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WINTER 1999

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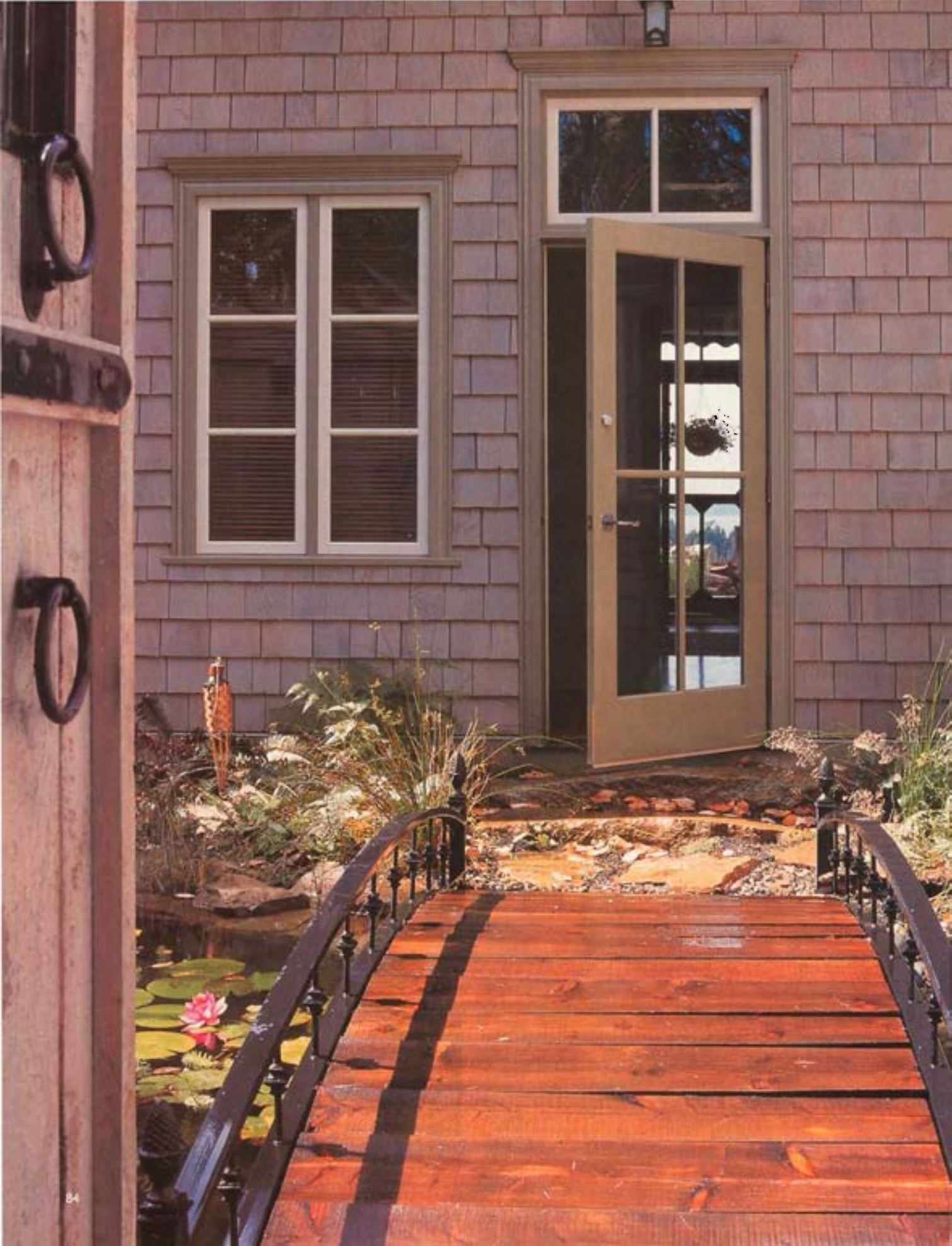
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THE DALONS WANTED A SIMPLE COTTAGE FOR QUIET LIVING. BUILDING IT ON THEIR REMOTE SITE WAS FAR FROM EASY, BUT THAT'S THE PRICE THEY GLADLY PAID FOR THEIR...



Island *life*

BY ROBERTA J. PETERSON

When Richard Dalon agreed to help build his own 2,400-square-foot cottage on a remote island off the coast of British Columbia, he had never constructed anything. "My background is in philosophy, about as far as you can get from building. I had absolutely no experience in construction or carpentry; I wasn't even good with a hammer," he says.

