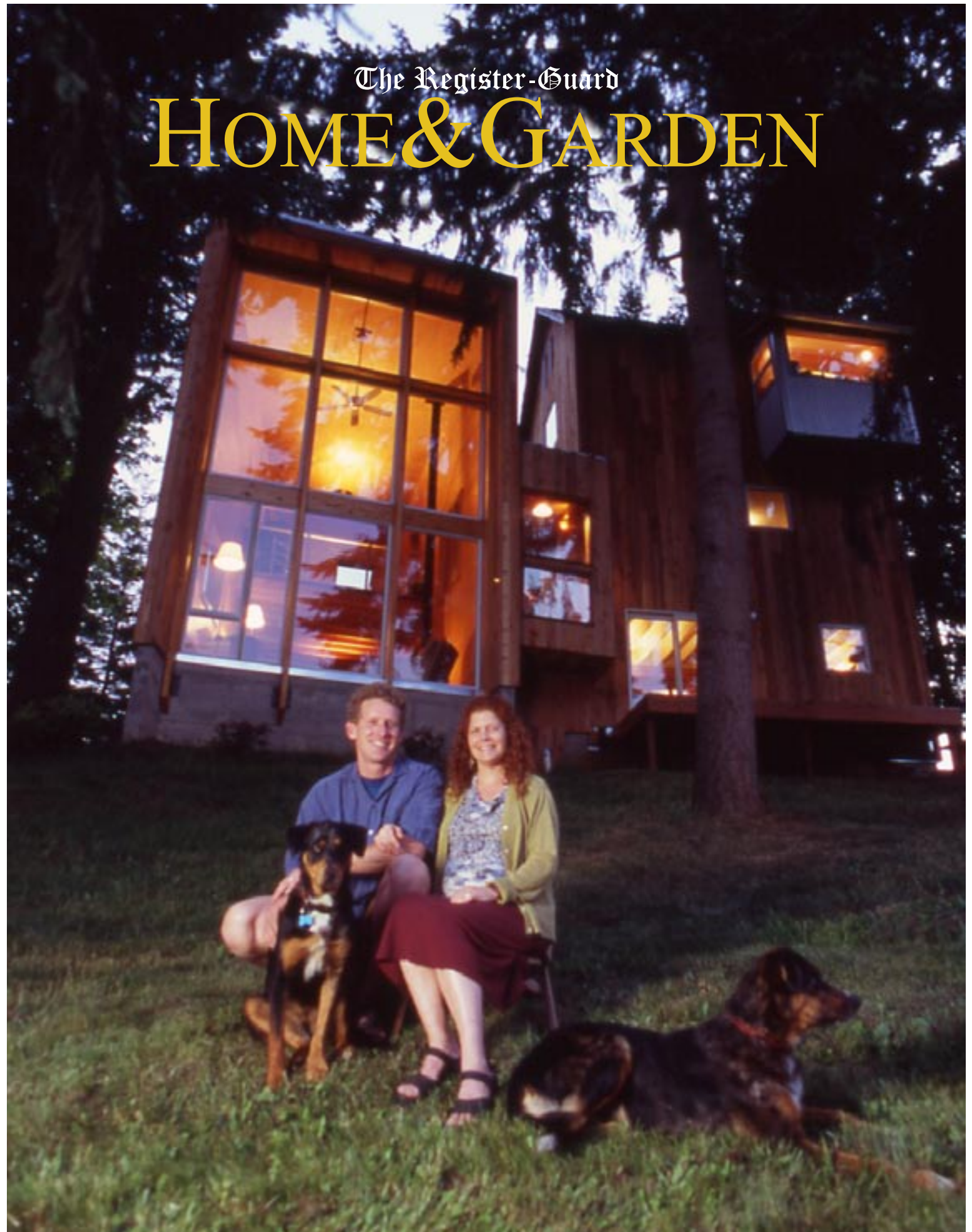


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Bright at home: New owners open “funky” home’s cramped spaces and capture light, views through walls of glass.

Seamus Walsh and Paige Fischer can see the light at the end of their long home renovation and addition project. Actually, they can see the light throughout their “new” house, a one-of-a-kind vision in wood, metal and glass adorned by towering fir trees.

It wasn’t always this way.

When the first-time homeowners moved two years ago to Alpine, near Monroe, it was to a much different house. Essentially a three-story rectangle standing on end, the 1,200-foot house had dark diagonal siding outside and dark paneling inside. Sparse windows failed to let in the already filtered light or capture views of the nearby trees and meadow and distant ridges. Each floor of the 1981 house was only about 400 square feet, dark and cramped with 7-1/2-foot acoustic tile ceilings.

“Even though the house was pretty unusual, I could tell that it was solid,” says Walsh, a custom furniture maker and shipbuilder who has done most of the renovation himself. “The foundation was dry, and there were no pest infestations or structural problems.”

He and Fischer had spent a year looking for a certain property - one with about 5 rural acres, roughly halfway between Eugene and Corvallis, with a shop and room for horses. The Alpine property fit that bill, but they still



had reservations about transforming the house into the home they envisioned.

