

ARCHITECTURE

# A home embraced by an architecture of delight

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Home of Bud Wood, West Vancouver B.C. The elaborate matching 25 brackets inside and out of the house came from a demolished mansion in Oregon, salvaged for \$25 each. Photos by Colin Perry



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In life, Woodruff "Bud" Wood was a legendary architectural designer and educator, with an equally legendary house that matched his persona. Now that house in West Vancouver is on the market, awaiting a new owner to appreciate its exuberant uniqueness.

Mr. Wood, who died in 2003, was past principal of the Vancouver firm Birmingham & Wood, and a beloved professor at the University of British Columbia school of architecture from the mid-1960s until his retirement in the mid-90s. But he didn't embrace the Corbusian ethos that held many of his peers in sway. "He was a Fifties-type Beat guy," recalls architect James Burton, who with Sandra Moore took over his firm after his retirement. "He believed in an architecture of delight."

"Bud was always drawn to symmetry, but never the simple bilateral kind of the classicists," adds Ron Walkey, a close friend and UBC colleague. Instead, he embraced the "geometry of life's complexity," Mr. Walkey says. "The cold-lined European modernists made him shiver."

The very process of approaching the house envelops a visitor within a geometric farrago: a stone path zigzags upward through the densely treed lot, through a gate of hand-carved teak Indian columns, and toward the massive oak door.

Upon entry, a visitor may choose to veer left and stride up a short spiralling stair path to the family room, or veer right and step down to kitchen/living room, or stop en route and ascend yet another spirochete-like stairway, to the sleeping quarters above. Corridors and stairways abruptly cleave and veer off at unexpected angles, like a four-armed Shiva. The oddly shaped windows, nooks, gargoyles and hanging lights evoke the intricacy of mandalas and Islamic patterns.

"Bud loved to embellish - in what he said, in what he designed," Mr. Walkey notes. "But this embellishment was always part of the geometry. Nothing was superfluous, tacked on for titillation. Each piece in his designs had a very specific form and location."

"Bud's house is like a journey through all the places in the world he'd visited, collaged together," adds Bill Pechet, a former student who later taught alongside Mr. Wood at UBC. "There's his six months in India, there are casbahs and souks and the sense of a Greek village, all transplanted into a west coast landscape."

While architects often talk of embedding history metaphorically or referentially, in this house the history is literally embedded. Affixed to the columns and beams are ornately carved wooden volutes culled from secondhand shops and salvage yards. Cabinets of spruce and oak are finished with drawers and doors that had been culled from Bud's favourite tobacco store on Hastings Street. Old floorboards from a tear-down have been repurposed into the kitchen counters. The kitchen's upper shelves were shelved from a wooden Quonset hut that was the interim architecture school while UBC's permanent building was under construction.

Just as the house construction was nearing completion, his students' favourite party haunt - a dilapidated mansion in Vancouver's west end where some of them lived - was slated for demolition. He commandeered its front door, and it remains the home's proud entry point: mediievally heavy with a huge, eye-popping stained-glass circular window.

Mr. Walkey points out that the design evolved through a collaborative process between Bud and Diane, who worked as an architect but gave up a promising career to raise their family. "The place is a joint creation, a testament to their interwoven lives, interwoven sensibilities and interwoven rituals," Walkey says.



Bud showed his initial drawing to his wife - a simple repetitive form, Mr. Walkey recalls - and Diane pored over the drawing, shifting things and making suggestions as she imagined actually inhabiting it. "I was more concerned about the journey than the geometry," Diane Wood says.

After much back-and-forth between the two of them, the house finally took shape and was completed in 1979. With a subsequent addition, the house now boasts 2,100 square feet but evokes a sense of an infinite Mobius strip as you meander through its many paths.

For students and peers, the house has served as a legendary gathering spot. (The wake for architectural giant Ron Thom, who died in 1986, was held here.) "It became a landscape of geniality," Mr. Walkey recalls. "With almost no four-square-walled rooms in the place, spaces flow into one another: there's always a corner to rest an elbow or set down a glass or open a book; and a small brass light nearby to read it by, and a rail to lean against."

Mr. Wood's architectural ethos was deeply influenced by the American Arts and Crafts architect Bernard Maybeck and by Mr. Wood's earlier tenure at the University of Oregon. He and his wife embraced the idea of building in furniture and imbuing a living space with a

sense of organic continuity. "The pieces are so embedded that it's hard to determine where the walls leave off and the furniture begins," Mr. Walkey observes.

"The house really worked exactly as we wanted it to," Diane Wood says. Compelled to downsize, however, she has put it on the market, listing it with Iain Edmonds and Associates. Its \$1.129-million list price reflects a quiet north-shore market, but also her determination to find the right owner, one who will appreciate and preserve its architectural integrity. Building a brand-new monster home on this craggy and irregular site could be difficult, at any rate.

For a buyer with patience, foresight and savvy, there could be a future payoff: if the next owner seeks and receives recognition of the District of West Vancouver's heritage register, the Bud Wood House might eventually qualify for preservation incentives. West Vancouver's senior community planner, Stephen Mikicich, notes that while the district's heritage program is still embryonic, it was conceived with the ambition of preserving historically and architecturally distinct houses such as this one.

That's exactly what Diane Wood is hoping for: "I would just love for the next person to carry on the journey."

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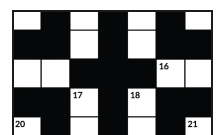
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