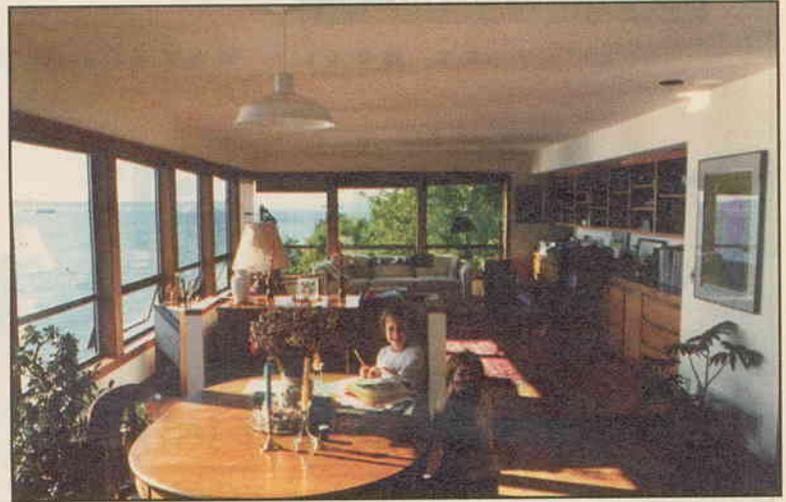


Small Alterations

Before the remodel, the living room felt like a shoebox, with a continuous low ceiling and little sense of division between dining and living areas.



JEFFRY WILSON

This Magnolia remodel adds up to lots of little changes and one moved wall

WHEN IT CAME TIME to remodel their waterfront home two years ago, a Magnolia couple learned they could accomplish more — with less.

Instead of ripping down walls and tearing up the roof, their architect, Jeffry Wilson, and interior designer, Pamela Pearce, persuaded them to skip the big-ticket alterations and focus on lots of little changes instead.

"We changed everything, but we didn't really change anything," says Wilson. "We moved only one wall. But though each change in itself was very small, all of them together transformed the house."

