



AMAZING ARMADA

Striking the perfect balance in a contemporary West Coast home

"DESIGN IS about finding the balance in things, finding the balance in scale and form," says Keith Baker of KB Design, the designer responsible for creating, quite literally, the perfect home for Jennifer and Lorne Porayko. "That's the best part of this house: it really meets all of our needs. We love it," gushes Jennifer as we stand chatting in the sun on the rooftop patio. Nestled on a rocky slope near the top of Arbutus Road in Cadboro Bay, "Armada" is an artistic study in contemporary West Coast construction, a fine sculpture of space and simply a work of art. The home illustrates the fine-tuned harmony that naturally occurs when you blend thoughtful, daring design and extraordinary workmanship.



BY JULIE NIXON PHOTOS BY VINCE KLASSEN



Previous page: Where earth meets air — “Armada” is a perfect convergence of concrete, glass, steel and wood, unified by contemporary angles and restrained curves. This page: Exposed glue-lam fir beams, sloping ceilings and plenty of windows complement the minimalist interior design.

Inspiration for this custom-built home emerged organically, first from the land itself. Mike Miller of Abstract Developments, builder and contractor, explained how the topography and the light told a story of the space, and thus the composition was set in motion. Rather than plunking down a square box, the Poraykos, Baker and Miller all agreed that proper siting was essential. The house was integrated into the landscape as much as possible, and thus “you get that feeling that it’s comfortable where it is,” says Baker. Sandy Nygaard of Nygaard Interior Design, who was brought in for the project at the beginning stages, said she drew her inspiration from the architecture and its clean, simple lines. “The house is such a statement. You have to

work with what the house is; you have to follow through,” she says decisively.

Despite the substantial square footage, the house appears graceful, not intimidating, as you amble up the driveway towards the entrance. Contemporary lines of wood, steel, stone and glass are all given equal play, while the tipped-back wall, curved rooftop and bank of angular windows sliced in halves by rough-cut cedar offer just the right balance of varying forms.

Enter the foyer through the grand yet welcoming oversized fir pivot door: it is here that you’ll find the first “wow” unexpectedly slipping from your mouth. (It’s okay, everyone does it.) At this moment, with the curved ceiling soaring



At left: The central atrium is impressive — both bright and inviting, the curved ceiling soars 24 feet above.
Below: The built-in bed and night tables were placed on an angled half-wall to take advantage of the ocean views through the trees.



24 feet above, you know you're in for an experience.

The idea of this central atrium was two-fold. The house was built with function in mind, and thus the foyer operates as the access point to the rest of the house. From left to right, there are entrances to all other areas of the home. This inner connection point keeps the entire house in balance. Secondly, this space funnels a cascading waterfall of natural light into the middle of the house through a profusion of windows. "I tend to make very bright houses," says Baker with a small laugh. "A cheery, light-filled environment is in support of good human health."

Clerestory windows (actually, skylights) slant downward, and thus act like a prism refracting light at acute angles. The three-by-five square cherry bookshelf to the left, which opens through to the living room, also directs light into the atrium. Consequently, whatever the time of day, this space is bright and inviting. A sense of warmth and cheer resonates all around.

"It seems a little crazy to have that much space," says Baker, "but the cool thing is that you can actually walk up into that space and enjoy it from above." At the top of the stairs is a good-sized rooftop patio, which takes advantage of views to Juan de Fuca Strait and, on a clear day, the Olympic Mountains.

"We wanted a lot of windows so that you could feel like you were outside all of the time," says Jennifer. And indeed one does. The kitchen, dining and living area are incorporated into an L-shape, with windows to the ceiling that slide open onto the terraced concrete deck. This open, airy space is all about indoor/outdoor living — the separation between the two nearly indistinct. The living area and patio essentially become one unbroken space. Outside, the expansive decks merge easily into

a natural, rocky landscape, carefully finessed by landscape designer Duane Ensing.

The kitchen, stunning in every respect, does not overwhelm. Honey-toned vertical grain bamboo marries its Asian flare with honed granite countertops and glossy Jenn Air appliances as black as a raven's wing. But the real masterpiece will take your breath away: the exposed aggregate bar-top, ground and polished to a silky smooth finish, is 1,400 pounds of pure beauty. It took three days to build and 10 men to move it, but it was worth it. "It's a one-of-kind piece," beams Jennifer.

