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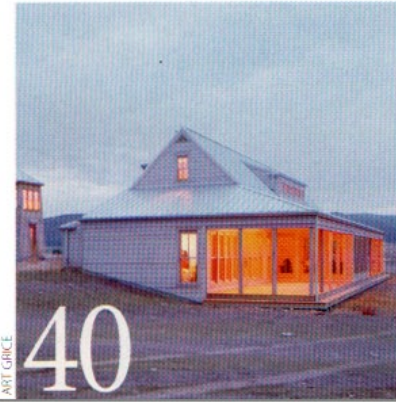
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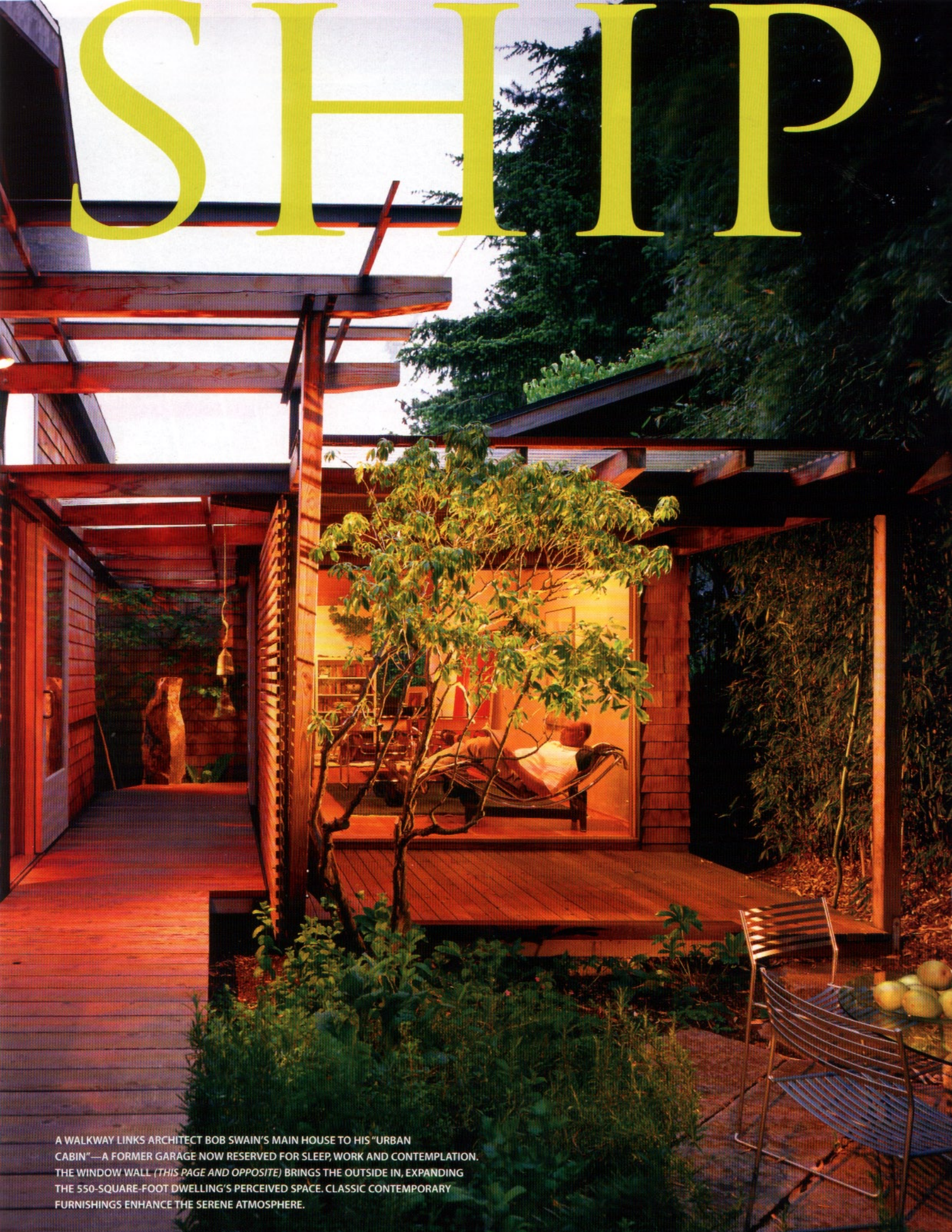
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■ ON THE COVER: Bob Swain counts stars instead of sheep in his glass-roofed Phinney Ridge bedroom (see page 56). Photo: William Wright.



