Blue HEAVEN
A BALLARD COUPLE GIVES UP A LIVE-ABOARD LIFESTYLE FOR A CONTEMPORARY HOME WITH A VIEW OF SHILSHOLE BAY

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Donna and Chuck spent 17 years on the water. They first lived together on a 42-foot powerboat moored at Shilshole Bay Marina. Five boats later, though they had expanded their floating home to 85 feet—still at Shilshole—they decided they were ready for solid ground.

The property they found for their home on land is less than a mile from their old moorage. Tucked away in a residential neighborhood above the waterfront, the site has a wide-open view over Ray's Boathouse and the waterfront near the Hiram M. Chittenden Locks.

The couple hoped to capture as much of the view as possible, to minimize noise from an adjacent train track and to build a home they could live in forever—they wanted at least one floor to be wheelchair-accessible. "We so much wanted a garage. And we wanted big shower," Donna says. They also wanted a large cooking area and a place to keep their growing wine collection, one of the hazards of owning a wine distribution business for the past 22 years.

Donna and Chuck also own a vacation home on San Juan Island, and it was there that they were referred to architect Geoff Premo—who also owns an island home—"He felt like we connected, and Geoff sort of understood where we were coming from," Donna recalls. "We both have places on San Juan Island, we both have houses in Seattle, and we both like to take vacations on boats! Plus, they liked what they saw of Premo's work. "We were looking for a contemporary house, and we loved all the work he did."

The couple was eager to get started, but worried the architect that they couldn't start building until they sold their boat. So they put the boat up for sale, and Premo and his team—project principal Dan Wickline, Michael Peterson and Cheryl Click—started on plans for a modern,
comfortable home with reminders of Chuck and Donnah. Life on the water.

Light blue Milestone counter tops flow down the sides of the base cabinets and pour across the kitchen floor. Next to the front door is a narrow, rectangular window a bit like a porthole. Interior walls are white, but reflections from the sky, floors and counter tops make them appear the palest blue.

The architect's willingness to use color was another selling point for the homeowners, "We like blue, and Geoff's not afraid of color" Donna says. "The clients were partial to blue as a color theme in the house. We worked to incorporate that as a strong design sense without it actually overwhelming the whole house," Pretities explains. "So it became a matter of balance, which meant limiting how much and how many blues were used as well as selecting other colors (gray and white) to offset the blues."

Also reminiscent of a life on the water is the walkway from the street to the house. The cedar bridge—"the dock" accessorized with a metal cleat—crosses a "mount" of various grasses, ferns and native sodgers. Structurally, the house is essentially two rectangular volumes set one on top of the other, with the second floor skewed at a 25-degree angle from the main level. The lower box is the kitchen and great room, guest room and bath and two-car garage. The upper box holds an open office, pantry and spacious master suite. Almost every room is oriented toward the water, with huge windows on the main floor and a wall of bi-fold doors across the front of the living and dining space.

"The lower volume parallels the bank and gives maximum exposure to the general view," Wickline explains. "The top volume, of shorter length, is rotated to better orient the upper volume to the view of the Olympics beyond." The angle of the upper level also creates room for a roof deck and a green roof on top of the lower level, and it gives the home a covered front entry.

Another thing the couple lived about the firm's design was how interiors and exteriors work together, "It's something we saw in a lot of (Pretities) homes, whether it was a log-cabin or a contemporary home," Donna says. "They really flowed in and out." The wall of slide-fold doors that opens to the first-floor deck accomplishes this flow in their house.

Outside the second-floor office area is a green-roof garden on the triangle created by the juxtaposition of the two boxes. Planted with a variety of sedums, it serves as a colorful foreground to the water view, reduces stormwater runoff and helps moderate heat inside the house.

Arching the structure is a basement for storage and the mechanical workings of the home. It also holds a 470-square-foot wine cellar, visible from above through a rectangular glass window in the dining room floor. "The two things we probably love the most in this house are the garage and the spacious shower in our master bedroom," Donna says with a laugh. It's probably no coincidence that those are two things they couldn't have on the boat.

For resource information, see Sources, page 78.