

# East by Northwest

A West Coast house looks to the East for inspiration.

**PROJECT:** RESIDENCE, MEDINA, WA

**ARCHITECT:** SULLIVAN CONARD ARCHITECTS, SEATTLE, WA;  
STEPHEN M. SULLIVAN, PRINCIPAL; PETER H. CONARD, PRINCIPAL;  
MARVIN J. ANDERSON, SENIOR ASSOCIATE

**GENERAL CONTRACTOR:** CHARTER CONSTRUCTION, SEATTLE, WA

**W**hen Seattle, WA-based Sullivan Conard Architects designed a family residence on the shores of Lake Washington, its inspiration was not the Seattle skyline to the west, but the Classical design precedents of the eastern United States.

The firm was asked to design a 10,000-sq.-ft. traditional house for a family of five, plus an outdoor pool and auto court, and to convert an existing 400-sq.-ft. gardener's cottage to a cabana. Located in Medina, the traditional clapboard house is a departure from the Northwest style that dominates the region — exemplified on a grand scale by Bill Gates' Pacific Lodge on the east side of the lake. The clients' backgrounds are northeastern U.S. and European, and they requested a combination of the architecture, Classical detailing and ambiance of both.

Finding common ground was simple. "Traditional styles of the northeastern states and Europe share the common language of Classical architecture," says firm Principal Stephen Sullivan. "The owners were looking for something that conveyed a New England feeling, with the fundamental New England cladding and cedar shingle roof."

In a region where traditional architecture is not often encountered, Sullivan Conard is one of few local firms that has a portfolio of traditional new designs and renovations. "We are known for having the facility to do authentic, traditional houses and are usually working on at least one similar project in the office," says Sullivan. "While it is unusual to see good examples in Seattle, there is a consistent demand. Much of Seattle was developed after the Second World War, and the 'Northwest contemporary'

Modernist style that developed in the 1950s and '60s prevails today. It is a very contemporary type of architecture. East Coast Classicism is not common and usually not very well done."

Due to its unusual topography, the Medina site enjoys uninterrupted views across Lake Washington to the Seattle skyline. However, the significant grade change to the waterfront had to be carefully integrated into the design.

A natural terrace in the landscape was reinforced with a low granite wall, allowing an expansion from two stories at the entry side to three stories at the rear. The rear is more expansive, not merely due to its increased mass. "The back is all about exposure to lakefront, big windows, big openings, terraces, and the pool because that's the private realm of the house," says Sullivan. "Towards the lake it can be very open. More of the building is exposed above ground and that gives it more grandeur." Medina's conservative 30-ft.-height restrictions prevented the addition of a third level above grade, so the firm capitalized on the space below. "We were helped by the incline in the sense that it gave us space to expand and have a bedroom level; a main living level; and a family/movie room, guest room and workout room on the lower level, while really grounding the rear of the house to the pool terrace and the landscape," says Sullivan.

Though the house is Classical in theme, the firm was careful not to let formality overwhelm the design. The family's daily activities are reflected in the informal aspects of the interior plan and the façade — "pushes and pulls" held together by the order of symmetry, axes and circulation paths.

