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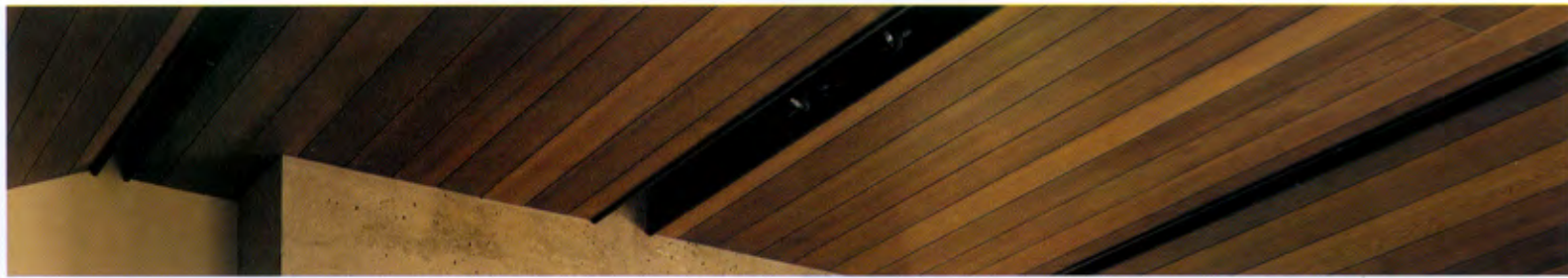
Soaking in Seattle, p.134

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"The Tao of Dow," Metropolitan Home, May, 2008. Jack Kearney of Company K designed and fabricated dozens of custom features in the extraordinary home, described in captions below each page.



# The Tao of Dow

Seattle contractor Jim Dow used natural materials and a minimalist aesthetic to transform a homely hilltop Mediterranean into a tranquil retreat worthy of its setting.





Homeowner Jim Dow excavated eight feet of soil from around his basement, adding light and outdoor access through glass sliders to what had been a subterranean space; then he added a cantilevered deck off the main-floor living room and installed a glass "rail" for safety because it doesn't impair views. Opposite: New windows framed in stained mahogany echo the living room's blackened-steel soffits and matching firewood bins. Dow found the coffee table's corroded top in an industrial steelyard.



## A few years ago, Jim Dow was sharing a sprawling Seattle

estate with his two teenage children and a live-in girlfriend. But when the girlfriend moved out and the kids left for college, Dow found himself alone and adrift in a 6,000-square-foot craftsman in the city's Magnolia neighborhood. Vowing to find something smaller and closer to the city's core, he purchased a 2,600-square-foot 1920s Mediterranean atop Queen Anne Hill.

"It needs a contractor," the real estate agent confided, and she wasn't kidding. Happily for Dow, he *is* a contractor, and he was able to see past the facts to the home's potential. The cloistered rooms were cloaked in gothic appointments that looked like something out of a horror film. And although the site boasted a remarkable panorama of the city, bay and mountains, the home's disregard for the scenery bordered on the comical, with just a single window oriented toward the view.

Inspired by some of the modern houses built by his company, Schuchart/Dow, the homeowner enlisted the services of designer Garret Cord Werner and landscape architect Bruce Hinckley. Working from initial plans by architect Brandt Hollinger, the trio preserved the painted-brick exterior but gutted the rest, fashioning a series of free-flowing spaces rendered in a muscular mix of walnut, concrete and blackened steel.

"I wanted the palette really simple," Dow says. "I didn't want to do all the coolest things you've ever seen in any design magazine."

Slots in walls, floors and even staircases offer teasing reveals between spaces, instilling every room and even the landscape with moments of personal discovery.

The home's masculine palette is given free expression in the living room, where a soaring concrete fireplace—stripped of any ornament save a sculptural steel poker—rises up to meet a vaulted cedar ceiling. Steel soffits fitted with lights encircle the room, lending scale to the space and preserving the purity of the ceiling plane, which consigns heating, cooling and additional lights to a series of discreet slots. A quartet of French doors supplants the lone window, offering access to a new cantilevered steel deck overlooking the city.

Noting the lack of vertical connection between the upper and lower levels, Hinckley proposed peeling back one end of the living room to reveal the basement below. Excavating around the latter allowed Dow to turn the subterranean space into a light-filled family room; concrete retaining walls hold back the soil outside and mimic the exposed foundation within. Custom sectionals by Werner offer plenty of space to sprawl when the eight-foot movie screen descends from the fir ceiling above.

Werner, who collaborated on the architecture as well as the interiors, chose tactile fabrics like mohair, wool and linen to counter the home's hard edges. He combined colors and materials in lieu of pattern to instill a bit of variety, and selected generous down-filled seating to accommodate Dow's love of reading. "I wanted to be able to take a nap in anything," the homeowner says.

This page: A metal scrim skirts the new steel staircase. Opposite (clockwise from top): Roberto Dutesco's horse photo dominates the family room, with its custom sectionals by the home's interior designer, Garret Cord Werner (the ottoman conceals a subwoofer); the former basement now features direct access to the outside; wood bins frame the window and Matthew Hilton's sinuous *Balzac* chair.

PRODUCED BY LINDA O'KEEFFE AND LINDA HUMPHREY. PHOTOGRAPHS BY JOHN GRANEN. WRITTEN BY FRED ALBERT.







## Since Dow loves to cook, and friends always end up in the kitchen, he decided

to make that room the focal point of the house. The design team vaulted the ceiling over the dining table (borrowing space from the attic) but lowered it over the cooking area to help break up the room's shoebox proportions. Open steel shelves take the place of upper cabinets. A five-burner Miele cooktop is the only appliance in view; Miele ovens are stashed under the island, and Sub-Zero cooling drawers take the place of a refrigerator, making the space feel more like a gathering room than a galley.

Although born and raised in Seattle, Dow vacationed on the family farm in Kansas, where he was surrounded by walnut trees and the furniture that his grandfather and great-grandfather made. He still loves the material, using it on floors and cabinets and commissioning a custom dining table from a 12-foot slab that he found in Oregon. The table's ragged edges echo the outline of the original

tree, narrowing as it progresses from base to trunk. "Everything in this house is sort of square and crisp," Dow says. "I thought, 'Let's just do this live edge and have some fun with this one piece.'"

A blackened-steel wall at the end of the room conceals a powder room and Dow's office and flanks a ziggurat steel staircase designed in collaboration with Jack Kearney of Company K. On a lark, Kearney added a slot down the center of the steps, allowing light to filter into the spaces below. "The house is like jazz, and the slots are a recurring riff," observes Hinckley.

■ Above: Mike and Doug Starn's moth photo adorns a blackened-steel wall at the end of the kitchen, where Henry Beguelin bar stools sidle up to an island outfitted with a Miele cooktop set into concrete. Opposite: The adjoining dining half of the room features a vaulted cedar ceiling and vintage Castelli chairs that offer a machine-age counterpoint to the dining table, which was crafted from a single slab of walnut.



In the master bathroom, a concrete Japanese soaking tub, which was custom-made, abuts an outdoor pool, giving Dow the sense of soaking in the garden; a sheet of glass divides the tub from the adjoining shower. Opposite (clockwise from top): Walls of cement plaster give the bathroom added richness and depth (a nickel tray straddles the concrete trough sink under a Boffi faucet; the custom towel bar is by Argent Fabrication); in the adjoining master bedroom, the ceiling-height headboard is framed in blackened steel and upholstered in camel-colored suede (Dow meditates daily in front of the window framing the black pine); the bedroom also features a suede-covered storage unit, an antique African stool and a dramatic *Drum* lamp by 3x10.