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Gray

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**THE
DESIGNERS
CHANGING
THE FACE OF
OUR CITIES**

TIMBER TOWERS

VIRTUAL REALITY

FALL FASHION

HOW THE DESIGN

COMMUNITY

IS TAKING ON

HOMELESSNESS



“Many clients say, ‘This is what we want it to look like.’ These clients said, ‘Here’s how we want it to feel.’”

—RYAN STEPHENSON, ARCHITECT

INTERIORS + ARCHITECTURE

Inspired by the emotionally layered nuances in a playlist of songs from his clients, architect Ryan Stephenson designed a modern house on Washington’s Bellingham Bay that reveals new character around each corner and communes organically with the surrounding landscape.



THE SOUND OF GOOD DESIGN

Written by RACHEL EGGERS : Photographed by ANDREW POGUE

Seattle architect Ryan Stephenson created this coastal Washington home for a spirited couple and their beloved dog. At left are the main living quarters; to the right are the detached garage and studio. Between them, a pocket view of distant islands beckons from the horizon. Stephenson and his clients— one of them a master bladesmith—bonded over their shared appreciation for the hands-on artistry of their respective crafts. They remain friends today (and even made a camp knife together). »

"HOW DO I NOT RUIN THIS?" That was architect Ryan Stephenson's first thought when he arrived at a rural project site near Washington's lush Larrabee State Park in the summer of 2014. Set on the coast and commanding an immense view of Bellingham Bay, the Olympic Mountains to the south, and Canada beyond the water, the plot called for a design that approached its awe-inspiring natural beauty with care.

In his potential clients, a lively couple in their 50s, Stephenson found kindred spirits. All three share an appreciation for superior craftsmanship and the humility, passion, and study that it requires. Stephenson launched his architecture firm, Stephenson Design Collective, in 2009, building up a portfolio of modern single-family homes, but a background in construction gives him a leg up in understanding the hands-on process of building a house. Similarly, one of the homeowners is a master bladesmith, whose exquisite knives are renowned for their design, balance, and utility.

With mutual artistic respect as their foundation, Stephenson and the clients embarked on the three-year project. For inspiration, the couple sent him links to songs by Ray LaMontagne, Jeffrey Foucault, and Volcano Choir and a short film *Minka*, the elegiac story of an 18th-century Japanese farmhouse. "That's not typical," notes Stephenson. "Many clients say, 'This is what we

want it to look like.' These clients said, 'Here's how we want it to feel.'"

As Stephenson studied the songs and the film, they revealed new layers of nuance and meaning. He took the same contemplative approach to his design of the home, which consists of two units: the main house and a detached garage with a studio for the bladesmith. He framed the home in dark, untreated Corten steel, which will be allowed to rust naturally; he chose thin, black-stained cedar planks to clad the exterior. These elements will change over time, revealing unexpected new textures and colors as they age. The form of the home reflects the way that things grow: incrementally, in layers. "You never see the whole house from one angle," Stephenson says. "It accrues."

A lot of the life of the home happens in the kitchen, which is centered around the chef-worthy Thermador range, set in a mega-island of white Caesarstone quartz, half of which is a detachable table that can roll out to the adjacent patio.

Just as the clients' lives are guided by a spirit of possibilities, so is Stephenson's design; its textures and shapes are in continual conversation with the extraordinary natural surroundings. "The house doesn't compete with the views but gently leads you to them," he says. "You get individual moments. It's a powerful feeling." ✱

Nearly all the home's rooms—living room, kitchen, bedrooms, and bathrooms—look out onto sublime views of the bay, coastal islands, and faraway Canada. The clients are legendary hosts to a rotating cast of visitors; Stephenson and his family are regular guests at their cozy, conversation- and wine-filled evenings. But that's not the only inducement to visit: "I like the rainy days, too," he says. When the clouds and mist descend, "you sort of lose where you are. All you hear is nature." The windows are from Zola Windows, and the railings are by Indeco Industrial Design & Equipment.

