

Sunset

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Festive desserts, readers' favorite cookies, and Christmas ranch dinner

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Santa Fe
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day trip

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easy garden
wreaths

DECEMBER 2006

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ON OUR COVER Easy to make and sure to bring a smile: angel food cake topped with whipped cream and crushed candy canes (see page 108). Photograph by Leigh Beisch; food styling by Dan Becker; prop styling by Sara Slavin

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Snowdrifts cocoon a secluded retreat in Washington's Methow Valley.

Winter retreat

Incorporating rugged materials and smart details, a Washington cabin disappears into its snowy setting

BY DANIEL GREGORY PHOTOGRAPHS BY THOMAS J. STORY

GOOD THINGS COME to those who wait. And wait. And wait. At least that's the way it happened for attorney Mary Drobka and her architect husband, Tom Lenchek, who bought a piece of land in Washington's stunning Methow Valley with the idea of building a

getaway home. Fifteen years later, the 1,400-square-foot cabin was finally built—and it's become the vacation retreat of their dreams.

Lenchek first started going to Methow as a bachelor in the 1970s to ski and rock climb; when Drobka, also an outdoors



Resembling ski jumps, the simple shed roofs over the house and garage blend into the blanket of snow. From the front door, views extend through the house to the mountain beyond.



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT A Rais woodstove (www.rais.com) rests on a rough-cut granite hearth; snowdrifts bury aspen trunks; stair treads are planks of parallel strand lumber (PSL) balanced on pieces of steel; Columbia River Plateau petroglyphs in cut-plate steel are embedded in the concrete wall outside the front door; a palette of stainless steel and warm wood unites the kitchen and dining area.

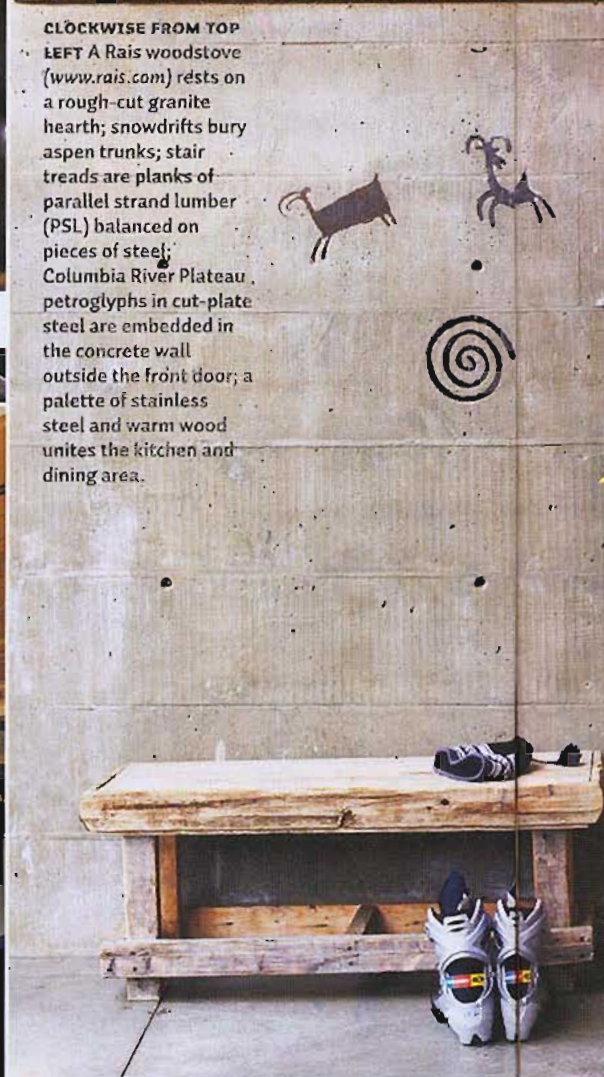




ILLUSTRATION: NIK SCHULZ

enthusiast, entered the picture, they began traveling to the valley together. In the mid-1980s, the couple purchased a lot near Winthrop, a four-hour drive from their jobs in Seattle. After buying a primary residence in the city, they didn't have room in their budget to build a second house in the same decade—but the southern exposure; views up to the Loup Loup Pass; and seclusion, near ski trails, of their rural property kept them dreaming as the years went on.

In the meantime, the couple used their land as a base for weekend adventures, either camping right on the lot or staying in nearby lodging. These experiences helped them figure out what they truly wanted when they were finally able to start work on their second home. "It had to have a direct connection to the exterior and the views," recalls Lenchek. "And it had to fit the site and not stick out." He remembered Frank Lloyd Wright's famous dictum that a house should be "of the hill, not on the hill"—it should blend with its environment, in other words. Also, the house had to work well in Winthrop's extreme climate swings, from 30° below zero in winter to 105° in summer. "It took a lot of napkin sketches to get it right," Lenchek says.

The reward

Now, after years of planning, the long-awaited home is perfect for its setting and its owners' lifestyle. Most of the windows—low-e and argon-filled glass for superior insulation—face south to receive maximum winter sun. A simple shed roof follows the angle of the ground. The garage roof slopes in the other direction, away from the driveway, so that snow doesn't slide off and pile up in front of the garage doors.

The front door is on the lower level, along with the combined kitchen and living/dining room, which opens to



the deck through big lift-and-glide glass doors. Two bedrooms and a bath are on the upper level.

Inspired by the area's old mining and ranching structures, which used logs and boards as the primary building materials, Lenchek and Drobka enclosed the bedrooms in 2- by 12-inch ponderosa pine boards salvaged from a nearby water flume. The weathered-wood exterior wall extends to the interior, linking inside and outside. Colored concrete floors and walls make a similar connection.

A place apart

Knowing the peacefulness that awaits at their getaway, the couple find the long drive from Seattle an easy trade-off. "When we're not skiing, we hang out in the living room or on the deck and keep those big doors open pretty much all the time," says Lenchek. "We usually arrive at night, and often we'll build a fire and keep the lights off—the snow makes the room very bright. One time we saw a deer walk by on the deck," he adds. Admiring the design, no doubt.

INFO Design: Tom Lenchek, Balance Associates Architects, Seattle and Winthrop, WA (www.balanceassociates.com or 206/322-7737). Resources: See page 120. >58



Designing for relaxation

Here are Tom Lenchek and Mary Drobka's tips for creating a home that promotes unwinding.

Clockwise from top left:

BEGIN THE GETAWAY

AT THE ENTRY A simple bench and coat hooks provide a quick decompression space. A metal roof and concrete floors and walls require minimal care.

USE LOCAL ACCENTS

A sun-bleached, wind-scoured ranchland souvenir creates a painterly backdrop.

BRING THE OUTDOORS IN

In the upstairs bath is a slice of nature, with an earthy palette and a vanity made from a fallen tree trunk.

KEEP IT SIMPLE

A built-in bureau and shelving make the small master bedroom feel spacious. A shutter screen slides across French doors for ventilation with privacy. ■

