

architect David Rutherford  
of ARC Architects fashioned  
a home and studio from this  
Ballard historic building.

## ballard building challenges architect, owner

by lauren hirt • photos by eduardo calderon

**W**hen Ginny Ruffner decided to purchase a building for her studio and living quarters, she did not consider just anybody; Ruffner chose an architect who designs city halls. And she did not choose just any building.

An internationally-acclaimed glass artist, Ruffner wanted lots of studio space, the more the better. Ruffner called on her friend David Rutherford of ARC Architects, Seattle, to help her look, and they found the Cors & Wegener building in Ballard's historic district, which dates back to 1893. When Rutherford first evaluated its layout, there were two generous studios on the main floor and apartments above those. A law firm was in a one-story space at the end of the building, which initially wasn't altered.

They started by gutting her first floor. The building's bare bones included 18"- thick brick walls, 15'-ceilings, full-height windows, and original hardwood floors. There was no insulation.



## we always have fun developing solutions for the problems that come up in remodels.

— David Rutherford

Usually the architect and client develop a program first, then the construction budget, then schedule carefully to adhere to the program—but not this time. “The program developed as we went along,” said Rutherford. “We would come back with some options, and she was willing to compromise more and more on her living area to gain studio space.” (For the living quarters, Rutherford carved out space for a small living room off the kitchen and a bedroom.)

“From a structural point of view, we were dealing with non-reinforced masonry and any area that you touch you need to bring it up to current seismic codes,” Rutherford said. “If it’s over a certain value you also have to bring it up to energy code. That was the issue with insulating the walls and the roof and the windows. The new windows had to be in the same style.” They furred out all the exterior walls with 2x6s and insulated and sheetrocked them while exposing the brick around the windows.

“There was a big plumbing knuckle there, and when the demolition was done, it was a bigger deal than we thought,” said Rutherford. Plumbing lines from the second floor converged to an exterior wall, and if they framed a wall around this mass it would take up valuable floor space. Ruffner decided to celebrate the obstacle by creating a plumbing chase that is small at the floor then swoops big and wide to the ceiling. “Working with an artist is very different from working with

a traditional client. Most artists I’ve worked with are much less finicky and more interested in the space but not the details; everything doesn’t have to be perfect so there is more latitude to do some funky things to cover up problems. I think artists understand it.”

The partition wall between the living and bedrooms has another creative twist: Ruffner and Rutherford chose to keep the wall open at the top, but the space along the top of the wall is filled with whimsical plywood cutouts.

Rutherford punched through a thick exterior wall to access an adjoining old garden shed, which became a wonderful dining room space. Ruffner loved the jagged edges at the opening and decided she wanted to keep the raw masonry opening just the way it was. Two shed walls are filled with old windows, and there is a charming fireplace at one end. The whole dining room floor is comprised of samples from architects’ offices: 12x12” marble tiles of every conceivable color and make up.

“The challenge in working with Ginny is containing her; once you walk through the home, you can understand that—it’s an electric kind of space,” said Rutherford.

Ruffner loves to entertain, but the kitchen is more of a catering center where everything comes

*left: The wall between the living room and bedrooms is adorned with whimsical plywood cutouts.*

*below: A passionate collector, Ruffner has plenty of display space on open shelves made of scrap marble.*



together. The kitchen shelves are marble from a scrap yard; you can see the raw edges of the perforated drill holes and the base cabinets were purchased off the shelf. The countertops are "Chemtop" – yes, the same material used in laboratories and science classes.

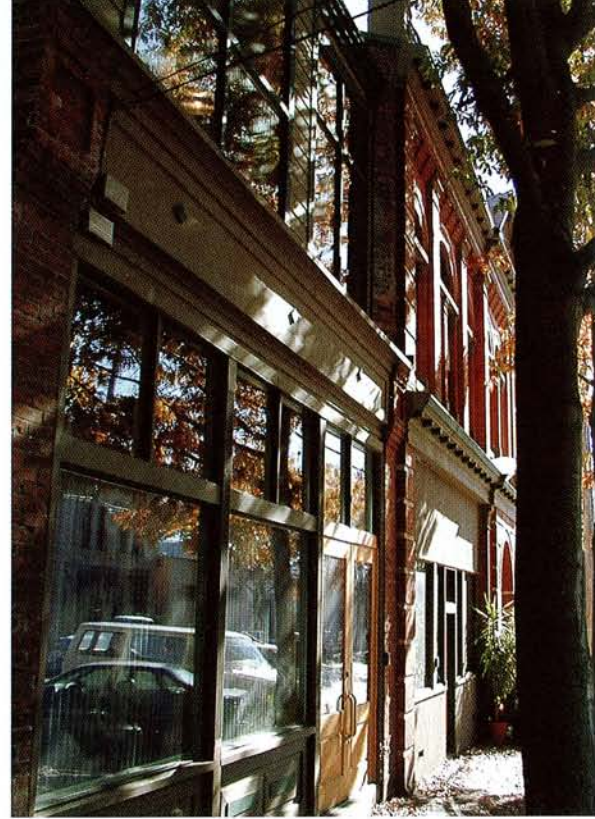
The kitchen's footprint is small but has a lot of volume. Rutherford suspended a large shelving unit from the ceiling over the island; the unit helps to define the space and serves as a display case for Ruffner's mixer collection.

The contractor, Joe McKinstry, added to Ruffner's passion for collecting by salvaging trim and materials from other jobs to incorporate into the project. Almost all the door trim is salvaged from various other jobs, so the trim is different on either side, much to Ruffner's delight. "Joe McKinstry really rolled his sleeves up," said Rutherford. "He would show up with a

piece of culvert that became the columns in the fireplace."

The project entered a second phase when the adjoining law firm moved out. Ruffner saw an opportunity to get more studio and living space: the one-story office space was gutted, and a second floor was added. But anything that you do to the outside of a building

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in Ballard's historic district has to go through review.

"This whole addition was essentially wood-frame next to the brick building. The historic board was pretty concerned about what it would be and what the proportions were." Rutherford peeled away the lawyer office's façade and created a new street presence, incorporating the horizontal lines from the historic structure and finessing complementary vertical windows. While the street front side of the building had to pass historic scrutiny, the design of the back of the addition was free to get a little crazier—more open with big sliding doors.

For the addition's roof, Rutherford used structurally insulated panels that span the whole distance specifically so they did not have to use beams. These panels are essentially oriented strand board sandwiches with foam in them. Ruffner liked the raw finish that the panels provided at the ceiling, so the panels and the oriented strand board flooring were just sealed to let the natural wafer texture show.

"We always have fun developing solutions for the problems that come up in remodels, and the projects begin to have their own identity and sense of place because

*above: Street view of Ruffner's glass art studio.*

*left: Ruffner uses ample shelving to infuse her kitchen with her artistic spirit.*



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of that," said Rutherford. "The magic of this place is less the architecture and more the spirit of Ginny, and that sense that she has of grabbing a space and making it hers." 📍

