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NOVEMBER 2005

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Afloat in a cloud of foliage, the cedar-clad Skybox flashes crisp aluminum window frames and trim. Decks on the roof and off the main floor take living into the air.

*A cost-savvy home on NW Skyline Blvd proves there's no upper limit on smart design.*

## The Sheltering Skybox

**B**efore we said 'I love you,' we started designing a house together," says Nicole Andren, referring to her creative relationship with husband Stefan.

The couple finally brought their architectural fantasies to reality this year when they grouted the last bathroom tile in Skybox. That's their name for the 2,250-square-foot, three-level modernist cube they designed and helped build on a vacant, tree-ringed view lot on NW Skyline Blvd.

Nicole, a 27-year-old freelance studio artist at Wieden+Kennedy, found a kindred soul in Stefan while she was studying architecture in Chicago. The 33-year-old native of Sweden had spent

a year each in architecture and engineering school before turning to product design, a profession he practices as a senior product designer with Nike's timing division and its Tech Lab.

When the pencil-happy paramours moved to Portland from Milan two years ago, they planned to purchase a downtown loft—they both prefer modern design—until sticker shock sent them scurrying to outlying ZIP codes. But their search for a clean-lined house turned up only custom-designed mansions.

Then, scouting empty lots, they passed a For Sale by Owner sign on ritzy Skyline. The woody, 0.7-acre patch, sloping away from the street, offered an expansive view of the western valley

and, just as important, an asking price of \$150,000. The sign had been up for 12 hours. A couple months later, it was theirs—and so was the project of designing a beautiful, functional home without breaking the bank.

"We didn't want it to stick out like a white stucco modern house," Nicole says. Inspired by Japanese architecture, the couple drafted up a tucked-away entrance below street grade that opens into an expansive living and dining space. This "social zone" flows through a wall of glass windows to a west-facing deck running the width of the house. Flights of stairs on the home's south end go up to a master bedroom suite and down to the couple's shared studio and



Left: In the living room, the treetop view plays the starring role. A casual scatter of "light and low" furniture—including a platform in the room's center—lets guests arrange seating to their comfort.

Below: The master bedroom's sitting area was designed for easy conversion to a nursery. A French claw-foot tub in the bath playfully contrasts with the home's minimalist style.

Inset: For the master suite and main-floor powder room, the Andrens designed doors that slide on inexpensive industrial hardware.

## DOLLARS & SENSE

The Andrens trimmed their construction budget—and freed up cash for custom items and big expenses like excavating the steep lot—through four main strategies:

### DESIGNING SMART

A simple box is cheap to build, and Nicole and Stefan say they kept construction on time and on budget by making thoughtful decisions early and sticking to them. They conserved costs on big-ticket items like operable windows, including only the code minimum of one per room.

### SOURCING MATERIALS

The couple slashed costs by combing supplier catalogs for high-value, low-cost options—such as off-the-shelf, high-efficiency Milgard windows for the glass wall—and buying them directly from distributors.

### PITCHING IN

The owners took on loads of work themselves, from building the deck to laying plywood floors, staining exterior siding, framing interior details and more. They also saved big on architectural fees by drawing up their own plans.

### CHOOSING THE RIGHT CONTRACTORS

Wilbur Charters of Charter Homes and his subcontractors accepted their clients' hands-on approach. "They were interested in the project, so they became flexible," Stefan says.



guest suite. Muted stained cedar exterior siding—not stucco—clads the exterior.

Before hiring a contractor, the pair took their drawings to Southwest Portland engineering company VLMK Consulting Engineers for help determining structural details. Stick construction on a concrete foundation sufficed for the basic support system. VLMK also designed pre-welded sections and a bolting system for a steel-frame western wall to accommodate all the glass.

Completed this summer, the home is a showcase of ingenious and stylish

design, especially through its clever use and articulation of space. The main floor is open and filled with light, its only enclosed area a small powder room near the front entry. To the right of the entry sits a galley kitchen, a simple, long wooden bar screening its work surfaces from view. Beyond, a tree-filled vista commands the living/dining area, where stacked windows vault to meet a double height ceiling.

Two bold features divide—and connect—these two zones. A waist-high, see-through fireplace serves dually as hearth



Left: Light and color reign in the Andrens' shared studio.

