

# Hybrid Haven



*By carefully using materials and thoughtfully positioning windows and doors, architects Julia Campbell and Buzz Tenenbom gave their living room the feel of an urban cabin.*

BY DEAN STAHL

PHOTOGRAPHED BY BENJAMIN BENSCHNEIDER

## FROM A HODGEPODGE OF 'REMUDDLES,' A SPACIOUS URBAN CABIN EMERGES

*First in an occasional series  
on architects at home.*

FOR A DECADE or so, Julia Campbell and Buzz Tenenbom kept tabs on an old house in Queen Anne across the street from theirs. They liked the way it was sited on a spine of land to catch breezes and available sunlight. The location provided a rare combination of privacy and openness, with 27 steps up from the street creating the modern equivalent of a moat.

On the negative side, the house, built around 1908, had absorbed its share of hard knocks from student tenants, keg parties and well-intentioned carpenters with saws and hammers. Much of the original Craftsman charm had vanished in modernization projects, leaving a mishmash of styles, inside and out.

The extent of the alteration can be seen by comparing this house to its onetime twin next door, which has retained its wide eave overhangs and other Craftsman touches.

Tenenbom and Campbell have archive photos that show the progression of "remuddles," as Tenenbom calls them. In 1957, the roof overhangs were shaved off, entry stairs narrowed, windows modernized and graceful faux columns removed. Appropriate-size siding was covered by another type popular in the 1950s. By 1968, the front yard was cut back, a daylight basement installed and attractive multi-pane windows replaced with sheets of smoked glass.

When they bought the property in December 1999, Tenenbom and Campbell saw an opportunity to remodel it as a home, office and experimental project for their firm, CTA Design Builders,

Inc. That way the couple — both licensed architects and general contractors — could be there when their children, Emily, now 9, and Ben, 7, came home from school.

Campbell designed the make-over in a few weeks. Because it was not practical to restore the house to its original appearance, the root question became how much of the old to retain.

"This is a beautiful lot — high, wild and windy — something special. The house could become somewhat discontinuous with the neighborhood (in style), and that would still be appropriate," given its physical detachment from neighboring homes, Campbell says.

The couple decided to create a relaxed, informal hybrid without expanding the square footage or drastically altering the exterior. Having enjoyed vacations and weekends on Decatur Island and elsewhere in the San Juan Islands, they wanted to distill that experience: privacy, plentiful natural light, water views and natural landscaping. An informal, flowing, circular walk-through scheme seemed ideal. If they succeeded, they'd have a place they wouldn't want to leave, even on weekends — an "urban cabin," to use their term.

They chose mostly native plants for the 8,500-square-foot lot, and hoped judicious placement of doors and windows would bring the feeling of the outdoors in. They sketched in a walkway through a garden to direct clients around one side of the house and down a path to the back. They shifted the main entryway's location from the east to the south; interior plans flowed naturally from that key decision.

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*This circa 1908 photograph, retrieved by Campbell and Tenenbom from city files, shows their Craftsman-style house as it looked with stairs leading down to the street from the original front door.*



*A recent photograph, taken from nearly the same angle as the 1908 photo, shows what is now the back of the house. Campbell and Tenenbom have their office in the daylight basement; a path to the entryway winds through the garden. The stairway and deck, left, lead to the dining room on the main floor.*



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Oversized peeled logs, flagstones underfoot and a woodland garden let visitors know they're about to enter an urban cabin.

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Their construction crew basically took the inside apart and put it back together, enabling the family to move in a little more than three months after they bought the house. It's roughly 3,200 square feet, including a basement office with adjacent study and laundry room.

Today, the stone-tile entryway logically opens to a spacious living room that is bright and cozy. Generous views of greenery and window seats with built-in storage drawers are just the touches you'd expect in a vacation place.

The deck off the dining room has an industrial-strength, steel-step stairway for quick access to the back garden. The efficient kitchen includes an eating bar and small sitting area with window seats. Finishes, including white woodwork and warm paint tones, dispel Northwest gloom. A lofty view of Ballard to the north and Puget Sound to the south adds to the spacious atmosphere.

The urban-cabin motif is expressed

externally by peeled-log columns that flank fir entry doors on the main floor and the office entry downstairs. Stone tiles start at the porch and continue inside for a practical mud-room floor. Otherwise, the exterior panels and batten of the shedlike addition are juxtaposed with milled-cedar shingle siding, pretty much as it had been when they bought it.