But Richard and his wife, Mary Jane, wanted to move away from the crowds. Richard is a semiretired environmental consultant; Mary Jane works part-time in the medical field in Vancouver. They had always lived in big cities, but their priorities changed as they grew older.

"You come to appreciate the value of quietness," Richard reflects. "You want a bit of serenity in your life, to be part of the environment. I found I wanted to see the stars and experience my surroundings; to enjoy wildlife."

As the couple evaluated what they wanted in a home setting, they began to look at islands off the coast of Vancouver. "We realized you just can't get that far from the rat race on the mainland," Richard says. "There's something about the sense of separation on an island. You are cut off in every way."

ABOVE A pink water lily flourishes in the 8x20-foot goldfish pond in the courtyard. **LEFT** Nine-foot stained cedar walls surround the courtyard. The bridge was built from surplus interior flooring. **BELOW** Ironwork and Russian pavers contribute a sense of age to the garden area. The pergola from the courtyard to the entry creates a sense of enclosure for the walkway.





The Dalons found designer David Sorensen through a display in a Vancouver store. Richard liked the style of houses shown and hired Sorensen to redo their Vancouver townhouse.

"It was right downtown in the middle of things," Sorensen remembers of the townhouse. "I was living on Mayne Island at the time, and I would come over on the ferry to meet with them. Finally one time they decided to come to Mayne and talk with me there."

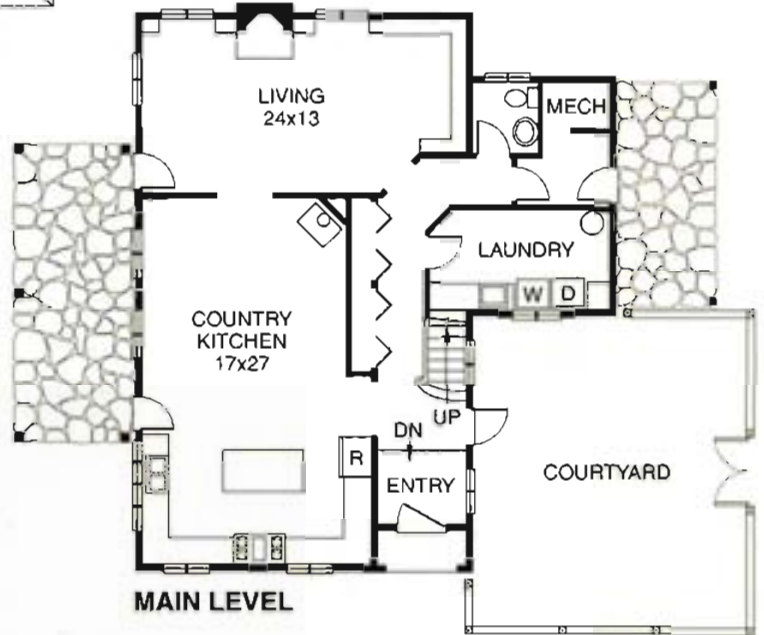
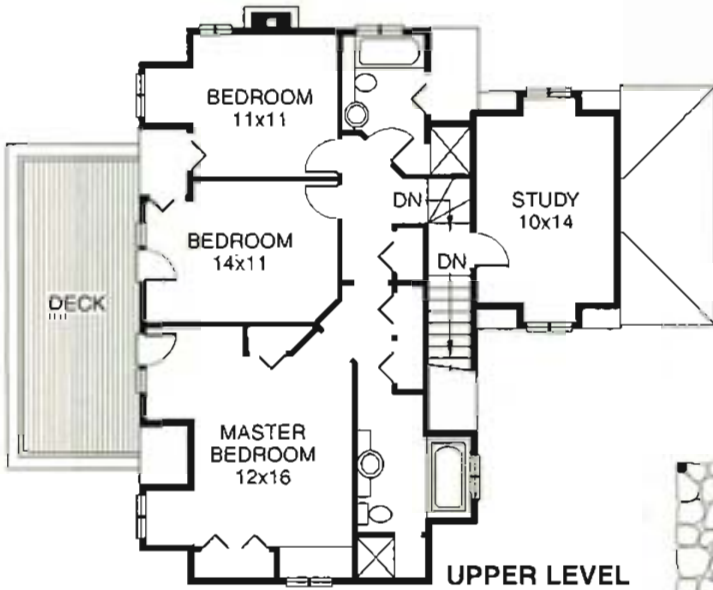
The Dalons fell in love with the island on that first visit. They decided to sell the townhouse and build on Mayne. With Sorensen's help, they started an exhaustive search that ended when they discovered a 10-acre site with a wooded setting and dramatic views.