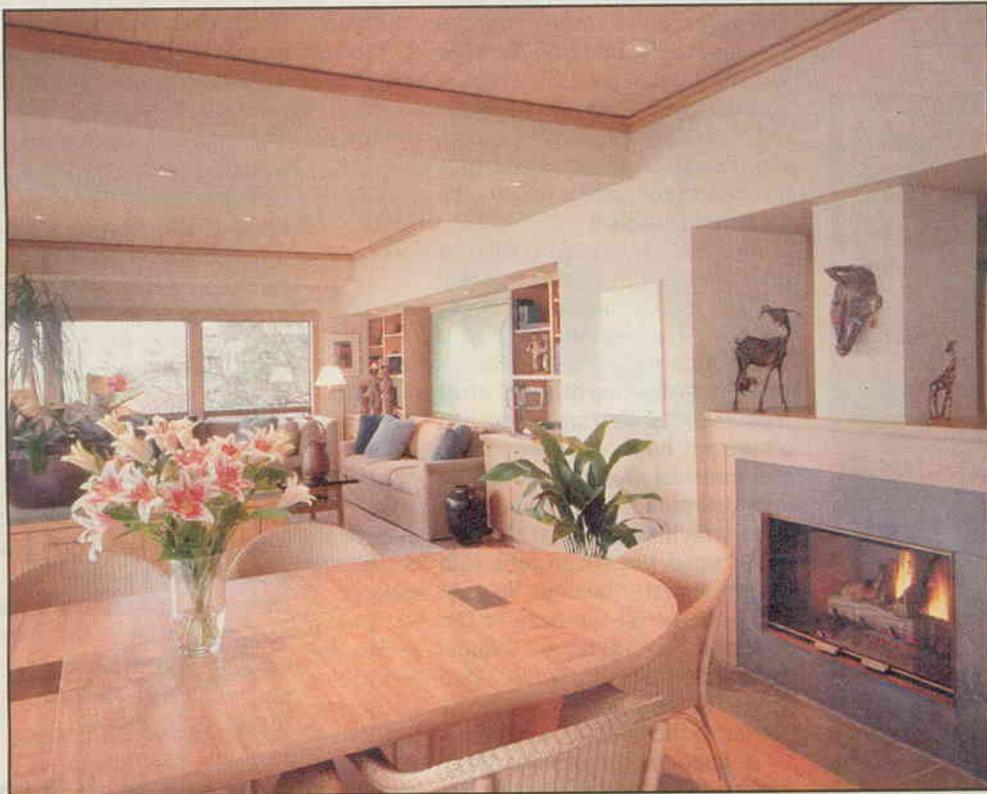
The owners, a physician and a

health-care researcher, bought the property in 1983, drawn mainly by the proximity to the water and the panoramic views of Puget Sound and the Olympic Mountains. Built in the mid-1940s but altered radically over the years, the house itself was not much to look at. Its anonymous exterior concealed main living spaces on the top floor and bedrooms in the daylight basement below.

The home's shortcomings became increasingly apparent as the years passed and the couple's family grew. Even though the living room, dining room and kitchen shared a single, 47-foot-long space, the rooms felt cramped and ill-defined, primarily because of the low, unbroken ceiling plane overhead. "It was like looking in one end of a shoebox," Wilson says.

Raising the roof was beyond the owners' budget. And adding walls would have broken up the view. So the designers borrowed some space from the attic and raised the ceiling just 1 foot in the center of the living and dining areas, highlighting each recess with hemlock. The remaining ceiling works like a soffit, defining the edges of each area.

"I was highly skeptical that 1 foot would make any difference," says the husband. "But it really changed the entire charac- ➤



A shoebox no more, the top floor of the Magnolia home features clear divisions between spaces and lighter wood finishes. The custom dining table sidles up to a new gas fireplace, installed where a woodstove once sat. Art niches provide views from the entry hall.



The breakfast table was replaced with a counter (built by Riley Stock) that stretches across a pair of picture windows. Stools are sized for adults and children.

WRITTEN BY FRED ALBERT
PHOTOGRAPHED BY BENJAMIN BENSCHNEIDER



The architect borrowed a foot of space from the attic to create a recessed ceiling over the living room. The original ceiling forms a soffit around the edge. Craggy bluestone, figured woods and a custom rug add pattern within the neutral palette.

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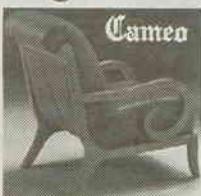


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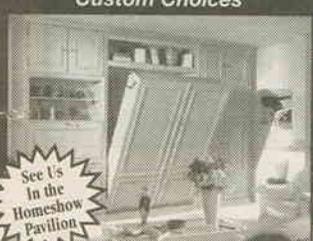


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ter of this space."

Although the owners liked the abundance of fir in the home, the wood had aged to a dark orange finish over the years, overpowering the white walls. Pearce lightened the wood with a semi-transparent stain (a process she calls "overglazing") and painted the walls pale taupe, bringing the two finishes closer together so they form a unified, neutral backdrop.

New energy-conserving window glass and perforated shades help combat the ultraviolet rays that faded the old furnishings beyond recognition. To stem future fading, Pearce chose a muted palette inspired by the colors of the neighboring beach. Gray, taupe, ocher and pale-blue yarns were woven into a custom area rug, and the colors were repeated in the chenille sofas and leather reading chairs.

