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What makes a perfect second home? For a Mercer Island family, it's a place on the water that feels remote without being so, nurtures communal interaction and can be hosed down when it's time to leave.

Accessible in a little over an hour (with no ferry lines!), the acre and a half of waterfront on Fidalgo Island feels like a world unto itself. Interspersed among a wealth of mature fruit trees, the main house, garage, guesthouse and sauna emerge gracefully out of the landscape like the islands they face on tranquil Similk Bay. "We wanted a house that is just the right size for us and our two children and offers a place for guests," says the wife, a former Microsoft employee. "And we wanted it all to be harmonious, simple and comfortable."

Designed by David Foster and built by Habitat Construction, the buildings are functional and fun and make clever use of space. In the main house, designed on one level for accessibility, two perpendicular

wings frame glorious views while enhancing the sense of isolation from neighbors. The centerpiece of the design is the great room, with its cathedral ceiling, exposed trusses and a double-sided fireplace that both separates and connects the living and kitchen/dining areas.

Floors are radiant-heated concrete painted a glossy black to set off the furnishings, and wall colors are based on a warm neutral palette from Donald Kaufman. Lighting designer Susan Rhodes embedded halogen tracks into the crossbeams, hung iridescent

"We wanted a beachy feel without it being a theme," says designer Robin Chell.

glass pendants over the island and added tulip-shaped sconces in the dining area. Furnishings, selected with the help of interior designer Robin Chell, were chosen for their stylish good looks, durability and economy. Colorful FLOR carpet tiles pack a lot of visual punch throughout the house, which was furnished with affordable pieces



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: THE L-SHAPED HOUSE EMBRACES A TERRACE WOVEN WITH MOSS AND THYME; FRUIT TREES DIVIDE THE MAIN HOUSE FROM THE GUESTHOUSE, AT REAR. THE BEDROOM BOASTS A SERENE VIEW OF SIMILK BAY, AS DOES THE NEIGHBORING BATHTUB. WEEKENDS ARE ALL ABOUT FOOD, SO THE OWNERS SPLURGED ON THE KITCHEN (OPPOSITE, RIGHT), INCORPORATING CHERRY CABINETS AND A VIKING RANGE. IT'S JUST A FEW STEPS TO THE DINING AREA (OPPOSITE, LEFT), WHERE A LONG TEAK TABLE ACCOMMODATES UP TO 10 PEOPLE FOR FRESH CLAMS AND CRABS.

from Crate and Barrel, Room & Board and IKEA.

"When we are up here, we are always making a meal or planning the next one, so we splurged on the kitchen," says the wife. The room is equipped with a six-burner Viking range, Fisher-Paykel dishwasher drawers, cherry cabinets and seaweed-colored granite counters. Clerestory windows above provide cross breezes and orchard views. A teak table in the dining area comfortably seats 10.

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In the living room, multitextured seating clusters around the hearth, and a wall of cabinets stores crafts, games and wine. Barn doors slide open to reveal a cheerful playroom and a compact office for the husband, a research physician. Twelve-foot-wide glass doors open the living room to the expansive terrace, where landscape architect Ken Philp wove concrete pavers with trails of moss and thyme.

In the private wing, two children's rooms feel youthful and fresh with their brightly patterned bedding and carpeting. "We wanted a beachy feel without it being a theme," says Chell. Down the hall, the master suite enjoys views in two directions; soft tones of yellow and caramel accentuate the sunny feeling of the space.

A short walk through lavender beds and apple, pear, peach and plum trees leads to the guesthouse, which easily accommodates eight or more visitors. A fenced cottage garden separates the guesthouse from the Scandinavian sauna, with its intoxicating aroma of cedar. The bay beyond beckons with crabbing, clamming and beachcombing.

"At home, we are all off doing our own activities," says the wife, "but here we just spend time together. We love it!" ■

Contributing Editor Lisa Kennedy is a Mercer Island interior designer and freelance writer.