One of the Gulf Islands in the Georgia Strait, Mayne is 11 miles from Vancouver and the mainland. Home to 900 permanent residents, the 5-square-mile island can be reached only by a ferry that runs throughout the day or by charter float plane.



Plan Number 32293

Total Living Area:	2,330
Main Level:	1,225
Upper Level:	1,105
Bedrooms:	3
Bathrooms:	2½
To Order Plans:	Page 141
Blueprint Price Code:	D



Please note:
The photographed home may have been modified to suit homeowner preferences. For example, the hallway niche is not shown and the master bath is organized to suit the homeowners. If you order plans have a builder or design professional check them against the photographs to confirm actual construction details.



OPPOSITE TOP Richard Dalon calls his enclosed courtyard The Cloister. **OPPOSITE BOTTOM** The front door is a shaded, welcoming place, and a favorite spot of Sascha, the Dalons' dog. Although Richard and Mary Jane enjoy sharing their property with deer, wire netting provides the young trees protection against their visits. **LEFT** The Dalons' home, with its breathtaking views, sits 450 feet above sea level at the end of a new quarter-mile drive. Because of rules set by the Island Trust, created to preserve the Gulf Islands, a 10-acre lot was required for building.



Should You Help Build Your Home?

Richard and Mary Jane Dalon's home was built for about \$100 per square foot, largely because Richard helped with construction. But before you plan to assist with your construction project, consider:

- Can you arrange to take time from your regular work? Building a house isn't something most people can do effectively in their spare time. Richard took nearly nine months off, treating the project as a full-time job.

- Are the savings worth the lost income? The Dalons saved the cost of hiring additional labor, which is

hard to find on an island. But Richard also wanted to be actively involved in creating his home, and assisting with design decisions on-site. Whatever your reasons, home builders associations warn that "helping" builders can sometimes actually result in a higher final tab.

- Is the builder enthusiastic about your role in the project? Is he patient? Has he allowed an owner to assist in building before? What about liability for construction quality? Builders are understandably reluctant to stand behind work—and workers—they don't control.

- Do you have any experience in construction or carpentry? Few designers and builders would be willing to take on an amateur. In most cases, it would be better to try your hand at some smaller post-construction projects, such as building a deck.

An excellent resource for those interested in helping with their home's construction is *The Real Goods/Independent Builder: Designing and Building a House Your Own Way* by Sam Clark; Chelsea Green Publishing Co., White River Junction, Vermont; 1996.

Building a house on an island would require many special considerations. Getting supplies to the site would be a challenge, but the first obstacle was locating the right craftsmen, especially since Richard and Mary Jane wanted a home a little out of the ordinary by Mayne standards.

Richard had moved to British Columbia from Pennsylvania, where he learned to appreciate older houses. He wanted the new home to include "lots of interior detail," such as wide moldings, true divided-light windows, and high ceilings. In the Vancouver area, he says, big, open contemporary houses are more the norm.

Sorensen works more with classic architectural styles. "English and French styles are my favorites, but I like to borrow from the best of traditional architecture in the U.S. and Canada. French country and Georgian are popular

back East," he says, referring to Toronto and southern Ontario, where he does most of his designing and building. "For the Dalons' house, I combined the best of what I'd seen in the city of Victoria with the Dalons' requirements. It's a very classical design, but not slavishly so."

The house had to revolve around the enclosed garden Richard calls The Cloister. "It was more than just a space to him," Sorensen explains. "It was important to the spiritual purpose of the house. So we started all our designing

OPPOSITE The front entry hall features floor-to-ceiling cupboards and drawers for storage; a lighted, decorative recess adds depth to the space. The pegged fir floors, finished with oil and stain, were milled from trees on the property. **BELOW** Casement windows offer a wraparound view from the family room, which serves as sitting room, library, and music room. The Rumford fireplace, purchased in the United States, features a small firebox designed to radiate heat into the room rather than up the chimney.





there." Mary Jane wanted the second floor to be incorporated within the roofline; she didn't want the sense of a grand manor house.