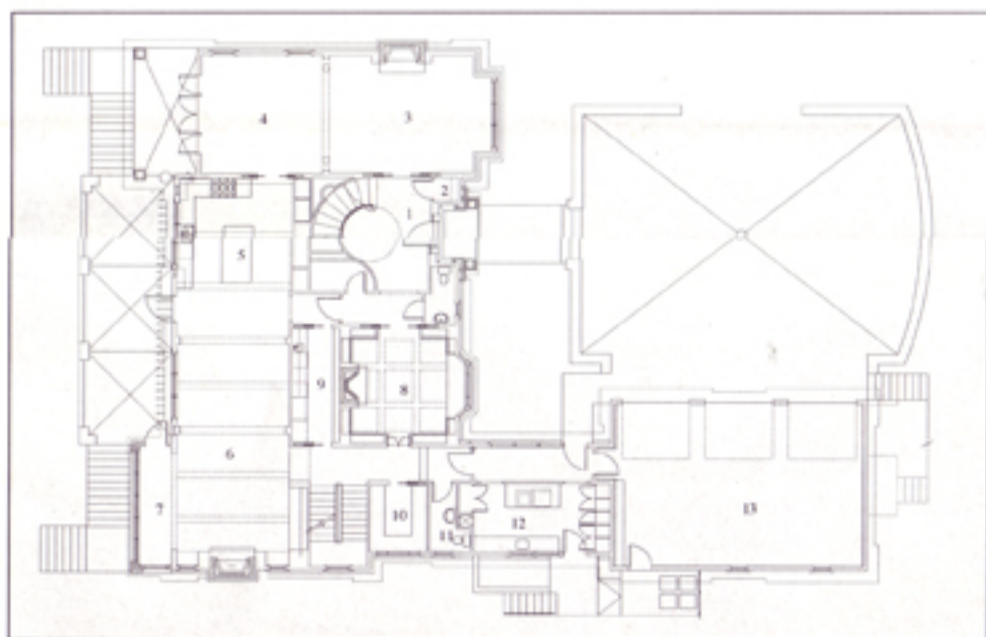
The front massing has an informal symmetry that reflects the interior spaces within. A Classical portico at the front entry and a Palladian window pull together the irregular roofline and the asymmetry of the dormers in order to present a formal façade to the street. "The rhythms and sizes of the dormers have to do with the specifics of the spaces. I tried to find an intuitive balance between the formal decorative aspects of the façade and the realities of the plan, which had to function in the way the family would want it to," says Sullivan. Because the height restrictions effectively prohibited a two-story home with a traditional high-pitched roof, the question of how to



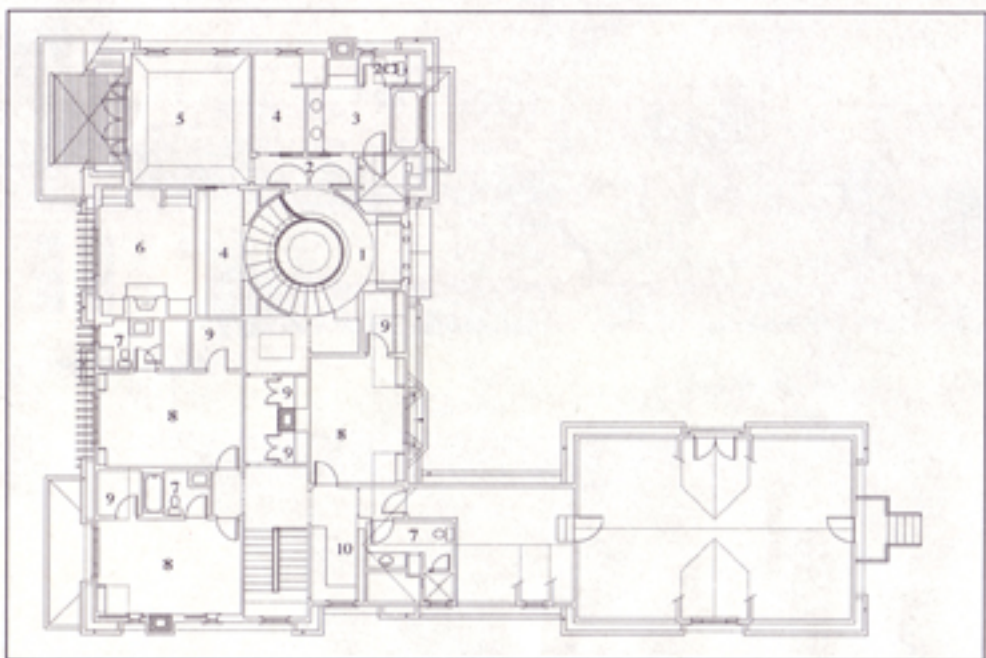
Seattle, WA-based Sullivan Conard Architects used painted cedar clapboard and shingle for the exterior of this house in Medina, WA, to convey the Classical architecture of New England. Photo: Benjamin Benschneider



A natural terrace in the landscape was reinforced to create the pool terrace and negotiate a steep incline at the rear of the site. All photos by Art Grice unless otherwise noted



Above: The main level accommodates the need for family and display spaces with an open-plan family room (6) and a separate, more formal living and dining area (3 and 4). Both areas enjoy views of the lake and connection to the kitchen (5). The library (8) and entry hall (1) share the central axis behind the traditionally conceived front façade.