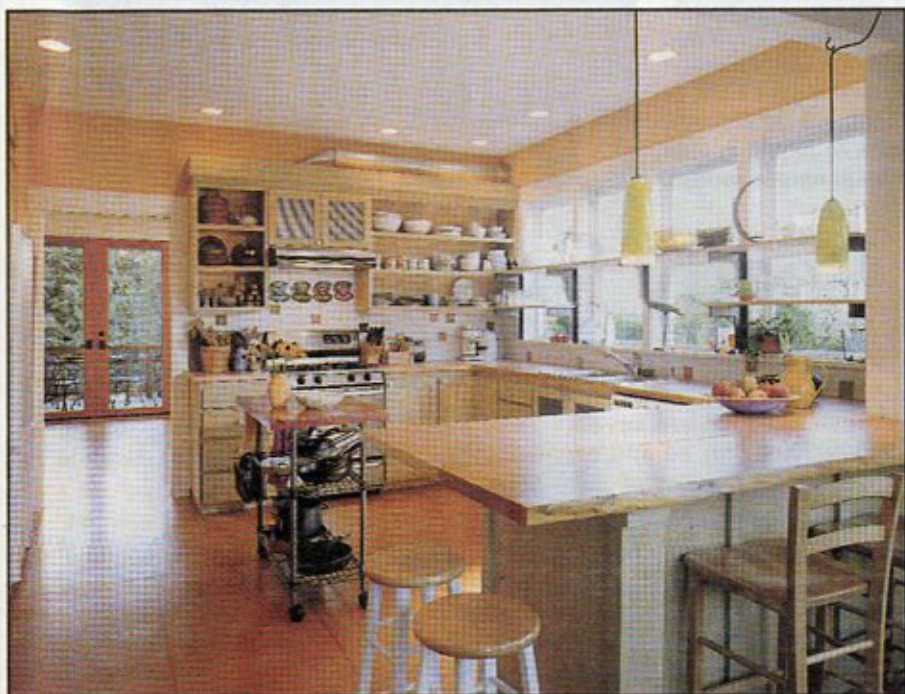
"We decided to emphasize that this is a house of different parts," Campbell explains. "History articulates itself through different sidings." That approach allowed more of the budget to go toward structural necessities, including earthquake-code retrofitting.

Moderate-cost materials were used in creative ways: The kitchen floor is made of large Masonite squares framed by inset fir. Mesh screens — of an industrial type used for radiator covers — are inset in some cupboard doors, and paint-grade cupboards are stained.

"Our house is a place of experi-



Warm, bright paint colors and generous windows bring cheer to Tenenbom and Campbell's dining room. Part of the living room, including window seats, is visible in the background. Glass doors open onto a deck. The two-plank pine table built by Campbell's father is just right for the family of four.




The well-lit kitchen has a bank of windows facing north with a view of Ballard. Glassware is stored on open shelves to catch the light. The floor is Masonite hardboard squares with inset fir; the breakfast-bar counter is a fir slab on the diners' side and sealed Masonite on the cook's side.

ment," Tenenbom says.

Upstairs are a refurbished master bedroom, with a view to the north, and bedrooms for their children, each with a study tucked neatly in an alcove. One top-floor bathroom, modestly updated, is serviceable for the family.

The couple plan at some point to re-vamp the basement office to make new

bedrooms for the children, and expand their own into a master suite. That's later. Now, all their weekends are booked. They stay at a special retreat they know. In Queen Anne. 

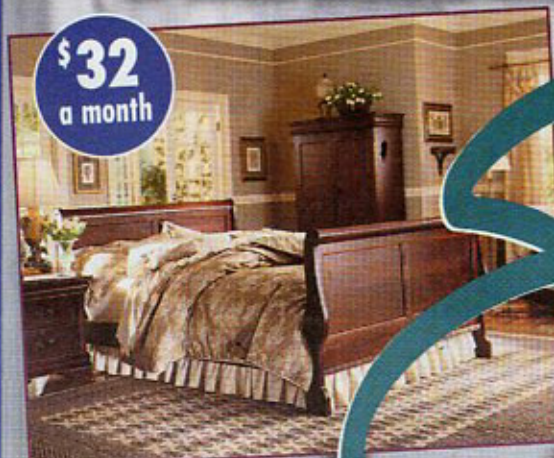
*Dean Stahl is a Seattle freelance writer. Benjamin Benschneider is a Pacific Northwest magazine staff photographer.*

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