



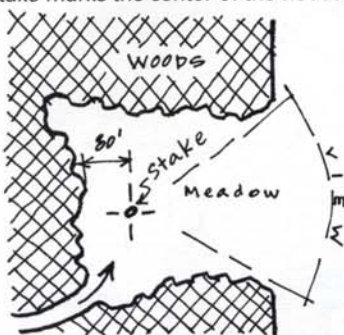
**W**e got the plan just about right when our firm designed Ted and Diane Johnson's house back in 1980. That house was in Northern California, and when the Johnsons decided to sell it and move to Whidbey Island in Washington, they called on us to design their new house. The new place would give us the chance to fix a couple of things that weren't quite right in the first house. This time we'd put the kitchen closer to the center of the house, for example, and we'd find a better spot for the guest room. It was as though our clients had lived in a Preliminary Plan for more than a decade and now were ready to go into Design Development.

**On the forest's edge**—The Johnsons' eight-acre site includes a meadow that is akin to an alcove on the edge of a giant room. The meadow is bordered by woods on three sides (drawing A, below). On its fourth side it merges with a large valley—the giant room—which is finally enclosed by the distant ridge (painting left).

The site is approached through the woods, down an 800-ft. driveway. When Ted Johnson and I made our first visit, we made our way to the site on foot. It was very satisfying to walk *through* the woods and emerge *into* the meadow. We rambled around in the meadow until we found what seemed the most comfortable place

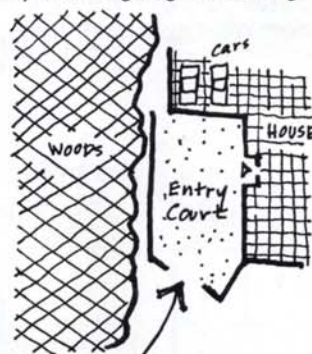
**A. Finding the spot**

*In the shelter of the nearby woods, the stake marks the center of the house.*



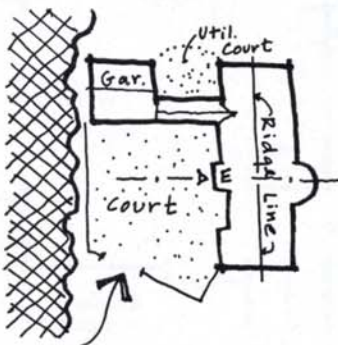
**B. First draft**

*Once the site was pinpointed, the approach, the entry and the garage were roughed out.*



