

FABULOUS FENESTRATION

Massive windows in a Gabriola Island home invite in the view

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Photo by Jeffrey James

DESIGN

A LARGE GLASS FACADE RISES TO A DRAMATIC peak, accounting for more than half the rear of this 4,000-square-foot home on Gabriola Island. Ships that ply the Georgia Strait, an occasional orca or dolphin, the Coast Mountains and, on a clear day, the Vancouver skyline are all visible through the large steel-framed glass panes. It's a stunning tableau for homeowners Bram and Joanna Vandenberg.

In architectural parlance, the big window

is called a curtain wall, and it's difficult to believe it was not part of the plan for the home's design from the get-go.

While it's now in the DNA of the house, the curtain wall began simply as an option that was raised in the weekly meetings architect Vince lameo of Architrave held with the Vandenberg.

The couple moved to Gabriola Island from the Lower Mainland, first into an existing house on the site and then, when construction

was completed in autumn 2012, into their new single-level home. The architect introduced the curtain wall option as a way to enhance the sweeping views and to add value to the home.

The retired couple (Joanna worked as a psychologist and Bram an accounting executive) wanted the property on one storey so it could adapt to a time when climbing stairs might prove difficult. "Our previous home had steps everywhere," Joanna says.

They had a clear aesthetic in mind: "We wanted a modern home," she says. Originally from the Netherlands, the couple had loved that style of home that was built for them there. They also wanted natural materials, and opted for arbutus cladding on their cabinetry and grey slate floors, chosen to withstand scratches from their two dogs.

They looked for a firm that could create a permanent home in an oceanfront location they had known only as a vacation spot. On the

island, they found Architrave, which both designs and builds, and has worked on hundreds of projects throughout its 20 years in business. "We were impressed with the quality of their homes," says Joanna.

"If the sun is shining, we sit out 10 months a year."

A fabulous view demands vast windows. This house was given plenty of fenestration to welcome the outdoors in.



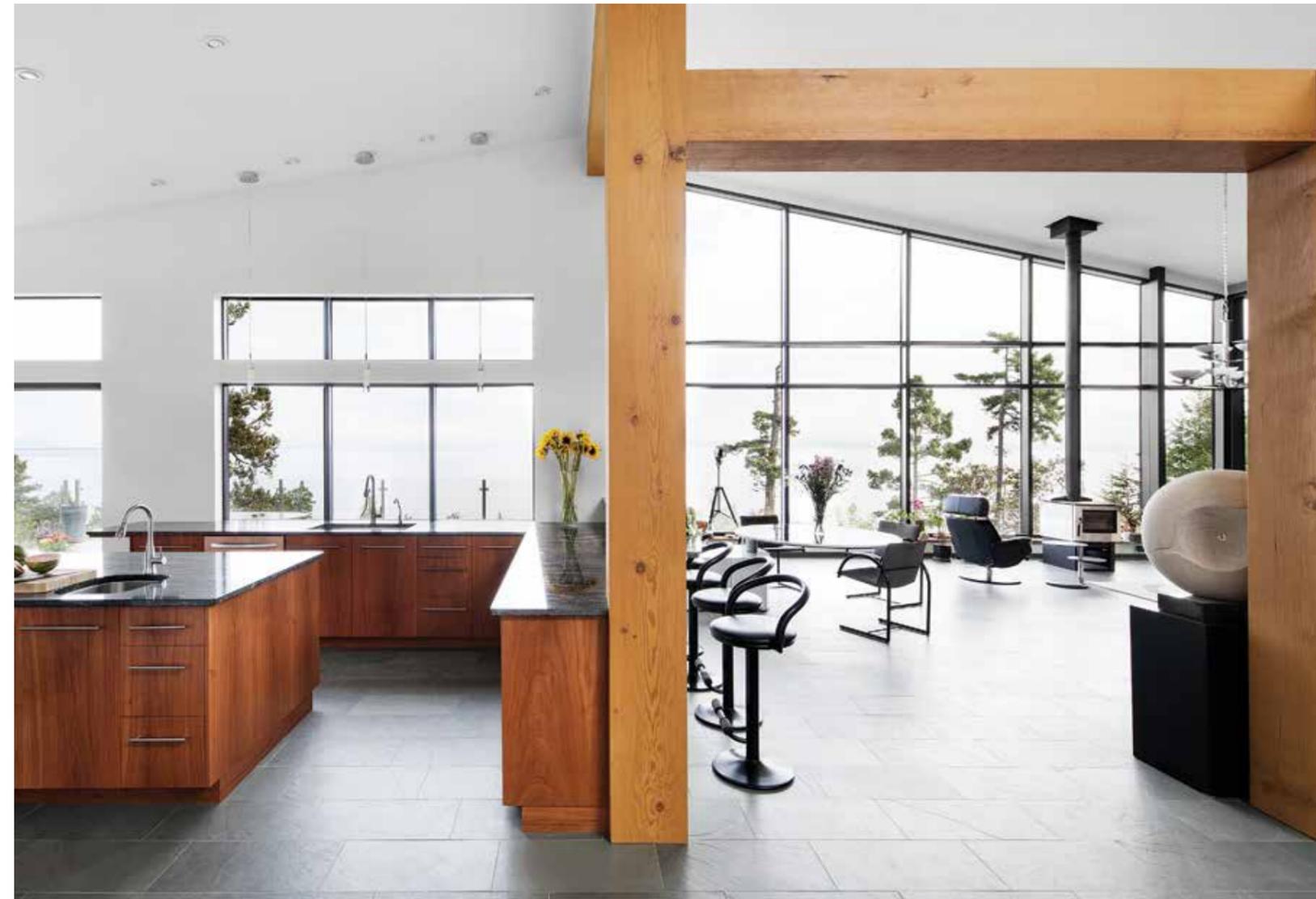
The roofline allows rainwater to be collected and piped into cisterns.

