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7 Stylish Dinner Plates

Aloft in the Forest

Among the many problems of urban living in Portland, Oregon, are raccoons, deer, and falling trees. It's not just that woods and forests persist inside the city limits but also the fact that a city was densely built amidst them. Despite such hazards, Stefan and Nicole Andrén built a sleek, modernist loft nestled in trees atop a forested ridge that snakes behind the city's downtown. The setting is urban, in a Portland kind of way. And Stefan and Nicole enjoy the woods just as a downtown loft dweller might enjoy the street scene. Perched on the roof deck, they gaze down at the busy deer and rustling leaves, sipping cocktails with friends who've made the short drive up from Portland's heavily developed Pearl District. "We never go into the forest," Stefan explains. "It's much nicer on the deck. And that means the deer aren't afraid to come out."

Uninspired by the loft options in downtown Portland, Oregon, the Andrén's opted to design and build their own freestanding version in the hills just minutes from the city.



The wooded site allowed for soaring, curtainless windows that the couple couldn't have enjoyed downtown. The 16-foot-high windows are from Milgard. **E** p. 210



In 2003, Stefan and Nicole moved to Portland from Milan, Italy, taking design jobs as a product designer at Nike and a freelance studio artist at advertising powerhouse Wieden + Kennedy, respectively. They first thought they'd find a loft in one of the city's burgeoning downtown neighborhoods. Tightly coordinated planning and an unusual culture of cooperation between developers and the city have given Portland its biggest housing boom since 1905, much of it concentrated in newly developed neighborhoods directly abutting downtown, such as the Pearl District. But lofts in the Pearl cost upwards of \$300,000. So, as Stefan recalls, "More for fun than anything else, we started sketching on napkins and scrap paper. With quite similar tastes, a house very quickly took shape, so I did a first pass at building a 3-D CAD model. At this stage we were too excited to turn back, so after a significant amount of research, and about 50 CAD variations on the same idea, we had something worth taking to an engineer." Stefan and Nicole (who earned her bachelor's degree in architectural studies) put form to their fantasy by laying out the elements that would make their dream home: guest rooms for visitors well away from the master suite; a high-ceilinged open plan organized around a fireplace; floor-to-ceiling windows opening west, away from the street. "We

approached the house from how it was going to be used," Stefan explains, "concerning ourselves with proximity of spaces related to daily and occasional functions, rather than with the design of a particular room. Once this was worked out, the rest fell into place fairly easily."

Stefan translated their napkin sketches into a CAD mock-up that the two played with for over a year. "We agreed on everything except the front door," Nicole announces. "He wanted it yellow and I wanted it bright orange. In the end we painted it over with chalkboard paint, so it can be anything we like." The CAD mock-up is on Stefan's desktop and a quick tour of it confirms that their imagined home was built exactly as planned, with no significant changes.

The Skybox, named for its site on Skyline Boulevard, turns its back on the two-lane road winding out of downtown. Indeed, the modest rectangle of brown visible from the road suggests a kind of modernist Nordic cabin or a skiers' shelter, belying the spacious geometry of the broad, three-story cube. Clad in darkly stained cedar and punctured with only a few small windows on three of its sides, the house opens up to the west as the steep, wooded slope drops away. Sixteen-foot-high windows wrap the western wall, framing the sparkling lights of nearby Beaverton and Hillsboro, visible through the ▶

The Andr ns' ingenious use of affordable materials is perhaps best illustrated in their kitchen, where all the cabinets and even the faucet are from IKEA.





Stefan at work in his studio (above). The house's open spaces are minimally furnished with modern classics like Verner Panton chairs in the dining area (below left) and a Corbu chaise and Eileen Gray end table (below right). **p. 210**

thick forest overstory. "We mixed the stain specifically for this site, so the house sort of blends into the trees," Stefan points out. The wood cladding reveals a burnished-aluminum interior wherever the cube's geometry has been disturbed (a tall narrow slice is taken out of one edge) or extended (as where a metal stairway traverses the southern wall, up to the roof deck).

Inside, the 2,250-square-foot volume unfolds in a pleasing sequence of well-proportioned spaces. Between entry area and main living room, the stained-wood floors step up 18 inches, obviating the need for any divider. At the same threshold, the overhanging master suite ends and suddenly the ceiling is 16 feet above you, the room wrapped in high walls of four by eight foot glass panels, slimly framed by two-inch profile steel.

"This is the clean floor," says Nicole. "It's such an easy house, with all the entertaining in this one great open space or out on the deck, and then the bedrooms and study all tucked away upstairs and down."

"We wanted that feeling of an open loft space," Stefan adds, "but with room for guests; a nice, sunny office; and extras like the master suite and sauna." With the right CAD software, a strong design sense, and the willingness to be patient and learn from their engineers and contractors, Stefan and Nicole managed to achieve all their goals while acting as their own architects. "Perhaps our greatest challenge was to come up with a solution within our budget," says Stefan. "But we can honestly say that the house came in not much, but slightly, under our budget." Now they're ready to offer their expertise to others: On the broad white tabletop of their shared office, shadows dapple the outlines of a new house design they're working on for a friend. ▶



IKEA Pax Cupboards

Stefan and Nicole made a handsome wall of kitchen cabinets using four IKEA Pax cupboards (at right) with standard shelving, including a clever adaptation of the shoe racks. By painting the doors in chalkboard paint, they created a striking and practical backdrop for their elegant kitchen. www.ikea.com

Bedroom

Interested in plain, elegant functionality, Stefan and Nicole took standard prefabricated interior doors from Western Pacific and hung them on inexpensive industrial rollers from McMaster-Carr. The slim black doors (below left), suspended millimeters above the floor, slide silently on metal tracks with no door frame or molding—so the floor continues in one uninterrupted flow from room to room. www.mcmaster.com / www.westernpacificbuilding.com

Chandelier

A ghostly chandelier (below) installed in the main-floor bathroom was bought for \$99 at Home Depot. Its garish brass and glass disappeared beneath a coat of matte-white spray paint, also used to glaze the \$10 crown molding into which Stefan and Nicole set it. www.homedepot.com

Vintage Bathroom Wall Sconces

Bathroom wall sconces were fashioned from three vintage 1970s Flos Lampadina table lamps designed by Achille Castiglioni that Stefan rewired and mounted directly onto tall, narrow mirrors (below right). This model was reissued as a table lamp—but can be repurposed—and is available in three different colors for around \$100. www.surrounding.com ■



How to Make My House Your House

