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A WALLINGFORD HOME IS FULL OF STYLE AND SURPRISES. BY JENNIFER SCHAEFER



Two polished aluminum pendant light fixtures, suspended from 15-foot-long cords, stylishly illuminate the dining table. The gray concrete floor in the great room, made glossy with a clear finish, is kept bare-feet-friendly year-round with radiant heat. The wall above the fireplace bears artist Robert Yoder's red-and-white assemblage and Helen Gamble's pitchfork. Opposite page: By "hiding" the ground floor behind a concrete retaining wall, the architects created a two-story home that looks like a single-story house from the east.



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mid the charming but typical bungalows that populate the Wallingford neighborhood is a bold new dwelling that is the architectural equivalent of a conjurer's trick. ✱ From the east, it simply looks like a single-story house perched atop a concrete wall. When you pass by the wall, however, you realize that it is actually two stories, and that the concrete wall is a retaining wall built to create a level lot. The solo-story effect is no accident, but an optical illusion devised by architects Robert Hutchison and Tom Maul of Seattle's Hutchison and Maul Architecture. "We had fun playing with contradictions [with this project]," says Hutchison. "At first glance, the house appears as one thing, but it is realized as another. Contradictions such as this one generate an element of surprise that contributes to a more interesting project." ✱ The

owner, a Seattle-based sculptor and single mom of a two-year-old daughter, describes her home's now-you-see-it, now-you-don't appearance as "great fun." She says, "That's a big reason why I chose Rob and Tom as architects—because they have a sense of humor." (The owner was exposed to the duo's quixotic minds early on, when they asked to transform her lot's original residence, a ramshackle farmhouse, into a temporary art project; see sidebar). Another selling point was that both architects have young children. "Rob and Tom understand how to design a house that is child-friendly," she says. "My last house, on Capitol Hill, was 19 stairs up from the street. [After living there], it was important to me to have a great family house." ✱ Another item at the top of the owner's must-have list was a classic gable roof. She says, "I grew up in New England






A gable roof lends a modern building classic lines. First-time visitors often wonder which one of the French doors on the south side is the main entrance (it's the one with the steel canopy). Opposite page, top to bottom: There's plenty of play and storage space beneath the open-riser stairs with recycled wood treads (cowboy boots are the owner's favorite footgear). A walk-in pantry adds storage space to the colorful and cozy kitchen.

The home's stark, graphite gray exterior yields a bright and airy great room with a ceiling soaring 21 feet up to the peak of the gable roof.

Above the bench gambols a group assemblage by artist Helen Gamble entitled *Palimpsest No. 48*.





A photograph of a child's bedroom with vibrant red walls. A wooden bed frame with a patterned mattress is the central piece of furniture. On the bed are several toys: a large leopard-print stuffed animal, a grey elephant, a yellow caterpillar, and a small orange cat. To the left, a wooden rocking chair holds a stack of books. On the floor, a blue rug features a row of colorful dots and a red ball with white polka dots. A pair of red rubber boots sits near the foot of the bed. The ceiling is white with a small orange lantern hanging from it. A framed picture is on the wall to the left.

“Rob and Tom
understand how to
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surrounded by federal architecture. I love simple, powerful forms like gables.” ✱ The juxtaposition of simple and powerful is a leitmotif that Hutchison and Maul have carried throughout the house. One example of this is the neat row of square, no-nonsense windows on three sides of the upper floor (the east side has a single window). The exterior windows are framed in a dark copper color, giving the minimalist façade a modern punch. ✱ When you enter the roughly 2,000-square-foot residence, another surprise awaits. The home’s stark, graphite gray exterior yields a bright and airy great room with a ceiling soaring 21 feet up to the peak of the gable roof. The walls in the great room (a living room, dining room and kitchen), painted a pristine white, serve as a gallery for the owner’s eclectic art collection—pieces she acquires as well as those she creates. “The white walls create a unified look,” says Hutchison. ✱ The kitchen provides contrast with splashes of color, notably a wooden island painted Chinese red and crowned with chartreuse plastic laminate. The island and all of the cabinets in the house were custom made by the general contractor, Seattle’s J.A.S. Design Build. Much of the kitchen’s storage space is contained in a doorless pantry with open shelving. “During the design process, I referred to the island as the diva and the pantry as the chorus line,” says Hutchison. A stainless steel sink,