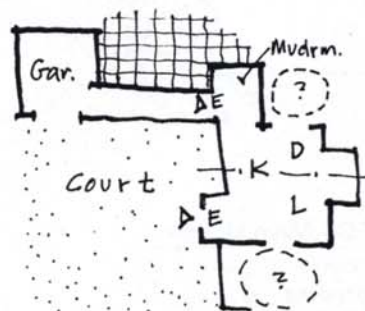
**C. Enclosure**

*Rooflines define the courtyard boundaries, and the entries appear.*



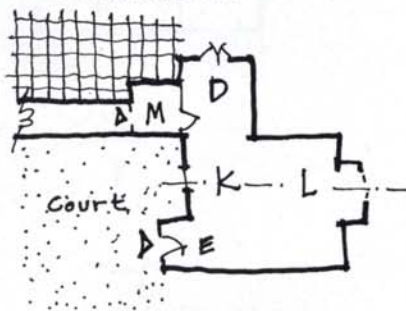
**D. Commons first**

*The public spaces emerge by the entries.*



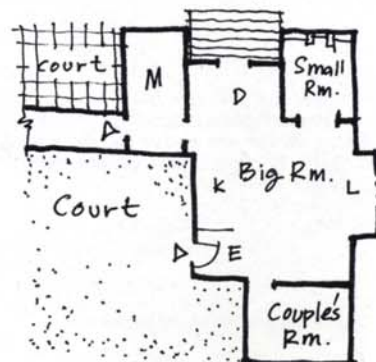
**E. Breakout**

*The dining area moves toward the sun.*

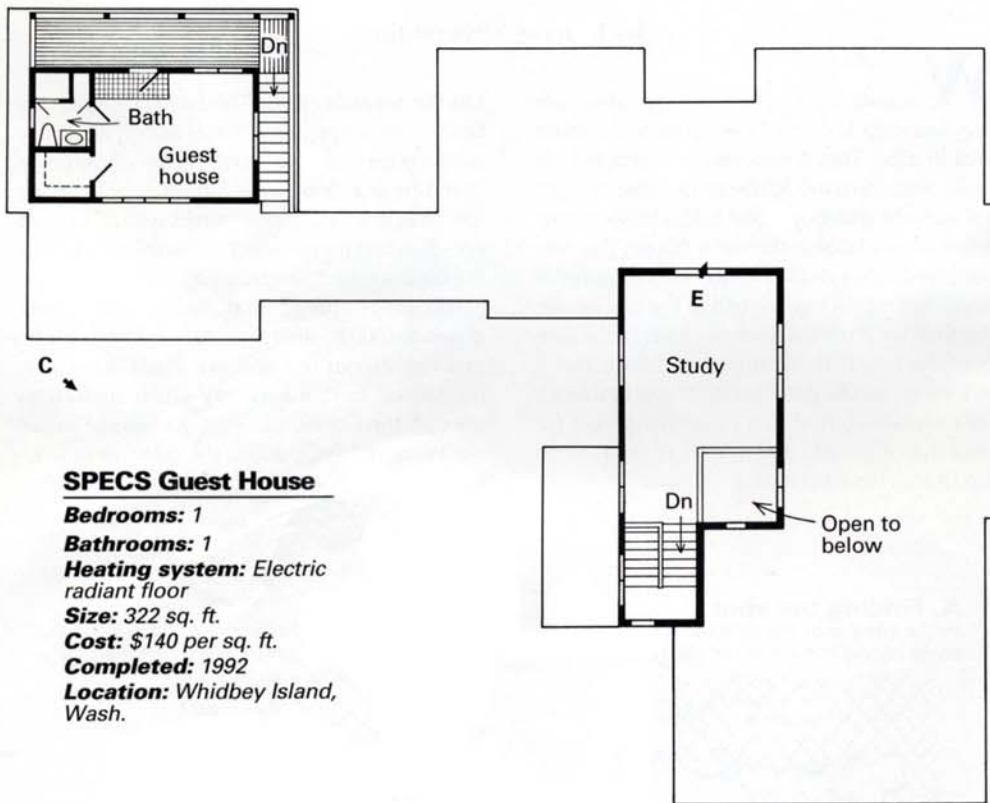


**F. Balance**

*The growing mudroom is offset by a small room off the living area.*

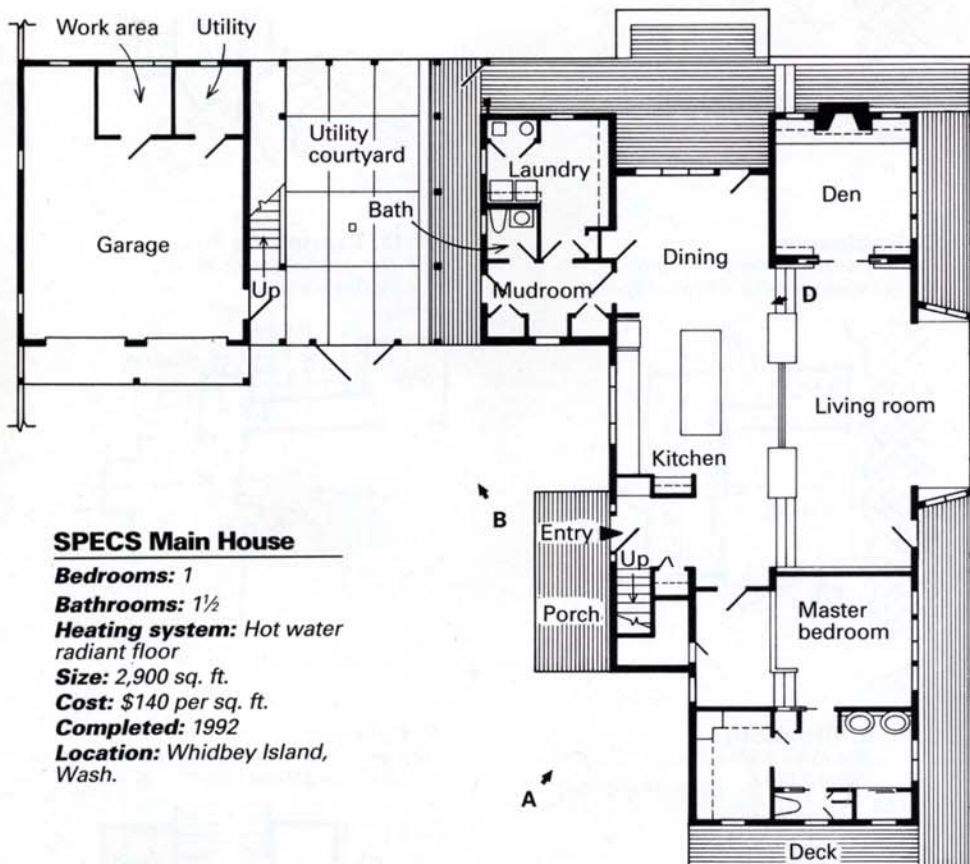


**Against the woods.** Embraced on three sides by a conifer forest, the Johnson house sits atop the brow of a rise overlooking meadows and pastures. The home's wood siding, corral fences and barnlike shapes evoke a rural enclave in keeping with Whidbey Island's architectural heritage.



