



# The Great

A Washington family breaks free from suburbia, resettling in a sylvan valley outside of Seattle.

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# Northern

In Carnation, Washington, Kim and Lou Maxon and their three boys reside in a horizontal, steel-clad house designed by the renowned firm Olson Kundig. Its south end is slightly raised above the bare landscape, accessible via a bridge

(opposite). Clerestory windows from Fleetwood are punctuated by a tall strip of glass from Milgard, hinting at the warm, light-filled space within. Alpine Welding did most of the architectural metalwork.





**The story of Kim and Lou Maxon's house** starts with a book. More specifically, an architecture monograph about Seattle-based firm Olson Kundig that Kim gave Lou for Christmas, *Tom Kundig: Houses*. "Which is now known around here as the most expensive book ever," Lou says, with a laugh. It was 2007 and the family had recently added a third child to the mix, and their modest suburban home outside Seattle, with its vinyl siding and planned-community setting, didn't suit them anymore. The timing was right, and Lou fell in love with Olson Kundig's style of landscape-integrated modernism. A few months earlier, the couple had bought a 21-acre, densely forested plot in Carnation, Washington, overlooking the bucolic Snoqualmie Valley. Lou wanted his three boys to get a chance to experience

what his own Seattle childhood had been like, "in a house that backed up to a huge forest, where we'd run around in the woods, play Star Wars, and climb trees." Lou, who'd founded a branding agency, already had strong modernist leanings. Though Kim favors Craftsman and wrap-around porches, she soon saw the light. "I realized that kind of house wouldn't take advantage of this view, and the porch would make it too shady, and a lot of windows would be nice, and before you knew it, here we are." She chuckles. "Lou had this vision, and I learned to trust him." Though they interviewed a dozen or so firms, they ultimately chose to go all in with Olson Kundig. Lou recalls the opening quote from the book—"Only common things happen when common sense prevails"—and says, "We had the opportunity

to take the safe route and we opted out." On their first visit, principal Tom Kundig and project architect Edward Lalonde immediately saw the land's potential. "It was the perfect site for that prospect/refuge balance we're always trying to find in a home location, with the forest behind, protecting you, and the prospect view out over the valley," says Kundig. The Maxons decided to keep 16 acres under forest management, and took their role as stewards of the rest of the land seriously, attending state forestry classes in the evenings. The whole site is now Forest Stewardship Council-approved, with any felled trees becoming paper or wood products. They also cleared only a little more than an acre to build on, under the watchful eye of a forestry consultant. It wasn't just the trees that provided >

Reminiscent of a shade that Lou's grandfather, an advertising creative, liked to use in his work, the red of the Fred Meyer barstools matches the Bluestar range. A pair of steel-wrapped vents rise from the fir plywood millwork, built by Schuchart/Dow. In the living area,

Lou sits on a Room & Board sofa, flanked by the family's Great Danes (opposite, left); the fireplace is by Montigo. The couple snagged their Womb chair, a floor model, on sale (opposite, top). Kim, a dressmaker, styles her garments on a mannequin (opposite, bottom).







Set on 21 acres at the top of the Snoqualmie Valley, the 3,200-square-foot house represents a major lifestyle change for the Maxons, who previously lived in a split-level in a planned subdivision. "When you're here, you just

sit and watch what's happening outside," says Lou. "It's like the Weather Channel. We don't even need the TV." Kim adds, "In spring everything explodes." Cedars, hemlocks, and vine maples shoot up from the fern-covered hillside.

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**a**

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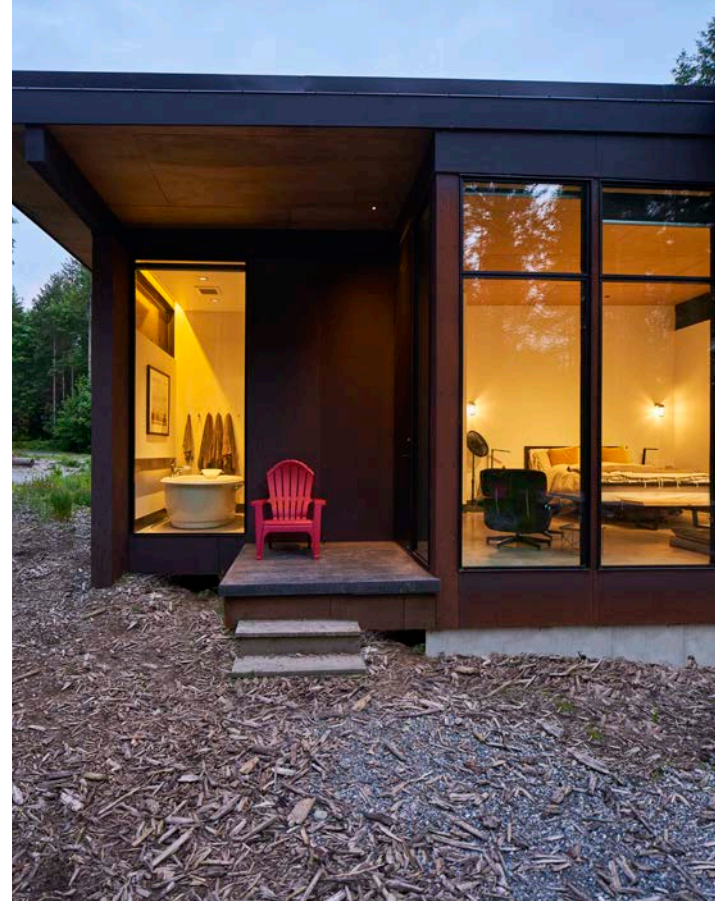
dwelling

