a connection to that courtyard. It would really encourage interaction among all the members of the family.

"Resale just wasn't an issue with them," the architect adds. "It was really about durability. It was about a house that could work for them for 25 years or more."

One 14-month building process later, the homeowners reaped the fruits of their labor. "When you look at the front of the house, you have no idea what's behind it," the homeowner explains. "Once you walk in, you see it opening up even more to you... So it's kind of like a book—you see the cover, but you have no idea what's in the pages."

The front building's skewed rectangle is repeated in the pool house, which is the third segment of the home. While a one-story middle section joins the two geometric anomalies, the real showpiece is the courtyard between them.

"[The owners]," Lewis explains, "sort of wanted this soft underbelly inside the C-shape that would be much more permeable and open and bring lots of light in." The result is an impeccably tailored intersection where bamboo, articulated trees and a small lawn mimic the house's restraint and stretched lines.

In keeping with the vision of the homeowners, the dwelling is as functional as it is innovative. Transitional spaces appear everywhere, one being the media room that

serves as a playroom for resident children or a sitting room for adults. Downstairs, a fully furnished basement accommodates teenagers who want their own space and elder relatives who require extra privacy. The most versatile area, however, is the pool house, which currently doubles as guest quarters and a changing room for pool-goers. "It [also] functions as a space for the owners to eventually live when they grow older," Lewis says, pointing out how the wide doorways and one-story setup make it wheelchair-accessible.

Although the house doesn't carry around frilly deadweights, it's hardly bereft of details. Case in point is the iron stair railing that contractor Joe McKinstry, president of Joseph McKinstry Construction Company, subjected to gun-bluing before applying a clear lacquer (per the advice of an automotive paint shop). Gun-bluing, which is actually a chemical used for darkening and preserving gun barrels, imparts visual uniformity and rich blue-black coloring—two qualities that suit the style of the railing and overall home.

Then there is Lewis' handiwork—touches that are fairly ubiquitous yet initially imperceptible. The baseboards, for example, are flush with the walls and separated by a slight 1/2-inch by 1/2-inch reveal. There's also the fireplace's custom stainless-steel surround, which better pleased the homeowners than the standard black metal version originally destined for installation.

"[The homeowners] really wanted something almost commercial in its aesthetic, but they also wanted elements that were warm," Lewis explains. The result is an interesting dichotomy of industrial and refined.



Much to the chagrin of their neighbors, the homeowners selected concrete block and fiber-cement board on the exterior, crowning it with a durable zincalume roof. Inside, soothing, almost rosy pyinkado (an Asian hardwood) composes the flooring in the main living areas and hallways. To change it up, there's limestone on the bathroom floor and purplish slate underfoot in the kitchen, which is the homeowners' favorite space.

Because it's a preferred pick, the kitchen received a healthy dose of seductive materials. The homeowners topped the mammoth island with soapstone and lined the periphery countertops with stainless steel. Regal overhead cabinets made of African ribbon mahogany with Sumi-glass inserts (rice paper sandwiched between clear glass) add further interest and style.

For all its little luxuries, the residence radiates quiet civility, and its cantilevers, posts and beams create an origami-like effect throughout. McKinstry, who has worked with Williams for nearly a decade, marvels at the absence of the architect's customary bluntness.

"In the houses I'd done before this, if we had a steel post, [Williams] would express it," he explains. "There would be a steel post right in the middle of the kitchen, or there would be a steel beam going right through the middle of the kitchen. [These particular homeowners] wanted a much more finished look, so a lot of that structural element is implied, but not expressed." For a house that revels in intelligent minimalism, nothing less—or, in this case, more—would do. ✨

#### PROJECT PROS

**Architect:** Jill Lewis and Lane Williams, Lane Williams Architects; 206.284.8355; [www.lanewilliams.com](http://www.lanewilliams.com)

**Builder:** Joe McKinstry, Joseph McKinstry Construction Company; 206.723.4651; [www.jmcc.com](http://www.jmcc.com)