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HABITAT

A Family Compound with High Style

A very DIY family crafts its own sprawling world of cheerful irreverence.

By Amara Holstein • May 1, 2013



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A five-foot-tall metal owl with glowing eyes greets you at the Gallagher residence. Inside, a surprising world awaits: a jumble of coats drapes from a jaunty metal fish, and laser-cut wooden letters above proclaim, "You Dropped a Bomb on Me, Baby." A painted mermaid smiles from the surface of a sliding door, knitted cozies cover pendant lamps, and grassy green walls provide a verdant backdrop throughout. "It's cheerful and a little irreverent," says Gretchen Gallagher. "We don't take ourselves very seriously, and we don't fit into a mold."

The thread that pulls all these details together is a unique aesthetic—part retromod, part funky-eclectic, part underwater theme, all unabashedly playful. Gretchen and Tim Gallager grew up together in Southern Oregon, and both studied art in college. Now, Tim is the owner and creative director of the industrial design firm Gallagher Designs—conveniently located next door. "My family and I became my client," he says. "And in a way, the house became a design experiment."



Color, pattern, and texture run wild in the Gallaghers' house, from the wall of printed metal scales that Tim hung in the living room to the back patio illuminated by a steel fire pit, the knitted lampshades in the dining areas, and the inspirational adages throughout.

IMAGE: JORDAN SIEMENS

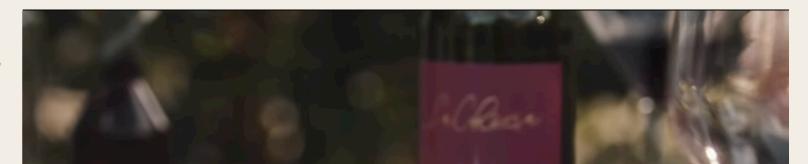
From the outside, the house is an innocuous 1950s wood-shingled ranch. But for a metal skull over the front door (and that owl), it blends seamlessly with its suburban Northwest Hills neighbors. The place was in poor shape when the couple first saw it in 2000, but they were enticed by the acre lot and the location —so they decided to reconceive every corner of the house and property for themselves.

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Over 12 years, which included three phases of remodeling and the addition of three children, the Gallaghers radically transformed their home's interior, nearly doubling the overall area to 3,500 square feet. Downstairs, they removed inside walls to create an open floor plan, and gutted the kitchen and refitted it with new appliances, concrete countertops, and a backsplash of glass mosaic tiles. They converted an attached garage into a playroom, with funky orange and green plaid carpet tiles underfoot, acid-green beanbag chairs and a camo-print couch, all anchored by a climbing rock wall. A spacious new master suite now protrudes from the back of the house, and a cramped attic upstairs became three bedrooms, one for each of their children, centered on a shared play space with built-in desks.

The family shared a tiny guesthouse (formerly a detached garage a short walk uphill) during the remodels, all five family members rotating through one bathroom. Now, it's a remodeled guest space for visiting grandparents, as well as where Gretchen sews and the kids play foosball.



In the bedrooms and bathrooms, words pepper the walls: a tongue-incheek welcome to the master suite, the nickname "Chop", and parental admonishments in the kids' bathroom. Everything is green, with the notable exception of their daughter's room, which is a powerful pink. With the help of a neighbor who owns a printing company, as well as tools and designers from his own firm, Tim applied his artwork to every conceivable type of material, from the monsters and undersea creatures printed on the plywood sliding doors to the living room wall covered in overlapping layers of 1,200 metal scales, alternately printed and painted various patterns, then meticulously nailed on by hand. A topless mermaid (who looks suspiciously like Gretchen) printed on canvas is applied to the headboard in the master bedroom. The couple pulled other items from Gallagher Designs' warehouse of castoffs and leftovers. A globular, shiny black chair sits in one son's room; a vintage fridge painted bright orange and repurposed as a closet in the other son's room. Antique glass lamps collected over the years are clustered together and arranged in the living room and stairwell.

IMAGE: JORDAN SIEMENS

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It doesn't stop at the back doors—the Gallaghers transformed the entire acre site into a veritable arts and sports playground. The master suite opens onto a sequence of a bocce court, a horseshoe pit, and a putting green. Up the hill, what used to be a meadow for cows and horses is now a basketball court, a play structure with an inground trampoline, and a lacrosse field. Between the Gallaghers and their neighbors, a shared swimming pool and lounge echoes with splashes and laughter from late spring to early fall. Tim's metal sculptures—a friendly alligator, a cheerful dog—are sprinkled about.

"The house is an extension of our family motto," Tim explains. "Do good. Be good. Kick ass."

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