On the bedroom level, the master-bedroom suite (5) has front-to-back-views and access to a small terrace. Each bedroom (8) has an en-suite bathroom (7) and private closet space (9). A study (10) is accessible from a front-facing bedroom.

suppress the height while retaining a traditionally conceived façade became critical. Despite Seattle's reputation as "rain city," the flat roof is a typical local response. "Everyone wants to maximize the volume by pushing up to the height limit. It's an unfortunate result of the zoning code," says Sullivan.

To reach the highest permissible elevation with appropriate massing and scale, the volumes of the bedrooms emerge below the ridge of the roof as a series of dormers. The same technique is employed at the rear, where a shed dormer links the master-bedroom balcony with the rear-bedroom dormers. "We deal with the relationship between style and scale in all of our projects," says Sullivan. "The way we were able to achieve a large house that didn't look huge was by a direct reference to human scale throughout the building. You can imagine a person standing behind each dormer window. When you break down the massing into these smaller pieces and give what is a relatively large mass some smaller elements, it becomes the language of the building and stops it from feeling huge."

In the absence of a regional precedent, the use of indigenous materials gives the exterior an organic feel. Granite from Washington's Cascade Mountains was used to build the lower level, basement story, site walls and chimneys. Regionally produced cedar trees provided the wood for the shingle roof and painted clapboard exterior, both of which were vital to the New England effect. Designer Susan Young extended this character to the interior with solid-wood wainscoting and quartersawn oak flooring.

The interior plan is highly personalized, and incorporates display areas on the main floor for the clients' collection of European and American antiques. "They requested both traditional and modern spaces and we were able to work fluidly between both and to design open spaces that are punctuated with rhythms of Classical detail, so they really function both ways," says Sullivan.

At the core of the house is the circular main entry hall — a dramatic, quartersawn oak, circular staircase connecting the living and bedroom levels under a domed skylight. It is a handsome introduction to the main level and perhaps the most recognizable Classical element of the interior plan. The entry hall shares the central axis with the library and the living and dining areas, the most elegant spaces in the house.



Above: A dramatic circular staircase greets visitors at the formal main-entry hall, connecting the living and bedroom levels under a domed skylight.

Right: The library is one of few self-contained rooms on the main level, and the most formal in the house. Photo: Benjamin Benschneider

"Next to the entry hall, the library is probably the most formal space because it is totally self-contained," says Sullivan. "Similarly, the stair hall serves only one function — reception and circulation — so it can be very formal."

The entry hall is the spatial center of the house, but its heart is the open-plan family kitchen. A rhythm of pilasters and beams enunciates the divisions of the kitchen, dining and family areas in place of discreet separate rooms. In contrast to the formal dining and living room, which connects to the main entry hall, the family room is for daily activities.

Its blend of informally connected and well-defined spaces marks the main level as less Classical in execution than the second. The latter's defined bedrooms and personal bathrooms are perceived as more traditional, in the sense that they are discreet, single-function spaces. But according to Sullivan, definitions of "traditional" have not remained static, and the authenticity was not labored. "If you really think about what traditional means, a traditional house built 200 years ago would never have the type of closets and bathrooms that our houses have today," says Sullivan. "Is that traditional? Not really, but it is traditional the way we define it now."

To successfully incorporate the clients' informal needs with their Classical tastes, the firm put function first. "When you do a traditional or a Classical house, and you start with an image of what that Classical house should be, you may find that it doesn't accommodate the plan," says Sullivan. "You have to accommodate the plan first, and then elevate the plan. It becomes very much a compositional balancing act. This design was very much based on the family use of the house on a daily basis, not how they use it ceremonially." — *Lynne Lavelle*

The site slopes to the waterfront, allowing the house to expand to two-and-a-half stories and to accommodate a pool terrace; landscaped gardens lead to the lakefront and a cabana. Photo: Benjamin Benschneider



The open-plan family kitchen and dining area is punctuated with a rhythm of pilasters and beams and opens to a terrace on the lake side.

