

On the Waterfront

Waterfront Living in the Pacific Northwest



Lake Washington Waterfront

Making the Most of the Available Space

By Russ Young

Robert and Mary Cugini had an opportunity, and a challenge: after the sale and subsequent development of his family's longtime sawmill at the edge of Lake Washington in Renton, Washington, they still owned a "leftover:" a long, narrow strip of lakefront property that was originally intended as campsites, or for vacation cottages, at the turn of the 20th century.

Their opportunity was to use the land as a waterfront retreat with three townhouses and a shared boat-house for Robert and Mary, and his two sisters.

Making that plan come to fruition was the challenge.

In the 1950s, when Robert's grandfather Alex Cugini began operating Renton's Barbee Mill, there were 14 sawmills in the Seattle area. By 2000, it was the only one left.

In 2006, the mill was shut down and the site was divided into parcels for development: the Seattle Seahawks subsequently built their football-training center on the northernmost land; the central portion was sold to a developer who has since





built 114 townhomes on the site.

That left the Cuginis with approximately 260 feet of lakefront, bordered to the south by a pumping station and other homes, and to the east by railroad tracks.

It took 12 years from 1999 -- when Robert, Mary and Baylis Architects first began working with local, state and federal agencies and the Burlington Northern Santa Fe Railroad -- until construction began on the three homes.

But their persistence and perseverance paid off, and the results are dramatic.



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The three townhomes, which range in size from 2,200 to 2,600 square feet are complementary, but not identical. And while they are oriented to focus on the views of the lake to the west, and to maximize the privacy of each, they share the site to give each one a feeling of more space.

One of the restrictions of building at the edge of the 22-mile-long lake is that the entire site had to be landscaped using native plants and no chemical fertilizers. Robert admits to being reticent at first, but he and Mary agreed with the stipulation. Now he says “it grows like crazy, but it’s turned out well.”

The landscaping is in harmony with the wildlife that is visible from each of the homes: ducks, otters, beaver, turtles and deer. And all manner of birds: there’s a bald eagle who has assumed residency on a perch that was originally intended for an osprey who lived near the mill; there’s also a “very aggressive” woodpecker who





occasionally tries tapping on some of the metal siding used on the houses.

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mill. Two of the homes have Douglas fir floors; the other has yellow-cedar flooring, also all from Barbee Mill. There is also walnut flooring and stairs, and sycamore cabinetry.

At the south end of the site there is a shared cabana. It overlooks a dock that has three slips and a Sunlift hydraulic boat lift.

At the northern end of the property sits a beautiful floating boathouse with exposed wooden columns and a curved roof. Open the doors, and inside you will find the Cugini's 52-foot Ocean Alexander, *Altino*. (It's named after the town in Italy from which Robert's grandfather emigrated to the U.S.)

Shoreline regulations dictated that the boathouse could only be built within the footprint of an earlier structure that was in the same location. That footprint was 53 feet in length, which means that there is a mere six inches of clearance at the bow and stern when *Altino* is tied up inside. "Making sure we got that right was the ultimate in 'measure twice and cut once,'" said Robert.

Much like the three townhomes, the boathouse is a prime example of making the most of the available space. The results are impressive. 🚤

