

# Good Bones

## Respecting the framework, designers turned a drafty barn into a cozy refuge

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PHOTOGRAPHED BY BENJAMIN BENSCHNEIDER

The precious houses of the 1960s and '70s became the ugly ducklings of the age of prosperity we have just passed. Some of them pose problems for new owners. They don't know what to do with drafty, 2-story-high rooms with huge expanses of single-pane windows, dark wood walls and poor lighting. Some people simply give up trying to adjust these barns to their liking and level them for new houses.

Tom and Lore Firman, newly arrived from Minneapolis in 1991, were fortunate to find a house in the Bridle Trails area of Bellevue they could work with. No simple facelift, the work involved replacing metal windows and wallboard with custom wood windows and doors, installing fir woodwork and Chinese granite hearths and creating specially designed built-ins as well as seating. The result is a tranquil, elegant environment

that respects the structural and design elements of the original house. What attracted Tom to it was a circulation plan that set the living room apart from the rest of the building. That, and the bones the network of fir ceiling beams that gave character to the living-room pavilion. But such attention to detail was marred by bronzed-aluminum sliding-glass windows and wall-board.

"This is an extraordinary refinement of what was here," says Tom. "We wanted to take what we liked of layout and structure and make it much more elegant and interesting and exciting. That's when we stumbled on the professionals to help."

Pamela Pearce, an experienced interior designer, was brought in to develop a coherent plan for wall and ceiling treatments, furniture and cabinetry. Mark Anderson, a principal in AOME Architects, designed the upgrades.

Before involving this team, the owners tackled some changes themselves, remodeling the front entry and kitchen. They had Frank Lloyd Wright-reproduction leaded-glass entrance doors installed and took a Craftsman-style approach to steps, railing and porch roofing. The kitchen was redone with fir cabinetry.



The dated look of the den was transformed by resurfacing the brick and quarry-tile fireplace in granite. Pamela Pearce designed the large sectional with fir shelves at the back for open storage.



In the dining room, the design team unified the beam ceiling and the walls by lightening the woodwork and darkening the walls. Pearce designed the burled maple table; Stewart Wurtz, a local woodworker, built it to go with cherry chairs of his own design.

The recent remodel started with the family room adjoining the kitchen, then proceeded to the dining room, living room and ground-floor den.

In the family room, a major task was to make over the concrete, quarry-tile and red-brick fireplace by sheathing it in Chinese granite supplied by Rhodes, Ragen Smith. The brick supports are now covered with tapered granite and the concrete crown is also camouflaged. All the granite was plowed out to fit around the original forms. Richard Rhodes designed it, the pieces were cut by hand in China, and Russian masons installed them. The fake-log gas fireplace gave way to coal that reflects the Asian style of the hearth and the origins of its new facing.

The family room originally had French doors all around. Most were converted to tall windows. When the substantial framed doors came out, the room gained much more light.

The dining room also had multiple French doors that were replaced with windows. To make the space feel larger and more serene, the design team looked to unify the cedar-beam ceiling and the walls by lightening the woodwork and darkening the walls. Wall sconces and mono-point lights replace the central chandelier.

The efforts of Rhodes and local woodworker Stewart Wurtz show best in the living-room pavilion, where a new hearth and new furniture establish a unified, restful setting. Here, as in the dining room, Pearce suggested "glazing" to tone down the natural cedar color of the roof structure. White drywall and black enamel columns around windows have given way to fir and cedar woodwork. A brick fireplace at one corner of the room was removed and a new Chinese-granite fireplace stationed closer to the central seating area. Exquisitely detailed fir windows replaced the aluminum ones.

Lighting was a problem. There was no joist space to hide wiring. The designer's solution was to hide up lights and art spots behind horizontal shelves or "decks" that read as trellises along the perimeter of the room.

One unusual idea was to make the bridge that connects the entrance hall to the living room feel more like a real bridge by replacing the parquet flooring and giving it some "squeak." Mark Anderson recalls, "I liked the idea of the bridge being a bridge. The sound is created by the flexing of individual walnut slats tied together with steel cable to form a carpet that is rolled out within the oak perimeter." With handsome windows on either side looking over Japanese maples, this is one of the most Asian experiences in the house. It reflects the couples' appreciation for the aesthetics of Asia and the Arts Crafts movement, both of which are about simplicity of line and form.



In the living-room pavilion, newly designed fir windows open to a view of evergreens and Japanese maples. Pearce designed a display cabinet to fit underneath the sill on the right. She also created a U-shaped seating area that includes wenge and walnut tables with oxidized-brass tops. The coffee table was inspired by a hibachi shape. The bridge at rear center connects to the main entrance hall.



In the powder room, the Chinese granite counter holds the glass sink. Japanese hemp cloth covers the wall; a wood screen gives privacy.



Outside, the landscape changed drastically after a re-do of the 1,700-square-foot garage built by former owners. The garage had three bays on the side facing the house and one at its end. Consequently, the backyard was a concrete pad leading to garage doors. Anderson had the idea to move the garage doors to the front and replace the court with lawn. That completely changed views out of the house from a sea of concrete to bucolic lawn and shrubs. The Chinese granite approach drive, the pond, stone work and stone wall are new.



Colorful maples frame the approach to the Firman residence. Chinese granite paves the driveway and is the stone of choice for two fireplaces in the house.



A bridge connects the living-room pavilion to the rest of the house. Custom wood-frame windows replaced the old aluminum ones. Stairs and railings are in the Craftsman style.

The changes to the house and grounds make a world of difference. "I think the original builders did a low-budget house that had an interesting start but they weren't able to take it further," Tom says. "We were fortunate to be able to take it further."

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