

NICE HOUSE



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THE MONACELLI PRESS

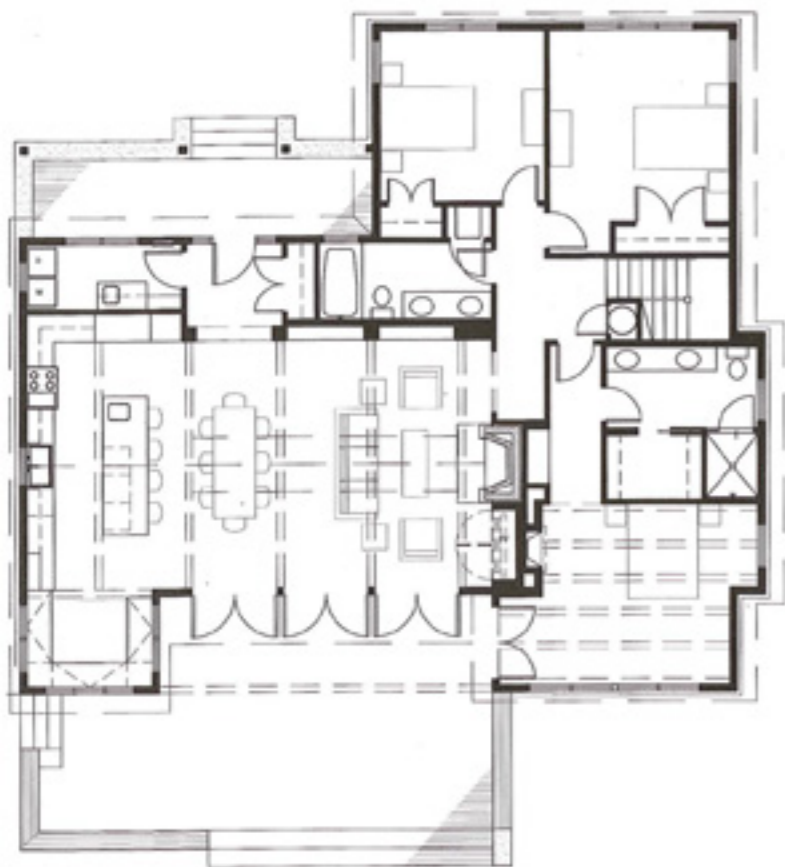


CARPENTER HOUSE

Whidbey Island, Washington



STUART SILK ARCHITECTS



Weathered pilings surrounded by driftwood and seaweed create an unusual but site-specific landscape for this house.

T HIS HOUSE IS A SINGULARLY LATE ARRIVAL in the migration from the East to the Pacific Northwest that began in the mid-nineteenth century. The five-bedroom structure sits in a continuous string of beach houses that line the shore of Whidbey Island, a long peninsula that juts into the bay separating Seattle from Vancouver. Looking as if it were conceived on the Atlantic coast around southern New England, its architectural expression is not exactly native to its situation, but like a good guest, it has impeccable manners as well as some interesting things to say.

The cross-gable massing, stained wood shingles, and flat, painted wood trim tie the design directly to eastern colonial revival prototypes, a pedigree that is corroborated by multipane double-hung windows and French doors, roof pitch, projecting eaves, and cornice returns that frame small attic bedrooms at the gable ends. Each element is perfectly proportioned, nothing appears to be out of place, and there is so little rhetoric that at first, one is not sure if the house is the work of a design professional or a skilled carpenter who was respectful of vernacular patterns. A closer look reveals a high level of sophistication and an impressive degree of control. A splayed lower roof conceals multiple irregularities around the perimeter and, in combination with the T-shaped plan, makes the house appear smaller than it really is. Projecting pergolas on the sea and land sides create an intermediate zone of partial shade, while a raised stone base protects the first floor from storm surges. Both elements enrich the composition while they help to integrate the house with the surrounding landscape.





Stuart Silk did allow the vernacular of Pacific Northwest architecture to emerge on the interior, where the regional infatuation with combinations of natural wood and stone, expressive structure, and great soaring spaces is revealed in the twenty-foot-tall living room/dining room/kitchen. It is a remarkable room: large but not overwhelming, simple in concept and rich in detail, and perfectly scaled for comfort. Walls of stained alder bathe the space in a warm, unifying glow, while the measured spacing of trusses and the disciplined alignment of cabinets, windows, doors, and transoms organize the architecture as a background for the daily activities of a large extended family on vacation. Over the course of the day, sunlight from clerestory windows shifts up and down the room, from the kitchen at one end, to the dining table in the middle, to the monumental stone chimney at the other end. The fireplace becomes a magnet on cool nights, while on sunny days, the great room serves as a vestibule to the seaside terrace and the beach beyond. The U-shaped window seat in a nook off the kitchen is a spot for family breakfasts, lunch for two or three, and rainy-day card games. Its intimate dimensions provide just the right amount of privacy and relief from the implicit sociability of the great room.

The decor matches the purpose: comfortable furniture, fabrics in solid colors with bold stripes, and a minimum of loose accessories. It's all very simple and direct, although one upstairs bedroom is fitted with star-covered blankets and a bed decked out like a speedboat, touches that probably make that room the first choice of every child under seven.

The bottom chord of the trusses establishes a comfortable ceiling height for a sitting room; the space surrounding the rafters and clerestory windows provides the atmosphere.



Interior spaces include the kitchen, the children's dormitory, a guest bedroom, and a fireplace with a supply of

logs. Everything about this house speaks to the powerful connection between architecture and memory.