these former suburbanites with an education in rural homebuilding, however. “It was everything,” Lou remembers with a sigh. A tree fell over and created a pool of water, which the county said required a wetland delineation (costing \$15K). The house is on a 400-foot-deep well (“deeper than Snoqualmie Falls!” Lou points out), and, because the county requires that private wells achieve a certain amount of water production, the bank wouldn’t issue the monthly draw from their loan until they increased the gallons per minute. As Lou says, “It was like going into a restaurant and the chef brings out twenty courses and you don’t know how much it’s going to cost until you get the bill.”

Once they finally broke ground in 2014, though, the 3,200-square-foot house easily fell into place with the help of contractor Schuchart/Dow. Perched on a bluff, the structure is cantilevered slightly into the woods, “hovering above the ground, so the forest can grow underneath and you feel more immersed in it,” says Lalonde. Mild steel clads the exterior—weathered in places by the wind and rain to a burnished orange—and, except for a vertical slice of a living room window, the driveway-facing side of the house is kept private, with only clerestory windows along its length.

“Our strategy with these kinds of houses is to do tough on the outside, soft on the inside, like a Tootsie Pop,” says Kundig. Step through the massive front door—a steel slab that pivots on a semi-truck axle—and a wall of windows frames the view of swaying cedar and hemlock trees in the foreground, with the valley splayed beyond. The house is long and lean, “so that when you’re in any room, the idea is to feel all four sides of the land,” explains Kundig. One end of the house is anchored by a capacious gathering space comprising the living, dining, and kitchen areas. The other end contains the master suite, with the boys’ three bedrooms and a den lining the hallway in between. Black and white colors predominate—“it’s Stormtrooper Palette,” jokes Lou—accentuated by pops of “Maxon red,” a Pantone-matched shade that Lou’s grandfather, an original Detroit ad-man, used prolifically in his work. With poured concrete floors underfoot and warm plywood ceilings overhead, it’s a perfect neutral backdrop to the family’s busy lives.

The last piece of the puzzle? Lou’s detached office, a two-story space in the final stages of planning that will be set on repurposed Great Northern Railway tracks. When it’s finished, it will slide



110 feet out to the forest and back to the house, powered by an electric motor. “I wanted a detached studio so that there’s a physical experience of leaving the house and entering the building,” says Lou. “It was really about commuting somewhere.”

On any given weekday, Kim comes home as Lou powers down his computer for the evening. Their three boys, now 12, 15, and

18 years old, may be romping in the woods with the family’s two Great Danes or playing fetch with them in the long hallway. An owl might flit across the sky as the sun drops behind the hills, with the light flickering pink and orange through the windows. More than a decade in the making, the home is, as Lou affectionately says, “like our Barbie Dream House.” ■

● Maxon House N

ARCHITECT Olson Kundig LOCATION Carnation, Washington

- A Entrance
- B Library
- C Living Area
- D Dining Area
- E Kitchen
- F Pantry
- G Bedroom
- H Closet
- I Master Bedroom
- J Master Bathroom
- K Den/Guestroom
- L Bathroom
- M Laundry
- N Powder Room

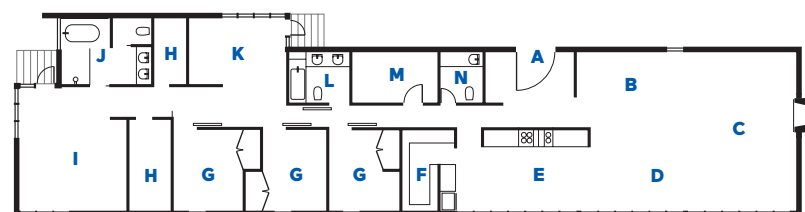


ILLUSTRATION: LOHNES + WRIGHT

Step through

the massive front door and a wall of windows frames the view of swaying cedar and hemlock trees in the foreground, with the valley splayed beyond.



For ventilation, many of the valley-facing windows, measuring 10½ feet tall, feature a section at the top or bottom that opens. Navy 111 chairs, part of Emeco’s Coca-Cola edition, sit at the heads of a Restoration Hardware table; WAC track lights provide illumination. The floors are made of poured-in-place concrete. Outside the master bedroom (opposite), a small deck is tucked beneath the flat roof. The tub is by Maax.