custom designed by the architects, is roomy enough for the owner to give her toddler a bath. “I wanted a kitchen sink where I could have tub time with my daughter without having to leave my guests,” she says. ✱ During Seattle’s warmer months, the backyard, shielded from the street by the concrete retaining wall, becomes a favorite private retreat. Three south-facing French doors in the great room serve the dual purpose of linking indoors and outdoors and maximizing natural light. “We sited the house as far north [on the 66-foot by 100-foot lot] as possible to take advantage of the southern exposure,” says Hutchison. ✱ On the west side of the main level is a powder room that doubles as a changing room and two small flex rooms, each measuring 100 square feet. The owner uses one of the flex rooms as an office and the other as a nursery for her daughter. ✱ The abbreviated second level is accessed via a custom steel staircase, designed by the architects with a unique touch: the steel hearth of the gas fireplace in the great room extends horizontally to serve as the first step. To help prevent slips, the owner requested that the fabricator, Michael Rydinski of Seattle’s Decorative Metal Arts, sandblast the part of the hearth that people step up on. ✱ Upstairs are a master bedroom and a guest bedroom, each with a suite bath and walk-in closet. The two rooms are cre-

atively connected by a graceful footbridge, a modern interpretation of a hallway made of the same materials as the staircase. “When we designed the double-height space [of the living and dining areas], we didn’t want anything to intrude on it, particularly a full second level,” says Hutchison. “But we needed some way to connect the two bedrooms. So we designed a bridge that would span the double-height space from one end to the other.” During the day, the high, square windows that run the length of the bridge provide southern light and a view of the backyard. At night, low recessed wall lights guide the way up the stairs and over the bridge. ✱ Due to a relatively modest budget, the architects and owner focused on a few key elements to splurge on, such as the staircase and footbridge, and kept materials to a minimum to cut construction costs. “We didn’t have an extravagant budget, so we needed to prioritize what was architecturally important and feasible,” says Hutchison. “Early on, we chose to focus on the spatial quality, natural light and composition of the building.” ✱ The result is a stylish yet welcoming dwelling that meets Hutchison’s definition of a successful project—one that results in “a happy client and happy architects.”

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HUNDREDS OF HOLES = ONE COOL ARCHITECTURE PROJECT

The “Hole House” at night, beautifully lit with halogen lights. Opposite page: Bright primary-color walls and ceiling make for a cheerful nursery.



When Robert Hutchison and Tom Maul first laid eyes on the Wallingford lot on Woodlaw Avenue North, it held a circa-1900 farmhouse in disrepair. The sight of the dilapidated building got the architects’ creative juices flowing and inspired a one-of-a-kind architecture-as-art project. ✱ When the owner bought the lot, there was never any doubt that the farmhouse would be torn down. “The farmhouse was poorly sited smack in the middle of the lot and was in poor condition. There was no insulation, hardly any foundation,” says Hutchison. “We agree with our client that it made the most sense economically and architecturally to demolish the building and build anew.” ✱ Prior to the farmhouse’s demolition on April 12, 2004, however, the architects approached the owner with a unique request. “They asked if they could drill holes in the house to see what it would look like with light passing through,” she says. “I thought it was a neat idea.” The architects’ motivation was simply to create something wholly different before it was destroyed. Remarks Hutchison, “As architects, we spend months, if not years, designing and drawing buildings that we can only hope will be constructed. We saw the farmhouse as an opportunity to quickly create a façade that was subtle, surprising and beautiful. We liked the idea of passersby doing a double-take.” ✱ Two days before the demolition, Hutchison (with help from three friends, one of whom was the owner) began drilling holes in the farmhouse using a cordless drill with a paddle bit. Over the next three hours, the group drilled hundreds of holes into the front façade, ranging from three-eighths-inch to half-inch in diameter. The next day, Hutchison and Maul captured their artistic endeavor, which they dubbed the “Hole House,” in a series of photographs. They took pictures of the hole-filled façade from inside the house, with the sun shining through, and, at night, lit the interior with four halogen lights (a neighbor donated the power) and photographed the house from outside. “We knew that, at night, the effect of the holes would be beautiful from the outside looking in,” says Hutchison. “What we didn’t anticipate was how incredible the interior would look particularly when a car drove by with its lights on.” J.S.