**SPECS Guest House**

**Bedrooms:** 1  
**Bathrooms:** 1  
**Heating system:** Electric radiant floor  
**Size:** 322 sq. ft.  
**Cost:** \$140 per sq. ft.  
**Completed:** 1992  
**Location:** Whidbey Island, Wash.



**SPECS Main House**

**Bedrooms:** 1  
**Bathrooms:** 1½  
**Heating system:** Hot water radiant floor  
**Size:** 2,900 sq. ft.  
**Cost:** \$140 per sq. ft.  
**Completed:** 1992  
**Location:** Whidbey Island, Wash.

For the sake of privacy, the L-shaped plan of the Johnson house places the guest quarters, which are above the garage, and the master bedroom at opposite ends of the two wings.



to stand. It was a spot about 80 ft. from the trees. Looking west, we drove a stake into this spot.

On successive visits to the site, we continued to enjoy moving through the woods, arriving at the meadow and gravitating toward our spot. Our site plan emerged around this spatial sequence. We imagined the driveway cutting through the woods along the same footpath, arriving at a clearing that would be a well-defined entry on the meadow's edge. We imagined our spot, with its westerly outlook, as a place inside the house around which other spaces and functions would be gathered. These thoughts led to the first draft of our site plan (drawing B, p. 83).

Architects will recognize this design stage as "napkins" because it is often reached over lunch after a visit to the site. Napkin sketches focus on the big issues and create a framework that eventually becomes a floor plan.

As Ted and I headed back to California, we pondered the problems we might encounter designing a house that would be built several states from our office. How would we find a good builder and keep in close touch with the project? We solved this problem by working with an architect on Whidbey Island (see sidebar p. 87).

**Napkins to blueprints**—Back at our office in Berkeley, my colleague, Doug Shaffer, and I stud-

Photos taken at lettered positions.



ied the napkin drawings. The first thing we tackled was the experience of arrival: What do you see when you arrive? Where is the entrance? How should we organize coming and going for both cars and people?

Hoping to capture the surprise and the pleasure of the first site visit, we imagined driving into a gated entry court, an open but well-defined space. In places where we do not have to worry about cars overwhelming the land, we like to create entry zones that bring cars together with plants and people. In small numbers, framed by trees and a decent site plan, cars look great.

In an effort to give our entry court a strong rectangular shape, we conceived of its eastern edge as defined by the unusually straight edge of the woods, emphasized by a long, low retaining wall holding back the woods. The court's western edge is the house. On the south side, the garage would provide the enclosure for this outdoor room, or entry court (drawing C, p. 83).

We immediately saw an opportunity here. First, we could separate the two-car garage from the house by 20 ft. or so, giving the garage an identity as an outbuilding subordinate to the main house. This would enforce the feeling of a rural enclave. Then we would connect the garage to the house with a breezeway fenced off from the entry court (photo right). This would give us a squarish

**Roof language.** The tallest part of the house is over the kitchen (photo above taken at A on floor plan), signifying the heart of the house. The garage (photo below taken at B on floor plan) is also two stories, but its ridge is lower than that of the main house to keep it subordinate to the main house.

shape for the court (a better proportion than a long rectangle), and it would create another outdoor space—a smaller, south-facing utility court between the garage and the house.

We now imagined the house as a long rectangle, helping to define the new utility court, as well as the entry court. A rough image of the roof followed, with the ridgeline of the house running north to south, intersected by the ridgelines over the breezeway and the garage that run east to west. By turning the corner this way, the eave lines and the ridgelines would play a strong role in shaping both the entry and utility courts as rooms in their own rights.

The entrances fit naturally into this courtyard arrangement. The main entrance is roughly centered off the entry court where it is clearly visible. At the end of the breezeway, a mudroom entrance is screened by a fence.

We liked the way this plan hid the view across the valley from the experience of arriving at the site. There is a glimpse of this view as you emerge from the woods, but then your attention settles