SHIP



A WALKWAY LINKS ARCHITECT BOB SWAIN'S MAIN HOUSE TO HIS "URBAN CABIN"—A FORMER GARAGE NOW RESERVED FOR SLEEP, WORK AND CONTEMPLATION. THE WINDOW WALL (THIS PAGE AND OPPOSITE) BRINGS THE OUTSIDE IN, EXPANDING THE 550-SQUARE-FOOT DWELLING'S PERCEIVED SPACE. CLASSIC CONTEMPORARY FURNISHINGS ENHANCE THE SERENE ATMOSPHERE.

SHAPE

A SEATTLE ARCHITECT BUILDS A COUNTRY CABIN—RIGHT IN HIS OWN BACKYARD

Written by Mia Nicholson Photographs by William Wright



The son and grandson of Cape Cod boat builders, architect Bob Swain revels in the challenge of maximizing tight spaces. So this thrifty Yankee and avid outdoorsman decided to transform his tiny Phinney Ridge house and remodeled garage into a pair of urban “cabins”: the former for entertaining house guests, the latter to serve as his private studio for work, sleep, yoga or meetings.

Passing through an “alpine meadow” dotted with dogwoods and aspens, a pathway skirts cabin one and deposits visitors onto the threshold of Bob’s 550-square-foot studio. Inside, a wall of glass opens onto a stone patio and a garden of bamboo and potted herbs.

“The garden enters the space,” says Bob. It also visually extends the main room—a serenely modern marriage of sitting area and office—well beyond its petite dimensions. In the warm glow of



THE BEDROOM IS THE NEXT BEST THING TO SLEEPING UNDER THE STARS. OPPOSITE, CLOCKWISE FROM UPPER LEFT: LEAVES ANIMATE A BABBLING WATER FEATURE. THE HALLWAY BATHROOM CULMINATES IN AN INDOOR/OUTDOOR SHOWER. THE CABIN SERVES AS A HOME OFFICE FOR OWNER/ARCHITECT BOB SWAIN. THE DOORWAY AT LEFT LEADS TO THE DRESSING AREA.

recycled-fir flooring, Wassily chairs, a Le Corbusier chaise and an Aulenti table lend an air of uncluttered elegance. Space-saving features—built-in cabinets, cupboards and drawers—were inspired by Bob’s seafaring pedigree.

“It’s a boat-builder mentality,” he notes. “Every space is used over and over.”

Nowhere is this done so ingeniously as in the combination bathroom and hallway: a passageway featuring a stainless-steel sink set into a wall of bookshelves and drawers. (Only the toilet is enclosed.) The multifunctional hall leads across a pad of Chinese paving stones to an indoor-outdoor shower lined with fossil-filled Moroccan cosmos stone and fitted with a heated floor.

“When I come in from the shower, I have a hot stone floor under my bare feet. That’s how I manage cold days,” says Bob. When the shower’s not in use, a sliding glass door draws attention outside to a small deck and lush garden with a soaking tub made from a 700-year-old Chinese rain barrel.

Much of what makes this bath-cum-hallway work so well is what it lacks: a ceiling. The airspace flows directly into an elevated sleeping loft tucked beneath a squadron of skylights. Accessed from a hall-like dressing space that mirrors the bathroom hall, the loft rises several steps above the other rooms to claim the sky and a good view of the Olympics. Fitted with a built-in bed and cabinetry, the loft belies its postage-stamp proportions.

“I wanted it to be kind of open, like a French garret,” says Bob. “Using the air above the bathroom and dressing room makes it feel like a lot of space.”

Minimal decorative detail keeps the look sleek throughout. Each metal used in the house, for instance, serves a consistent role. Copper appears wherever a person performs an action: light switches, electrical sockets, door frames and doorknobs. “It’s a subliminal logic, but once you adapt to it, you look for it without thinking,” says the architect, who relied on contractor Tim Tanner of Tanner Construction to execute his designs.

The finished product is “a sanctuary,” says Bob, whose busy work schedule demands constant globe-trotting around the United States, China and Italy, where he is a professor of architecture.

“Architecture is a very social profession, with constant meetings, phone calls and e-mail,” concludes Bob. “Here, it’s quiet, I get to enjoy the beautiful gardens, and I can get a huge amount of work done before I go to the office.” ■

Contributing Editor Mia Nicholson writes about food, travel and homes.