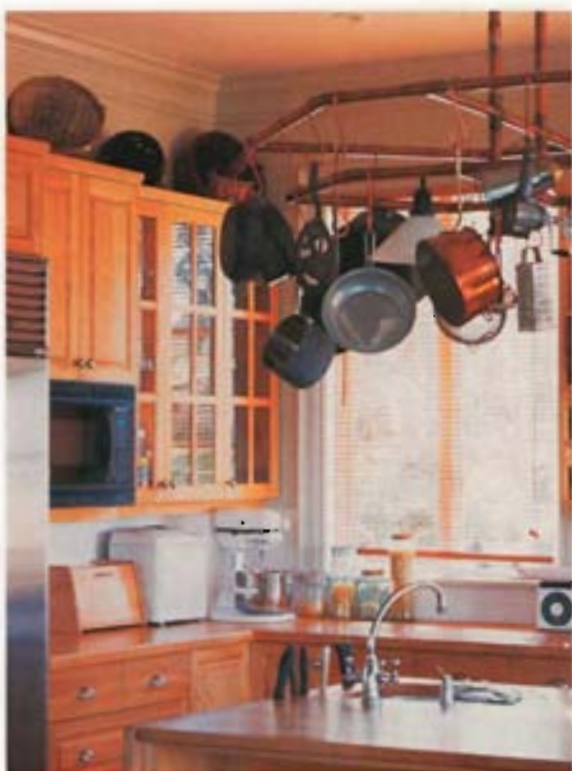
Sorensen worked within both requirements. They sited the house to catch the sun's full arc, so from anywhere within the house there would always be access to a view of the outdoors.

The style of the Dalon house, which Sorensen describes as a cottage with elements of Shingle style and classic French windows, is very unusual for new construction on Mayne Island and throughout the area. "Our here, there

tends to be a very rustic approach. The homes are euphemistically called West Coast contemporaries. In reality, they are a mishmash of design approaches."

Richard loves the reactions of his visitors when they enter the house for the first time. "They talk about how warm it seems, and how they feel at home as soon as they walk in," he explains. "That was exactly the feeling I was trying to create."

To build the Dalons' unusual home, Sorensen helped solve the labor problem by introducing



FAR LEFT The kitchen was designed as an open room with ample space for cooking, eating, and visiting with friends. Kitchen cabinets are ash with pewter knobs; countertops are solid maple. Both propane gas and electricity can be used to power the large stove, which is convenient for frequent power outages. The 4x6-foot island features built-in cupboards, a wet bar, and shelves for dish storage.

LEFT Richard fashioned the decorative pot rack in the kitchen from 1-inch copper tubes, soldered together. The kitchen opens onto a veranda and provides views to the south.

BELOW High ceilings and wide window moldings throughout the house help create the ambience of a much older home.





the couple to his brother, John, a contractor in Toronto. The four talked, and the Sorensens agreed to take on the project. But a building assistant would be necessary—and not easy to find on remote Mayne. They asked Richard to consider helping. He readily agreed, since he wanted to be closely involved with the project.

His contributions as an assistant started slowly. “At first, all I was able to do was some crude nailing. But I picked things up as we went along. Simple things that they assumed anyone could do—like remembering to allow an eighth

of an inch when you saw—I messed up.

“I learned how important it is to know little tricks the Sorensens taught me. The only way I was able to learn, though, was to make the mistakes first. Then they would step in and show me a better way, and it would make sense. It required a great deal of patience on their part, but they were good guys and great teachers.”

Among the first steps for building the home was constructing a quarter-mile road to the property; next came installing a septic system. “There’s lots to think of when you build on an island,”



FAR LEFT The Dalons designed their custom-made bed with built-in shelves and drawers underneath. The window seat also incorporates built-in drawers. **LEFT** Floor-to-ceiling cupboards and drawers between the master bedroom and bath provide additional storage. **BELOW LEFT** Richard, designer David Sorensen, and contractor John Sorensen installed the decorative cedar shingles by hand because they weren't able to obtain nail guns. The aluminum grillwork below the roof allows air to circulate under the eaves. **BELOW** Mirrors on the cabinet doors leave space for windows in the master bath. The shower is tucked under the sloping roof.





Richard explains. "Your water and septic system is your lifeline. It's very important to do it right. We are reliant on our own well water. And I wanted to use a septic system available in the States that wasn't accepted in Canada yet, so it took some time to get it approved."