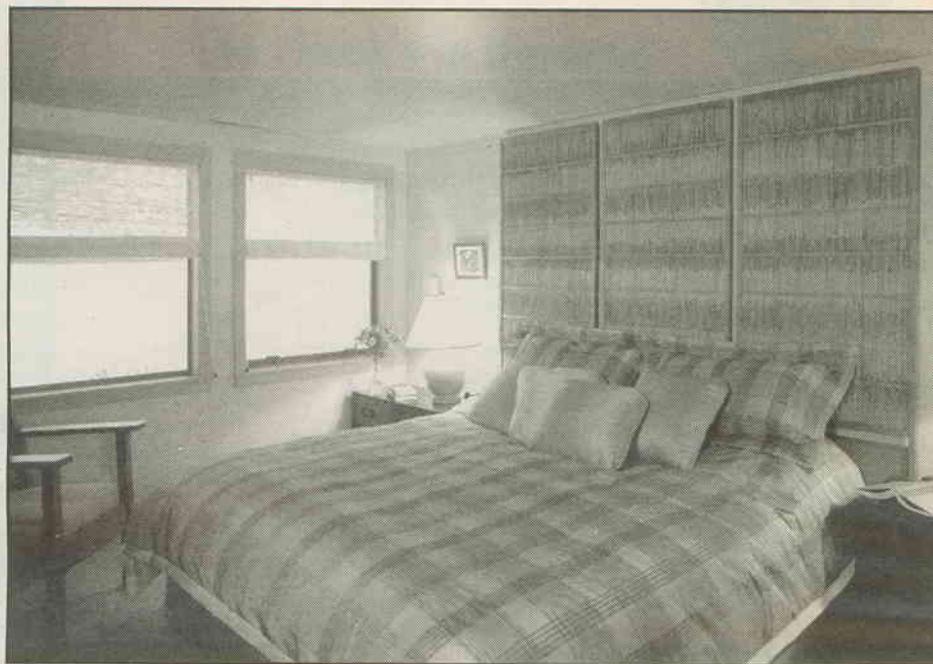
Although she avoided overt use of pattern, Pearce introduced subtle textures and patinas designed to counteract the chilly slickness of the picture windows. A craggy slab of bluestone covers a built-in buffet crafted from anegre, a highly figured wood. The same material was repeated on the custom dining table, but inset with skewed inlays, forming a richly patterned finish. Pearce surrounded the table with woven Lloyd Loom chairs, and added cushions covered with an easy-care textured vinyl.

In an earlier remodel, the owners did away with the kitchen table, since it always left someone with his or her back to the view. Now a "floating" breakfast bar spans the window wall at the end of the room, its four stools sized for both children and adults. "We get up in the morning and look out into the water and see the sunrise and mountains in a way that we never did before," says the wife.

Wilson and Pearce focused much of their remaining changes on the main-floor study and adjoining powder room. The former was too small, while the latter was too big (and in desperate need of updating). Contractor Raymond Fuller of Spectrum Building Services shifted the common wall, creating an additional work area in the study and scaling back the bathroom to a more compact size.

To accommodate overnight guests, Wilson and Pearce added a recessed shower stall to the powder room and concealed it behind sliding panels covered with vintage Japanese floor mats. A newly enlarged window allows bathers to admire the view of Puget Sound through the branches of a flowering cherry tree.

Pearce revived the bedrooms in the daylight basement by lightening all the wood and painting the walls pale taupe or



Vintage Japanese doors hang behind the bed in the home's basement bedroom, training the eye upward so the ceiling appears taller.

Basement makeover

Like many hillside homes, this Magnolia residence has a reverse floor plan, with main living spaces upstairs and bedrooms in the daylight basement. All too often, basement rooms are cold, dark and confining. To make basement spaces feel more inviting, Bellevue interior designer Pamela Pearce offers the following suggestions:

- Small, high windows always remind you you're in a basement. Use full-height windows and French doors, if possible, to bring in light and provide a connection with the outdoors.
- Avoid fluorescent fixtures, and augment incandescent room lighting with wall washers and small incandescent lights hidden under cabinets.
- Since light is at a premium, choose furnishings with reflective finishes such as glass, brass or bronze.
- It's important to make a basement

room feel warmer, not just brighter. Instead of reaching for that can of white paint, try a warm color or neutral instead. It doesn't have to be a light shade, either — people often gravitate to dark, cocoon-like spaces. Natural wood is a good room-warmer, too.

■ If you plan to spend a lot of time in the basement, get rid of that \$5-a-yard level-loop carpeting and spring for a luxurious cut pile instead. Ditch the old college furniture and use the same quality pieces you'd expect upstairs.

■ Stick a 7-foot plant in the corner instead of a 3-foot one: Tall objects (like the headboard in the Magnolia bedroom) will make the ceiling feel higher.

■ Replace that steep, narrow staircase with a gracious, wide, carpeted one and you won't always feel as though you're going into a basement when you walk down the stairs.

— Fred Albert

apricot. She added a touch of character to the small, boxy master bedroom by furnishing it with antique tansu chests. To compensate for the low ceiling, she hung a trio of vintage Japanese doors behind the bed in lieu of a headboard. (The doors draw the eye upward and also hide a pesky electrical panel.)

Although the remodel didn't add an

inch of space to the house, the owners claim it's much more usable now. So, in a sense, they ended up with a bigger house — in the same amount of space. **P**

Fred Albert reports regularly on home design for Pacific Magazine and other publications. Benjamin Benschneider is a Seattle Times photographer.