The lofty ceilings, sloping inward, and exposed glue-lam structural beams made of fir are grounded by the glowing jatoba hardwood, complete with radiant in-floor heating. The open concept is at once inviting and interesting, capacious but cozy. Warm and cool elements create a unity between air and earth.

When queried about their favourite part of the house, Jennifer had a difficult time choosing just one. "I think it depends on the time of day. I absolutely love waking up in our bedroom. We feel like we're on holidays when we wake up." In the master suite, a curved half-wall anchors the built-in night tables and Asian-style bed, its unusual angle optimizing the views of the ocean and Garry oaks just outside the patio. "It's more visually related; you can lie in bed and look out through the windows, you see the moon and stars at night. It relates you to nature more," says Baker. Much like a treehouse, the light in the morning here is refreshing; the crisp ocean air rejuvenating.

Enter the master ensuite with separate his-and-hers vanities. Here you'll find a sumptuous play of light and dark: honed



In the ensuite bathroom, light from above illuminates its extraordinary features: a two-person steam shower, Japanese soaker tub with wrapping staircase, honed slate floors and CaesarStone countertops. Adjacent are a large dressing area and a laundry room.



slate floors, vertical grain cherry wood and grey porcelain tile backsplash go head-to-head with white CaesarStone countertops and sink and, the pièce de résistance, a flawlessly white Japanese soaker tub with a wrapping staircase. These simple yet arresting components are punctuated by the light streaming in from the skylight above.

“We are both very active: we do martial arts, we weight-lift and hike, and we’re outside quite a bit,” explains Jennifer as she begins to open the glass door to the two-person steam shower. Electric controls ensure just the right temperature and time for a steam. The horizontal window lets in natural light, and the soaring tops of towering Garry oaks and arbutus outside again make you feel like you’re in a canopy of trees.

“I think it’s important to make a house function,” says Baker, which is why the spacious dressing area (complete with lots of built-in storage and a skylight) is located directly off the ensuite, and beside that is the laundry area. “This has been the

best thing ever!” grins Jennifer enthusiastically. Definitely a practical place to locate the laundry, and it’s still accessible from the public side.

Back down the stairs, through the atrium and beyond, is Lorne’s private office with a built-in cherry desk and a stunning ocean view through a panoramic window. This wing also houses symmetrical bedrooms, each with their own full-piece washrooms. Jennifer, who runs a communications company, uses the east-facing bedroom as her home office. In addition, this area houses a mud-room (appropriately dubbed “Marcus’s jacuzzi” — Marcus is the couple’s one-year-old Boxer) and the electrical room.

The lower level includes more useful spaces: a media room with vertical grain cherry panelling, projector and hidden access door; a large closet for the stereo controls; a temperature-controlled wine cellar; and a home gym with a large full-piece bathroom.

With such a large footprint, “Armada” needed to be designed and built with a few green technologies in mind. High-efficiency in-floor radiant heat throughout, top-quality low-E windows, power blinds to minimize solar gain and to contain heat, non-cellulose insulation, low voltage lighting and multi-zoned controls keep the house energy efficient.

Walking through the Poraykos’ home, the solid sense of balance manifests in every detail; the yin and yang in pitch-perfect harmony. Both inside and out are endless examples of the equilibrium between earth, air, fire and water — all with minimalistic intention. This congruity springs directly from the cooperation of all the parties involved in bringing this house together. While Miller steered the ship on its 14-month-long course, “Armada” wouldn’t exist without an extraordinary high level of skill and lots of hard work. With open minds, everyone worked together, building the house “one step at a time” says Miller, who credits site foreman Peter Robilliard of Abstract Developments for much of the project’s success. “Without someone as talented and as willing to push the limits as him, it wouldn’t be like that. It wouldn’t have turned out the way it did without his expertise.”

Trust also played a huge role. Nygaard says the Poraykos were “really receptive to her ideas” and gave her a lot of freedom to create the interior design. Baker was particularly impressed with Mike Miller and the crew at Abstract. “They nailed it. It’s really that good,” he says. “That’s rare, to find builders who care enough to get it that good, and who respect the design.”

And then the Poraykos. “They really went the extra mile as clients,” says Miller. They did their research and trusted their instincts, and then they put their faith in the professionals.

“Ultimately everybody did all of the things they needed to do, beautifully, and the whole project came out superbly. It’s an amazing house,” says Baker.

Amazing indeed. ▼

Julie Nixon was unequivocally wowed by the light-drenched atrium of “Armada”. She could have spent hours at the top of the stairs, awed by the changing swaths of light shifting from every direction.