The 10-acre lot had to be attached to the public utilities, but that wasn't enough. "We lose power very often in winter out here; we're very vulnerable," Richard says. "If something happens in Victoria, on the island, or even here on our property—in any of those cases, we lose power, and we aren't very high on the list for getting it restored. So designing and installing the right generator system was essential."

A few standard building supplies are available on the island, but arrangements had to be made to ferry most of the materials to the site. For some construction supplies, logistics were more complicated.

"It wasn't like building a house in the Midwest," Richard says. "We had to be sure we had the right amount of everything, and at the right time." For instance, they had to be ready for the concrete supplier the moment he arrived.

Since transporting materials could get expensive and storage space was at a premium, minimizing waste became a priority. "We carefully counted the trees and selected the views for windows," Sorensen says. "The trees that had to come down were milled for flooring; nothing was wasted."

Richard personally carted off any unavoidable waste, transferring it by truck on the

Windows

In Richard Dalon's opinion, there are two ways to approach windows. The first is what he calls shotgun windows: huge, open panes that allow those inside to see everything outside. They are common in contemporary houses.

"We set out instead to frame our favorite views," he says. "As we were building the house, we would find a view we enjoyed—a particular perspective of the water, or the forest, or a vista including other islands—and we would build

the window specifically in that spot as a frame for that view."

"How windows fit into a facade is important to me," designer David Sorensen says. "I think it's the most important architectural detail. I'm always trying to design windows with distinctive shapes and glazing patterns."

Richard originally wanted outward-opening French windows, until he learned their cost. His second choice was true divided-light windows, meaning each pane

of glass in a window is separate. "I found out that those were almost as expensive as the French windows. So I started searching for Plan C." The answer, he says, was a brand of window with fixed dividers and a single pane.

"The dealer proved to me you can't tell the difference from true divided-light windows. It's all one piece of glass, but the dividers are permanent, and the effect is the same. It's a compromise, but one I am happy with," he says.

ferry. "We couldn't wait until the end, as you might in a standard building project," Richard says. "We kept the site very clean, and this was important in making the job efficient."

There were no cranes on the island, so the three partners had to construct a pulley system and use brute force to hoist rafters atop the two-story framework. "That's when we realized how old we were," Richard says. "It might have been easy at 19, but at 50..."

The Dalons' three children, all in their 20s and living in nearby Vancouver, helped build on weekends. "Even though they no longer live at home, they became a part of the house through helping; it turned the building process into a family experience," Richard says.

Inside the house, Richard says the kitchen was the most important room to him. "I do all the cooking, and people like to visit with me there while I work, so I wanted it big enough that they don't get in the way."

Richard's favorite place is The Cloister, a quiet outdoor enclosure on the northeast side. "It's mild here in winter, with tulips showing up as early as January. But it gets very hot in deep



ABOVE Richard and Sascha enjoy walks on Mayne Island, taking advantage of the solitude and wildlife that attracted Richard to the location. **OPPOSITE BOTTOM** A secondary bedroom beneath the eaves features a window seat with built-in drawers. **OPPOSITE TOP** The smaller bathroom on the second floor makes the most of a tight space. The refinished claw-foot tub takes center stage, with a shower stall located behind a door to the right. Fir floors have the same finish as those downstairs. **BOTTOM** An upper-level deck allows views above the treetops. In addition to wildflowers and forest animals, Richard and Mary Jane often glimpse killer whales and sea lions off the coast.





summer, and there are few places where you can be comfortable outside," Richard says. "I designed this as a special place where there is little direct sun. It's a great place for solitude."

The Dalons are convinced locating their new house on an island was the right decision for them, even though they aren't ready for total isolation.

"Out here, we are surrounded by deer and other wildlife all year long," Richard says. "I love the quiet, and it's pitch black here at night. You see thousands of stars that just disappear in the city. We feel we are closer to the real world." □

RESOURCES ON PAGE 143.

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 BUILDERS: JOHN SORENSEN, DAVID SORENSEN,
 RICHARD DALON
 FIELD EDITOR: BETTY CAMPBELL



TOP The upper deck on the south side is shared by the master bedroom and one secondary bedroom. Underneath, a 12-foot electric awning provides shade for hot summer days. **ABOVE** Mayne Island is accessible by ferry, a restriction that complicated construction but ensures privacy today.