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PARTY BOAT:
A FLOATING HOME BUILT
FOR ENTERTAINING



CLOCKWISE FROM FAR LEFT: For a private sauna in a Seattle backyard, Chad and Emily Robertson, designers and co-owners of Chadhaus, built a pivoting steel entry door with firewood-storage cubbies. The sauna opens to a changing area with a shower and recessed LED strip lighting tucked into the tongue-and-groove ceiling. An electric heating unit creates steam when water is poured over the hot rocks on top.



Hot House

A meditative private sauna springs up in a Seattle backyard.

Written by LAURA AGUILERA-FLEMMING
 Photographed by JESSE YOUNG

After a five-month trip to Finland for his graduate thesis research in 2005, Chad Robertson and his wife, Emily, returned to the States with a fascination for Finnish saunas. "Sauna has been and still is a part of daily life and culture in Finland," Chad explains. "It's both a personal and a communal experience that feels wonderful and encourages good health." Now co-owners of the Seattle furniture and design studio Chadhaus, the couple found that their Scandinavian experiences

served them well when, six years later, one of their repeat clients asked them to design a sauna for their backyard. The clients had several specific requests—including a pivot door, a showerhead with a pull chain, and space to recline—but let the Robertsons take the lead on aesthetics.

Inspired by traditional Finnish materials, the designers chose hypoallergenic hemlock wood for the interior. Etched matte glass windows filter in natural light while imparting a cloistered feel. Benches line two walls, allowing the clients to sit or lie down while enjoying the steam. The designers carefully calibrated the building's scale to their clients' bodies: "We measured them sitting, standing, and lying down," says Emily. "We based the sauna's interior height on the dimensions needed for them to lie on the top bench with their legs resting vertically on the wall." More complicated was wedging the 100-square-foot structure into the compact backyard. According to Joseph Schneider, president of JAS Design Build, the general contractor for the project, that process was "a little like building a small boat inside a telephone booth." When the puzzle finally came together, though, it was the picture of relaxation ❧