

# FOREST IDYLL

A MODERN HOME RELIES ON ANCIENT PRINCIPLES TO CRAFT A PRIVATE RETREAT IN A BUSY SEATTLE-AREA NEIGHBORHOOD.

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Each room in the Juvet Landscape Hotel, built in 2008 by the firm Jensen & Skoldvin Arkitektkontor and featured in the sci-fi film *Ex Machina*, has at least one wall of glass focused on a view of nature that changes with the seasons. It also happens to be located in a remote spot in a small village near Norway's northwest coast. "It's both very modern and very formally simple," says architect Matt Wittman. "It really uses the site and the building forms to frame the landscape." The hotel's design had captivated Wittman's clients, who wished for something similar for their Seattle-area home. That location, however, was a far cry from the forests of Norway. Here, bordered by a busy street with neighbors on three sides, the architect and his partner, landscape designer Jody Estes, had to devise another way to capture the hotel's encompassing feeling of serenity.

First up was the dwelling's orientation. "What was originally an almost idyllic suburban neighborhood has become a much more urban experience with traffic and noise, so our thought was that we would turn the house inward," Wittman explains. From the street, a dense cedar slat fence, stained a deep black and punctuated by trees standing sentry, keeps the world at bay. "If you drive by, you see a blank, very quiet, very humble façade that's very deferential, not trying to call attention to itself," he notes. Within the walls, the L-shaped abode embraces a central courtyard as its focal point. The kitchen, dining, and living rooms are all focused on the garden, with sliding doors enabling the lower floors to fully open to the outside. "It's so important to orchestrate the views and the screening and the green and the light because

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you have a very contained view," says the architect. "Your neighbor is very close, but you create a way that it feels like your neighbor is not there." Thoughtfully placed, often etched windows—a low one in the living room, a frosted one in the bathroom, a high skylight over the stairs—are orchestrated to bring in light while maintaining privacy. The meticulous attention to flow and the blurring of the boundary between exterior and interior makes the comparatively modest residence feel larger.

To conjure the illusion of a more expansive property, the team turned to the precepts of Chinese landscape painting and garden design, which rely on the layering of elements. These moves include the flowering crab-apple trees to obscure the fence at the rear of the property, the slatted staircase wall that plays peekaboo with the main floor, the interior's filtered sight lines, and the maples clustered close to the home that play with the eye's perception of distance. "That helps the landscape seem larger, too, by putting things in the way of other things, you get the illusion of depth," Estes explains. The result, says Wittman, is that "you feel like the property is a lot bigger than it actually is."

A rich materiality permeates the house and ensures that the cedar siding-clad home feels warm and welcoming. Hydronically heated natural concrete floors, their soothing gray tone augmented with a lightly sanded finish, ground the residence with visual and visceral warmth. White oak, used for the cabinetry, the staircase and its adjoining slatted wall, complements the cement's hues. "You have a lot of wood in the places that you touch," says Wittman, including doors and window frames. Into this backdrop, Wittman wove in contemporary furniture and lighting with delicate, simple lines. There is a fixture, sourced from Europe, in the art room; a collection of Sonneman pendants over the kitchen island; Eames molded plywood dining chairs, and a Carl Hansen & Søn wing chair all keep the focus on the architecture. The natural variations of the materials function as abstract art: the streaks caused by the cold-rolled process that forms raw carbon steel—used for both a wall in the art room and the fireplace wall, the wood's variegated striations, and the restrained punctuation of colorfully upholstered pieces are the total of the adornment.

"It's the best thing you could hope for, where the clients have a great design sensibility from the get-go," says Wittman. "Now that they're in it, they appreciate it. Sometimes they'll send us photos of their kids playing on a staircase or working in the art room or their bedrooms and running outside, so just kind of seeing how that choreography, that theater of daily life plays out in unscripted ways is really fun." ■



The entry courtyard of this Seattle-area residence was planted with 10 grass plants to a cedar fence, creating a woodland feel. Architect Matt Wittman drove color-coded concrete from the main and parking levels, concealing the structure's interior. A Tech Lighting fixture from Lighting Network is visible on the roof.

Quantum Window & Doors sliders open from an interior courtyard to the sleek Henrybuilt kitchen and the adjacent dining area. Sonneman pendants from YLighting shine down on the Corian-topped counters. Wittman's partner, Jody Estes, took a layered approach to the landscape design.





Above: Anchoring the second floor is an art and teaching room for the homeowners' three children. Hovering above the work table is a Veronika Gombert light. Cabinetry by Winterwood ensures that supplies are kept organized. Sierra Pacific windows look out onto the landscape.

Opposite: Luxurious finishes, such as the cold-rolled steel covering the fireplace wall in the living area and the oak that encases the stairs, stand in for more expected decorative flourishes throughout the house. In the space, Wittman placed a Carl Hansen & Son's wing chair, which reads as sculpture in its own right.



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Opposite: Sherwin-Williams' Snowbound covers the walls of the master bedroom, creating a serene backdrop. The colors of the clients' own bedding, side table and artwork mimic those found just beyond the window.  
Below: The understated approach continues into the master bath, where simple white Jeffrey Court subway tiles cover the wall behind the Victoria + Albert tub, which features Lacava fixtures from Ferguson. On the floor is the same thinsset concrete found throughout the second story.