“We were a little bit intimidated by how funky it was. Our Realtor thought we were nuts,” admits Fischer, a graduate student in forestry at Oregon State University. “But we were excited about

doing something different.”

A 22-foot-high wall of glass spans the east side of the new living room and loft, framing a view of the meadow and barn below. Morning sun streams into the maple-paneled space that expands up and out, wedgelike, to snare every available bit of light and scenery through the giant windows. “Seamus and Paige wanted to open the house and fill it with more natural light,” says Eugene architect Richard Shugar, who designed the 800-square-foot addition that also includes a new entry and stairway.

“When I first saw the house, despite its



Wedge-shaped living room and loft face outward toward glass wall.

outward appearance, I saw that the site had so much potential," recalls Shugar. "Whatever kind of project they wanted to do, I knew it had to capture the site."

The stairway, with window walls front and back, goes a long way toward capturing the site. The heart of the house pulses with light from the windows, and a natural warmth emanates from cedar siding on the walls. The custom stairway has floating wood steps perched on iron brackets rather than traditional risers, adding to a surreal indoor-outdoor connection: "We ended up centering the stair and windows on a view of the big tree on the east side," notes Shugar. "It feels like you're climbing the tree."

The orientation of the home's glass also should allow the building to capture enough solar energy to warm the house adequately for much of the year without getting too hot in the summer.

The airy living room, with its angled ceiling peaking at 22 feet, draws warm air upward in a convection action that should enable the wood stove to heat the house effectively in winter. In summer, the hottest air will exit

through an exhaust fan near the ceiling's highest point.

So far, so good, according to Fischer. "Before, it was usually cold in the house. It was small and dark and never got a lot of sun. It's comfortable now."

All that glass also virtually eliminates the need for daytime artificial lighting. "So many places are sited poorly, and have such little thought given to daylighting, especially in a climate that's so gray and dark most of the time," says Walsh, who grew up in Phoenix. "It's counter-intuitive to build that way. Now it's really nice in here even on gray, wet days."

Old and new in harmony

A complete remodel shed new light and improvements on every part of the original house, which expanded by about 200 square feet with the removal of the old staircase and the addition of a second-floor bathroom.

The first two stories were gutted, making way for a reoriented first-floor kitchen and a large second-floor space that is dividable into two bedrooms for kids (the first is due in July). The low-hanging ceiling panels were removed to help carry the new sense of light and openness throughout every room.

The third-floor master bedroom, which served as the couple's "retreat" during the project, has an open-peaked ceiling and a little "bump-out" office cantilevered from the back side of the house. It also captures views.

Large wood-framed windows now brighten every room, replacing the previous assortment of small, mismatched panes.

New red cedar siding is hung in rain-screen style, meaning the vertical slats are held slightly away from the protective building paper beneath to prevent mold problems through better air circulation.

The exaggerated vertical aspect of the three-story house has given way to a more grounded look with the two-story addition. The knotty siding adds continuity between the home's old and new elements. "The addition doesn't pretend to be part of the original design of the house but it also doesn't clash with it," says Shugar. "There's a kind of

harmony there."

Spans of corrugated metal contrast with the cedar, break up the mass of the building and offer protection to surfaces most exposed to the elements.

Cost-effective, but not easy

Walsh and Fischer, who met while both studied anthropology at Hampshire College in Amherst, Mass., lived in the Bay Area prior to settling in Alpine.

"A fixer-upper in Marin County, more like a tear-down, was about \$350,000," Walsh says, not really joking. So they were happy to find this property for about \$150,000, and budgeted \$50,000 for the remodel.

"It was really hard to imagine how it was all going to come together," says Fischer. "My family (from Portland) stayed away for awhile. They couldn't fathom buying a house and immediately tearing out almost a thousand square feet of it."

The couple say they exceeded - but didn't shatter - their anticipated spending limit. "Everybody told us it would take twice as long and cost twice as much," says Fischer, who chose paint, carpeting and tile. "It may have taken twice as long, but it didn't cost twice as much. We saved on labor and a lot of materials because Seamus was able to build so much himself."

Except for hiring contractors for foundation, drywall, plumbing and vent work, Walsh did most of the building with occasional help from friends and "\$10-an-hour guys."

Walsh even built many light fixtures and lamps, and fashioned rugged but stylish lengths of railing for the stairs and loft from \$1 turnbuckles and cable left by a previous owner.

"A lot of credit goes to Seamus and his exquisite craftsmanship," says Shugar. "I remember being a little bit nervous that he was going to do it all himself, but I think he did a remarkable job."

The homeowners still have some work to finish on the new bathroom, and then plan to focus on landscaping, gardening, tending their chickens and enjoying their two horses and dogs. Strolling the property on a sunny June afternoon, Walsh spots another building challenge, albeit slightly less challenging than the first:

"I've got to remodel the chicken coop next."

**By Joel Gorthy
Photos by Bryan Wesel**