

# TIMES COLONIST

## House Beautiful: Surrounded by woods and water

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Stone, wood and shingle details add interest to the curved exterior, which has a five-metre overhang to protect the patio from winter storms. Photograph By Dom Koric, Rob Parsons Construction Ltd.

With waterfront vistas all the way from Mount Baker and Darcy Island to 10-Mile Point and Mount Douglas, this home offers extraordinary panoramas.

And the inner view is just as astonishing, with a giant cedar trunk from which rafter beams branch out, a glass-walled staircase and a massive disappearing glass wall.

Situated just steps from the water, the attractive front patio is protected from the elements by a five-metre overhang featuring a single, curved beam that arcs across the house and supports oversize rafters that radiate outward like streaks of sunlight.

This is the exceptional island retreat of Vancouver radiologist Dr. Ken Poskitt, who knew just what he wanted to build and sketched out plans in detail before sending them to a designer and then to Dave Patrino at Kettle River Timberworks in Vancouver.

“And then I went to Rob Parsons, who is the really important part of the story and was a great builder to work with,” he said.

Parsons knows the island well. He has built five houses from the ground up there, and has also done a number of renovations.

Working in such a location is a pleasure, as Parsons appreciates the wilderness and wildlife. “There are tons of eagles over there, and one time we saw three killer whales circling a rock with seal pups on it, which was really interesting to see up close.”

But building with no power and severe transport limitations adds some stress.

“Sidney Island is a big co-ordination challenge because of organizing the barge trips for materials, getting sub trades and crews over there. Sometimes, as soon as you mention the word Sidney Island, tradespeople say they are not interested.”

Parsons has his own boat and makes the 25-minute crossing from Van Isle Marina with his crew, carrying everything he needs.

“You never want to forget anything and, fortunately, I am well organized and we keep a whole lot of tools on the island.”

He avoids getting caught in storms and staying overnight at all costs. “Sometimes it can be pretty rough, but so far we’ve always made it back. I keep a close watch on the forecast and we pack up early if there is a storm brewing.

“We are also governed by rules set out by Transport Canada and if it is blowing over a certain number of knots, we don’t travel.”

Apart from the isolation constraints, the biggest challenge was figuring out how the beams would fit into the roof system, look good and comply with the building code.

“The timberwork was pretty amazing, especially the central cedar tree trunk, which is a metre in diameter at the base, and supports roof rafters that radiate out.”

Parsons explained he used conventional framing up to the roof, “and that’s where it got complicated because of various exposed beams and rafters,” including a skeleton of inside beams that curve into a tighter radius than the one over the veranda.

Of course all of these exposed structures are what made the house so appealing to a radiologist who is used to looking deep into the human body.

Another of the home’s striking aspects is a collecting glass door system comprising eight, 1.2-metre wide panels that open up at the front to a width of 10 metres.

The challenge for Parsons was figuring out how all the segments would glide smoothly away and be stored.

“It’s a really nice feature, and it’s pretty amazing on a good day to open up your whole living room, especially as the house is right on the water.”

The heavy, double-glazed wall components were barged over — like everything else — and formed the biggest glass wall he has built on the island.

Radiant in-floor heat is powered by a propane boiler and concrete floors, in the laundry and kitchen, are acid-etched to a ruddy patina.

The home has a mezzanine entrance that rises six metres to the second floor, with a turret at the top of the stairwell. It’s made of structural posts and beams, with sealed glass units installed on site.

It took just over a year to build the 1,850-square-foot home that rests on a slab, and pouring the concrete was another

tricky point.

Retardants were put into the pumper truck to stop the cement from solidifying too early and Parsons has to keep an eye on the weather because once a slab is poured it ideally should be damp for seven days to cure.

“With the Poskitt house we had just one day to get the pour done, and that was May 13. If not then, we would have had to wait three months because of the tides.”

He explained several trucks had to be off-loaded from a barge, including pumper and concrete trucks, and a very high tide was needed to manage that.

“You can’t do this kind of work at night, when there are high tides in the summer. Can you imagine the problem with lights? So we were very limited.

“Luckily, I checked that, otherwise it would have really mucked things up”

The owner said when he started looking for a builder, people on the Island told him about Parsons. “I thought when you build a house, people only tell you horror stories. But the oddest thing with Rob was, I’d mention his name and for the next two hours everyone I talked to couldn’t stop telling me about him. It got rather annoying,” he said with a chuckle.

“I had a design basically done when I met Rob. We discussed what I wanted and he knew what I was doing better than I did. He didn’t let me get in the way and I supported all his decisions.

“He had to co-ordinate everything, from solar, wells and septic system to choosing the right tides for delivery of timber, equipment, concrete. And I can’t recall a single instance where he made a mistake.

“Everything was always here on time, ready at the right moment. There’s no question, I have a wonderful house and had a wonderful experience because I chose the right person. Rob did a spectacular job.”

Poskitt says his house is “incredibly” functional but he also appreciates the fact that it fades into the landscape. “You don’t notice it unless you really look. You can be paddling offshore a couple of hundred metres and hardly see it. It doesn’t scream, ‘Look at me!’ ”

That’s good because the doctor didn’t want anything gaudy or overdone, but preferred to create a home, “that catches your eye but takes you a while to appreciate, like a painting.”

Island-born Poskitt used to live in Campbell River and, when looking for a recreational property, fully expected it to be on Quadra or Cortez island.

“I only looked at Sidney to eliminate it as I thought it might be too settled. But when I got here I was shocked. It makes more sense as it’s so undeveloped. And my wife, who is a real city girl, is totally hooked now.”

The owners now live there from April to October. The house functions almost entirely on solar power thanks to a bank of batteries that store electricity, and a back-up propane generator.

Their winter visits are more variable, “but the amount of solar power is still enough to maintain everything in a stable pattern.”

The owner added the island is a recovering ecosystem after having been severely overgrazed by fallow deer years ago. A management program keeps the herd healthy now, rare flora is returning and the island operates as a

sustainable tree farm.

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