Photos by Adrien Williams





Photos by Adrien Williams



Architrave proved how well they know the land, starting with its topography. “There are not many flat landscapes on Gabriola Island,” says Jameo, recalling how he had no choice but to dynamite an area to carve out a plateau for the house, one that would take advantage of the ocean view. The firm then terraced the land, creating retaining walls from the sandstone it had recovered.

Another logistical challenge came after the couple decided to keep the original home on the

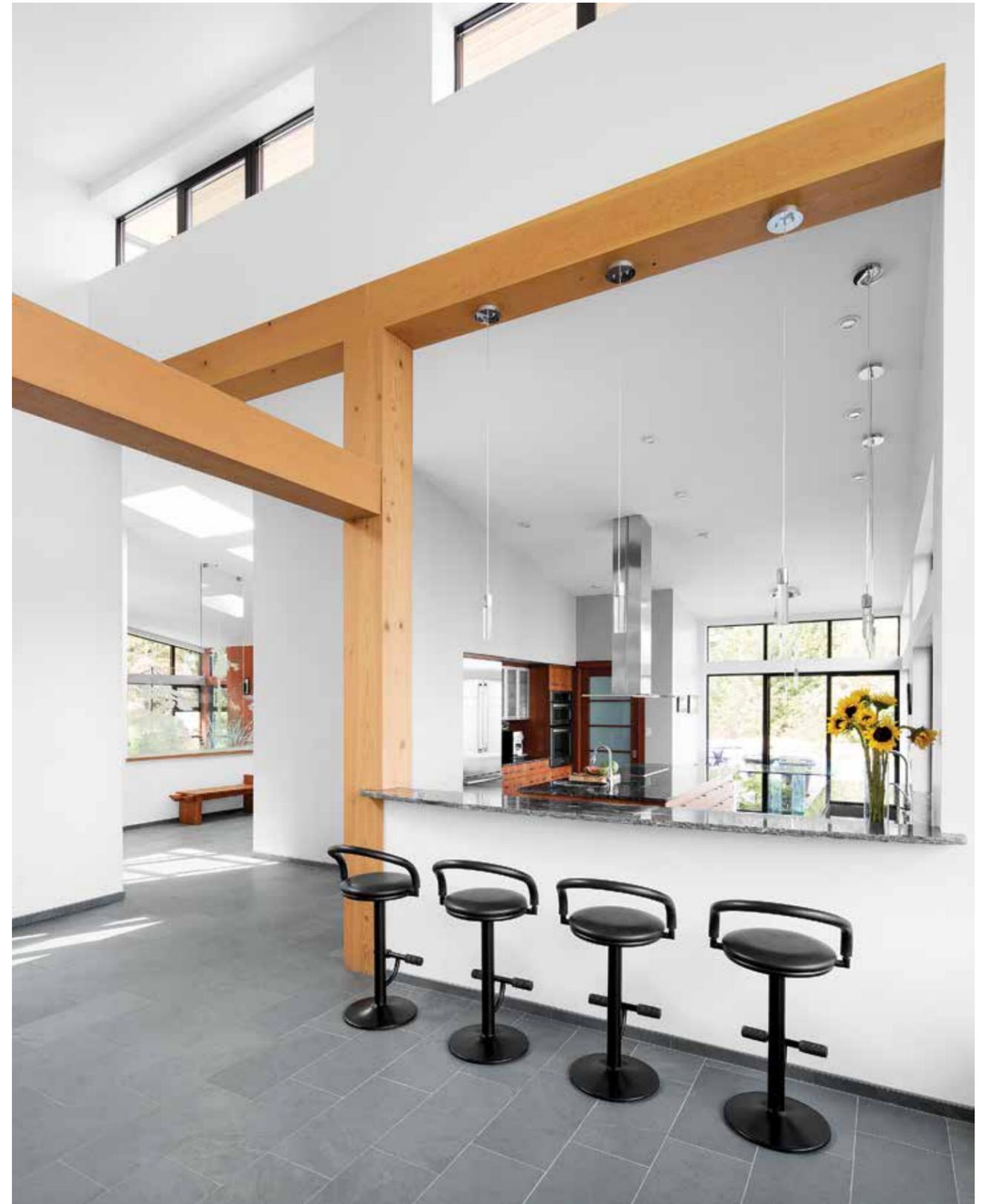
property as a guest cottage. First, it had to be cut into three large pieces, two of which had to be transported up a hill from its location. “It almost tipped over,” recalls Joanna, of the truck and its lopsided cargo. It was no easy feat, Jameo admits: “It took four to five hours to move it 250 feet.” It arrived and, as his personal project, Bram has been turning the now-connected two large pieces into a place to which he’ll be proud to welcome guests. The project is nearly complete. 

Most of the kitchen cabinetry is arbutus; some cabinets are made of aluminum and glass. Kitchen countertop: Cosmic Black granite.



Photos by Adrien Williams

The flooring throughout the house has radiant heat from an air-to-water heating system.





Photos by Adrien Williams



While Architrave created a prime ocean view through the curtain wall and the blasted plateau, and brought parts of the old house onto the hilltop, another challenge was the island's relatively low rainfall. The answer was to create a v-shaped roofline that collects rainwater at its centre. Pipes lead to a 17,000-gallon cistern.

"The area has sandy soil," says Joanna, an avid gardener who grows asparagus, rhubarb and strawberry, to name just a few crops. "It

drains fast and we need to water often." There's also a 2,000-gallon tank near the guest cottage, where the fruit trees grow. All her watering needs are met with adequate rainwater.

While interior is defined by open spaces and an easy flow up and down its slight levels, the exterior has an impact on the homeowners. "If the sun is shining, we sit out 10 months a year," says Joanna, who in the warm weather gardens in the morning and usually swims in the afternoon.

Eclipse doors in the living room allow the outdoors to come indoors, and when the bugs start biting automatic screens keep them at bay.

Then again, welcoming the outdoors in is what this house is all about. ☞

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