



BELOW: IN THE LIVING ROOM, THE DESIGNERS SQUARED OFF A SHARP CORNER (STILL EVIDENT ON THE EXTERIOR) AND INSTALLED A GRID OF ART-DISPLAY SHELVES. PIECES INCLUDE A JADE HORSE FROM TAIWAN, A CHINESE TEMPLE URN CIRCA 1670, A 1997 HOPI DEER KACHINA BY PAT HOWESA, A 1997 HOPI DANCER KACHINA BY LOREN HONYOUTI, A TURKISH MINIATURE BY HAYDAR HATEMI AND A 1998 LATVIAN WATERCOLOR, *ALEXANDER NEVSKY CATHEDRAL*, BY F.R. **OPPOSITE TOP:** H2K DESIGN LOWERED PART OF THE LIVING ROOM THAT HAD BEEN USED AS A DINING AREA AND TRANSFORMED IT INTO A COMFORTABLE, CASUAL SEATING AREA. **OPPOSITE BOTTOM:** IN THE KITCHEN, OWNER KATHY WOLFE WORKS ON A BONSAI. THE KITCHEN PLAN WAS LEFT INTACT, BUT ALL OF THE SURFACES ARE NEW, AS ARE LIGHTING FIXTURES AND APPLIANCES. THE FOREGROUND COUNTER IS TOPPED WITH MESQUITE WOOD. ARTWORKS INCLUDE AN AFRICAN MASK, A MASK FROM THE GALAPAGOS AND TRIBAL JEWELRY FROM NEW GUINEA.

Brian and Kathy Wolfe moved into their new home in 2001, but they didn't make any changes for a few years. After all, the unusual, imposing house, designed by architect Roger Newell in the early 1980s, is a powerful piece of architecture.

Rising out of a four-acre site on a wooded hillside overlooking the

flower fields near Bow, northwest of Mount Vernon, the unadorned, two-story structure features multiple sharp angles, inside and out—and few of them are the predictable 90 degrees. Nevertheless, the Wolfes loved the house enough to snap it up, settle in and see how it worked. “Except we did add a few doors,” Kathy notes, “because there weren't any. Not even to the master bathroom.”

As time passed, they noticed drawbacks more serious than a lack of doors. Aside from the home's early-'80s palette, which included an abundance of shiny black tile and mirrors, and a “Hugh Hefner-inspired” oversize whirlpool tub in the master bedroom, the interiors were poorly lit—a significant problem for the art-collecting Wolfes. Kathy is a docent for the Museum of Northwest Art in La Conner, and the couple has a large collection of international and Northwest art. More fundamentally, the circulation was awkward, and “it was a little severe with all the angles,” Kathy says.

The couple wanted the project to be a do-it-yourself fix but quickly realized they were getting in over their heads. Poring over past issues of *Seattle Homes & Lifestyles*, they admired a house designed by Garrett Kuhlman of H2K Design. Soon the Wolfes had hired the Stanwood-based firm of Kuhlman and partner Wendy Kennedy.

“Most design firms have a ‘look,’” notes Kuhlman, “but we try to find our clients' aesthetic and work with it.” With this project, the designers were thrilled to have the Wolfes' art collection for inspiration, but they also had to “embrace the angles,” Kennedy says—meaning they had to respect the existing architecture, since it was the strength of that architecture (and the inspired site) that originally appealed to the clients.

The architecture has been duly respected, but the renovation still amounted to major surgery. In the most significant structural change, the designers lowered a large section of the living room, transforming the former dining area into an informal TV-watching den. The designers also cut off one sharply angled corner of the living room, squaring the room with a grid of art-display shelves. They replaced the glitzy tile-and-mirror fireplace finishes with bronze and sycamore, in keeping with the “organic but textural” quality of the new interiors and the understated, natural-toned furnishings specified by Kennedy.





BELOW: AT ONE END OF THE HOUSE'S PRIMARY AXIS, A PORTAL REVEALS A COMPELLING VIEW OF TREES. **TOP RIGHT:** IN THE MASTER BEDROOM, THE DESIGNERS REPLACED A LARGE WHIRLPOOL TUB WITH THIS MORE MODEST MODEL; THE VIEW REMAINS DRAMATIC. **LOWER RIGHT:** THIS CARVED JADE SCULPTURE FROM MONTEVIDEO, URUGUAY, IS THE FIRST PIECE OF ART BRIAN WOLFE EVER PURCHASED. WHILE SERVING AS A TEENAGE CADET IN THE MERCHANT MARINE 40 YEARS AGO, BRIAN BOUGHT IT—FOR ABOUT \$1.50, HE RECALLS—FROM AN INDIAN WHO PADDED OUT TO HIS SHIP IN A CANOE. **OPPOSITE:** THE "MASK WALL" LINES THE UPSTAIRS HALL WITH PIECES FROM BALI, AFRICA, INDIA, VENICE, ALASKA, CENTRAL AMERICA AND CAMBODIA.





Every interior surface in the house—white oak floors, granite and mesquite counter tops, cross-grain doors, neutrally painted walls and ceilings—is new. To accommodate the varied ceiling heights, new lighting dramatizes the art collection while warming the once-dim interiors, which now serve as a “subtle background for artwork,” Kuhlman notes.

A new bank of southern-exposure windows in the former family room helps reinvent the space as a dining room at the far end of the house. At the opposite end of the 90-foot-long hallway that serves as the house’s primary axis, the designers removed a stained-glass panel so that clear glass now frames a view of nearby trees. To fill a double-height void above the main entry, Kuhlman and Kennedy suspended a trio of elegant Noguchi lamps. Upstairs, in the master suite, the giant whirlpool tub was replaced with a more modest model, and a partial wall now screens it from the bedroom. Complementary organic-toned materials supplant mirrors and flash in the master bath.

Throughout the house, artwork has been positioned and illuminated to offer dramatic visual vignettes that serve as counterpoints to the rich views visible through the many windows: distant fields, surrounding forests and sculptures that highlight the newly landscaped grounds.

The house still projects a powerful architectural presence, but it has been immeasurably warmed and transformed into an ideal gathering place—the Wolfes are inveterate hosts and community activists—as well as a showcase for a colorful, eclectic art collection. ■

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Design Details

INTERIOR DESIGNERS

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LOOKING DOWN THE 90-FOOT-LONG MAIN HALLWAY, WHICH SERVES AS THE HOME'S PRIMARY AXIS, THE ENTRY FOYER AND STAIRS TO THE UPPER STORY ARE TO THE RIGHT; STEPS DOWN TO THE LIVING ROOM ARE TO THE LEFT. ALL OF THE FINISHES, INCLUDING WHITE OAK FLOORS, ARE NEW. ARTWORKS (LEFT TO RIGHT) INCLUDE: *RELEASE THE FALCON*, BY MOU-SIEN TSENG; AN UNTITLED FISH WATERCOLOR BY ELIZABETH PRATT; *WINTER WALK IN SWEDEN*, BY LAVONE NEWELL; *WIND DANCER*, BY JOHN RICHEN (AT FAR END OF HALL); AND *HORIZON: ABSTRACT W/ LINES*, BY CLAYTON MARSH.

