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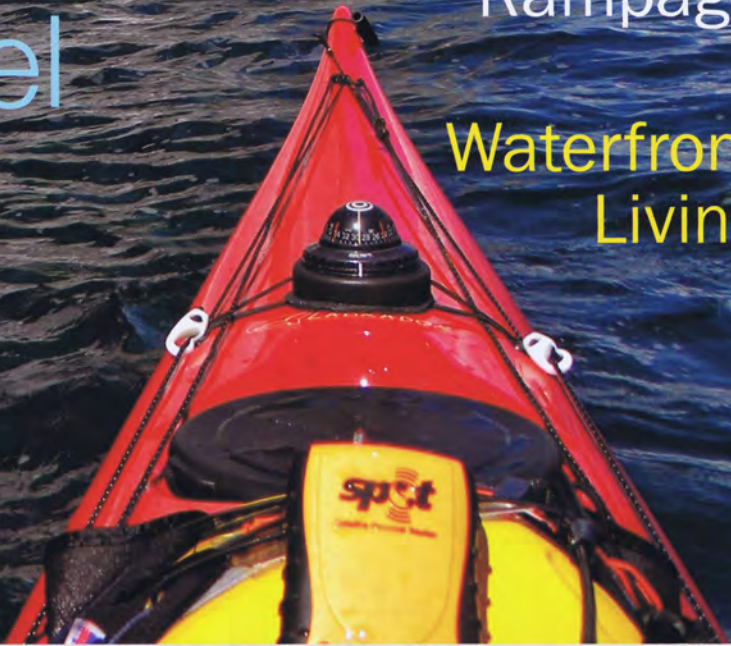
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On the Waterfront

Waterfront Living in the Pacific Northwest



Refined Over Time

Gig Harbor, Washington

by Russ Young

As you come up the driveway of the Gig Harbor, Washington home of Mary Dicke and Jeff Robinson, it's hard not to notice the brightly colored kids' play-structure near the bottom of the hill.

Considering that their two children are grown—their daughter is an attorney; their son is working on an MBA—and they do not yet have any grandchildren, it might seem to be out of place.

Actually, it's indicative of the approach the couple has taken toward remodeling and refining the waterfront house they've owned since 1985. Although Mary and Jeff seem to be aging quite gracefully, some of the changes they've made to their home are in anticipation of the limitations that old age may well bring. And they're also thinking ahead to the potential joys the future may hold, such as grandkids.

At the same time, they've paid gentle homage to the past, particularly to when their children were kids.

Consider their son's former bedroom. A railroad train that was painted on the wall when he was very young is still featured, although its surroundings have been painted and repainted, and are now mostly covered with an impressive collection of sports memorabilia, including a collection of baseballs that have been autographed by some of the game's greats. There's also a selection of Jeff's collection of bobblehead dolls—he's not sure how



Homeowners Jeff Robinson and Mary Dicke



many he owns, but says there are “hundreds.” Although Jeff is a life-long New York Mets fan, two of his favorites are of Seattle Mariner icons Ken Griffey Jr. and Ichiro Suzuki. (The most unique bobblehead in the collection is one of Mary, dressed in the robes she wears as a juvenile-court commissioner. That one resides in her office, though.)

Although the bedroom that was their daughter’s doesn’t look like it was when she was living at home, Mary shows the back of the door to reveal the way the entire room looked back then: covered in photographs, as well as bits of memorabilia from childhood through adolescence. And Jeff and Mary like to point to the concrete floor of the utility room, where they have applied a protective coating to preserve notes written on it by their children and their friends. Many are joyful; some are wistful. They all make it clear that this was the house that the kids and their friends liked to hang out at the most.

Originally from New York—she grew up on Long Island, he’s from Brooklyn and they met while both were in law school at Hofstra University—the couple moved to Gig Harbor 40 years ago. “A family member asked if UPS delivered this far out,” Mary recalled. They rented a small house until the opportunity to purchase their current house from a friend came along eight years later.

There was a major remodel in 1993, in which they maintained the footprint of the original 1962 house, but rearranged the floor plan, took walls down to the studs, relocated stairs and vaulted the popcorn ceilings, among other changes.

Over the last couple of years, Jeff and Mary have worked with architect Don Larkin and designer Autumn Donovan (*see sidebar*) on what started out as a relatively small project—a larger nook off the kitchen—that morphed into an impressive



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addition to the home in the form of a sunroom.

It is indeed a sunny space. "Boy, do we get sun," said Mary. "Major sun," added Jeff. Those aren't complaints; they're acknowledgement of the importance of sunshine in the often-gray Pacific Northwest. The couple marvels at how the atrium-style roof and the NanaWall folding window-wall, and the primarily southern exposure, allows them to see the sun rise and set most of the year. They have a view that stretches across Carr Inlet as far as Oregon's Mt. Hood on a clear day. Closer in, they can watch the eagles, seals, otters and the occasional orcas that may fly or swim by.

What appears to be hardware flooring in the sunroom is actually a ceramic tile product. It lends itself

well to the heating element that lies beneath it. That makes it a favorite place for the couple's pair of burly Labrador Retrievers (one black, one yellow) to stretch out and snooze after being outside on a drizzly afternoon. The floor tiles are sturdy enough to handle repeated cleanups of muddy paw prints and wet dog hair.

The kitchen and the lower level of the home have also been substantially remodeled, and that's where some of the changes that Autumn Donovan refers to as "aging in place" become evident. That means thinking about the dimensions, fixtures and materials in recognition that the homeowners are getting older, and allowing for some of the possibilities it brings. That ranges from making sure the kitchen aisle is wide enough for a wheelchair (strictly just in case) to

the use of single-handle plumbing fixtures, doors with levers rather than knobs, motion-activated lighting and a curbless shower entry.

The lower level has a small kitchen, with a bedroom and bathroom that would accommodate live-in help should that become a requirement in the future.

This is all in recognition of Mary and Jeff's desire to stay in their home for the long term. "We've worked a lot of hours for many years," she said. "And we haven't always had much time to enjoy being here."

That's not to say that their home is only about its future and its history. Some of the recent changes are about today's desires; Jeff got the Toto toilet that he saw while visiting Japan. It has several electronic features, including a heated seat, auto-flush, an automatic

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lid and a night-lit bowl.

Mary had wanted an indoor barbeque during the latest remodel—she ultimately didn't get it—but admits that a NanaWall window system between the dining area and outdoor deck works well for year-round grilling.

Although both of their children currently live in Southern California, they have provided input on changes and refinements to the home in which they grew up. The process even extended to the "Custom Made For ..." placard on the front of the new Bluestar range in the kitchen. After considerable back-and-forth between Mary, Jeff and their son and daughter, they drew on a Van Morrison lyric. It now reads "... Where The Water Runs Clear."

Jeff and Mary's home is a reminder of the past, and a reflection of the present, while recognizing what the future may hold. Perhaps we can all learn from that. 



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Anton is an attorney at the law firm of Reed Longyear focusing his practice on helping clients develop proactive planning solutions in the areas of estate planning, tax, and business.

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