

## On Vashon Island, a secluded spot has room for life's true treasures

By Valerie Easton

EVERY HOUSE has a story, especially one as long in the genesis as the remodeled home of Mimi Thompson and Eugene Carlson. This Vashon Island contemporary is elegantly sleek, yet prodigiously expressive of its owners' interests, tastes and personal histories.

Carlson is a native Seattleite, son of United Airlines CEO and civic booster Eddie Carlson. Eddie was instrumental in pulling off the 1962 World's Fair, the guy whose Space Needle sketch-on-a-napkin became a reality.

His son has had a distinguished career of quite a different sort. After leaving Seattle for the Navy, Carlson ended up in Washington, D.C., as a columnist and reporter for The Wall Street Journal. He helped start the Asian edition of the paper, living abroad for many years. The Hong Kong screen, Japanese tansu and multitude of books that breathe beauty and personality into the house reflect Carlson's life over the many years he lived in the East and abroad. Combined with Thompson's artwork and the couples' collection of paintings and ceramics, the house hums with originality.

Thompson, who moved to Seattle after a stint in the Peace Corps, ended up meeting longtime friends of her future husband, who . . . you see it coming . . . introduced the two when Carlson was back in Seattle tending to family concerns. After 20 years back East, he was ready to move west, and the couple started a search for property. They ended up buying a little house on a secluded piece of high-bank waterfront, which they rented out for years. "It didn't take long for us to be convinced this is an extraordinary



BENJAMIN BENSCHNEIDER / THE SEATTLE TIMES  
Mimi Thompson and Eugene Carlson's home is an artful blending of native Northwest and contemporary Asian aesthetics, captured in this view of canoe, concrete wall and roughened-wood pole supports.



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The cool, quiet gallery serves as entry, dining room and display space for favorite works of art, including paintings by Michael Spafford and Vashon artist Joanne Hammer. "Adult Books" is by owner Mimi Thompson, painted when she was part of a Washington, D.C., artists' collective. Skylights and French doors infuse the spaces with pearly island light, emphasizing the home's contrast of warm and cool colors.

community," says Carlson. "It's not a faux island, it's a real island." So they decided to buy adjacent property, expand their house and move in themselves.

Once these very urban people committed to the idea of island life, they sought out Kris Anderson, the home's original architect, who by a lucky coincidence had also recently moved back to Vashon Island.

Unfortunately, the project started out with a long permitting process, drainage issues, and erosion that necessitated building a massive retaining wall. "We bought the house again by building that wall," says Carlson wryly, pointing out three 42-foot-long I-beams.

They ended up with a sturdy 3,500 square feet of home and studio-topped garage. "We put in an elevator so we can stay forever," Thompson says happily.

Despite its unadorned palette of concrete, tile and wood, this is a comfortable home. The living room is intimately scaled, the kitchen pretty and efficient, with books and magazines everywhere. The serenity of their island idyll is broken only by the high jinks of their Irish terrier, Nuala.

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The gravel terrace outside the kitchen features a firepit made out of a sawed-off industrial propane tank. Thompson's painting evoking a rock wall the couple admired on Block Island (Rhode Island) summers outdoors on the shingle wall.



BENJAMIN BENSCHNEIDER / THE SEATTLE TIMES  
The newly remodeled and more-than-doubled-in-size house is pushed back into the hillside, roofed in metal and finished in shingles to blend into the island landscape.



BENJAMIN BENSCHNEIDER / THE SEATTLE TIMES  
Carlson's study is the light-drenched apex of the house, with exposed beams, a baby grand piano, desk, reading nook and walls of books, which are allowed to migrate from the second floor down the shelf-lined stairs.

### Creating a window to the rest

The entry gallery, with skylights and a view of bookshelves at one end, sets the tone for an interior filled with art and books. Eugene Carlson loves Japanese concrete work, and called on Vashon Island contractor Reid Kruly of Cascade Pacific Construction to duplicate the smooth finishes he remembered from his sojourn in Japan. Even the bedroom walls are covered in a skim coat of concrete. Floors are mostly bamboo or concrete with radiant heat, kitchen counters are stainless steel.

"It was a challenge to fit in the new requirements with the old motifs that Mimi and Gene liked," says redux architect Kris Anderson.

"I like to develop spaces to move through — the gallery/dining room was the fun part."