Above: A sonnetlike kitchen deploys off-the-shelf items like tall Ikea cabinets, whimsically covered in black chalkboard paint. Behind a bar of kiln-dried Douglas

fir, a custom-welded stainless-steel counter features a simple depression for the sink. A pop-up downdraft vents the Miele cooktop, leaving an unobstructed view of the dining room.



and interior window, and an 18-inch step runs the width of the floor. The vertical jog produces topographical drama as well as a storage cavity for extra folding chairs and table leaves (it's accessed through cutouts in the riser). And the step serves as a bench where guests can perch, facing Nicole and Stefan while

*'It works; that made us both really happy.'*

they work in the kitchen. "No one yells at me for doing dishes," Nicole jokes.

Upstairs, the lofted master bedroom borrows natural light from the western glass wall. The abridged space prompted Stefan to draft scores of floor plans before he successfully found room for a walk-in closet, a bath with a separate toilet room and shower, and even a sauna. On the bottom level, slim windows in the couple's shared studio frame

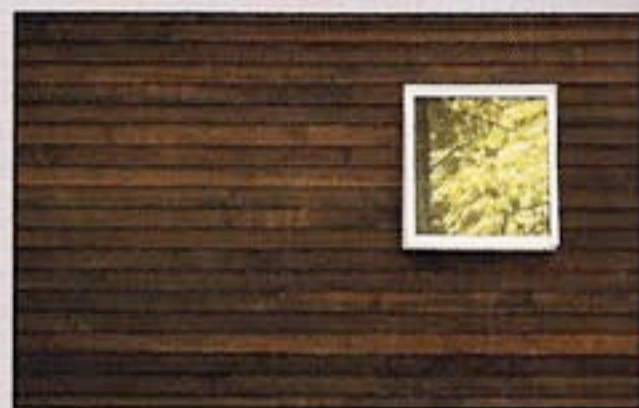
optimal views and allow plenty of wall space for pinning up images and works in progress. And at the northern end of the floor, two guest rooms peer into the trees, a specially insulated wall between them offering privacy for two sets of parents who snore.

The couple overlooked few details other than the punishing heat that accumulated this summer inside the glass wall; they say window coverings will fix that. "It's a product for living," Nicole says, citing Le Corbusier. "Where are you going to throw your bag down when you walk in?"

"It's about how you feel using it," Stefan concurs. The exacting design experience was satisfying enough that the couple is marketing their services to others under the name Krown Lab.

"It works; that made us really happy," says Nicole. "We had a housewarming party with 100 people, and the flow, the bathrooms: it worked. Our friends are already comfortable here. That's the test." ■

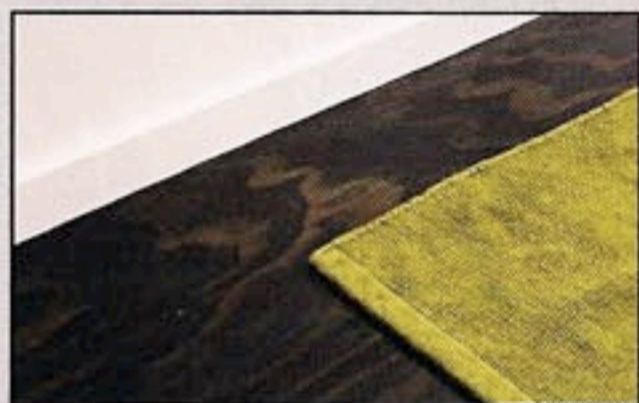
## PENNYWISE POSH



**EXTERIOR** Cedar lap siding, \$1.40 per square foot. Contrary to popular belief, standard six-inch horizontal cedar lap is one of the lowest-cost sidings available—Hardiplank was the only cheaper alternative the couple found, says Stefan.



**GUEST BATH** Bauhaus door handle, approximately \$20. The couple purchased this and similar fixtures on a trip to Stefan's native Sweden. "Here it's called Scandinavian modern design. There it's just a door handle," he says.



**MASTER BEDROOM AND STUDIO** Plywood floors, \$0. The wood was left over from framing the house. Sable stain echoes the look of the oak planks on the main level.



**MASTER BATH** Porcelain tiles, \$5 per square foot from Oregon Tile & Marble (1845 SE Third Ave., 503-231-0058); river rock shower floor, \$200 total from www.naturalstoneoutlet.com. The tiles, used throughout the bathroom, look like slate at a fraction of the cost. Rock was easy to grade to the shower drain.