

The Public/Private House

Every house must welcome visitors from time to time, but some make a business of doing it beautifully. By Cheryl Weber, LEED AP



Street Smart

Living in a former storefront isn't for everyone. But it

works out just fine for the owners of this building on a Seattle street corner. Thanks to some creative spatial boundaries, they live and work happily from home—without worrying about the neighbors staring in. The wife, a personal assistant, and the husband, a real estate and software developer whose clients often come to the office, had been living and working there full time in awkwardly divided space. They asked Seattle architect Tyler Engle for a gracious new design that also would showcase their art collection. ■ At 1,543 square feet, this house is fairly small. Fitting multiple programs into the compact interior easily could have made it feel crowded, but the floor plan flexes for both openness and privacy. Inside the plate glass window on the left is a foyer/lobby with built-in seating; on the right

A large skylight makes the living area feel like a courtyard, and clerestories brighten the master suite behind it. A shade inside the skylight protects the owners' artwork from direct sun.

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is the wife's office. Directly behind that is what Engle calls the shipping container—an ipe-clad core housing a powder room on the left and a kitchen in the center. Thin steel "blinders" bookend the kitchen's parallel counters, partially hiding it from pass-throughs on either side, and pocket doors close off the core from the street view. The wood rectangle "could have been moved forward or backward in the space, but we placed it in the sweet spot so it provides a buffer between the courtyard and the street," Engle says. ■ The courtyard Engle refers to is an airy living and dining room at the house's center, where a 12-foot-9-inch-by-9-foot skylight, and the ipe wall, make it feel like it's outside. Interior clerestories let light through to the master suite, entered through a pivoting door behind the living room. Four steps up beyond the bedroom is a second bath adjoining the husband's office, and an outside entrance. ■ The husband, who uses a wheelchair, goes to work by going outside, up the sidewalk, and into the rear door. "He wanted to commute, and that's his commute," Engle says. The concrete floors have a smooth terrazzo finish that's easy to maneuver on, and the hydronically heated surface makes the wheels warm to the touch.



■ The gut-renovation of the 100-year-old building, once a drug store and soda fountain, immediately hit a snag.

Excavation of the flimsy, 2-inch-thick slab revealed unstable soil, which meant digging down and refilling with gravel. But in a building this old, there's always a surprise lurking behind the walls. "When you have a crisp architectural design, you can't get away with crookedness—that was the biggest challenge," says builder Stan Christensen. "We re-framed the old side walls to get insulation in, and did a lot of furring and straightening to get things level and plumb." Exterior improvements included



The husband's office has a rear entrance; the wife's office occupies the storefront (opposite, top). An ipe core houses a powder room and kitchen, where blackened hot-rolled steel "blinders" have a supple wax finish. Two pocket doors on the street side of the ipe container allow for two-zone heating and divide the public and private realms.

replacing the Victorian paint job with a charcoal-gray color that respects the building's form. ■ "I love this space because, with constraints, great things can happen," Engle says. "It has as many uses as some houses we do that are 8,000 square feet." ■

Project Credits: **Builder:** Christensen Construction, Seattle; **Architect and interior designer:** Tyler Engle Architects PS, Seattle; **Structural engineer:** Swenson Say Fagét, Seattle; **Living space:** 1,543 square feet; **Site:** 0.35 acre; **Construction cost:** \$229 per square foot; **Photographer:** Benjamin Benschneider. / **Resources:** **Bath tile:** Dal Tile; **Bathroom light fixture:** FontanaArte; **Blackened Steel:** Company K; **Cabinets:** Pacific Rim Cabinets, Boojum Woodworks; **Countertops:** Dogpaw Design; **Floor:** Durashine; **Interior Paneling:** Christensen Construction; **Kitchen backsplash tile:** Pentel; **Plumbing fixtures:** Kohler.

