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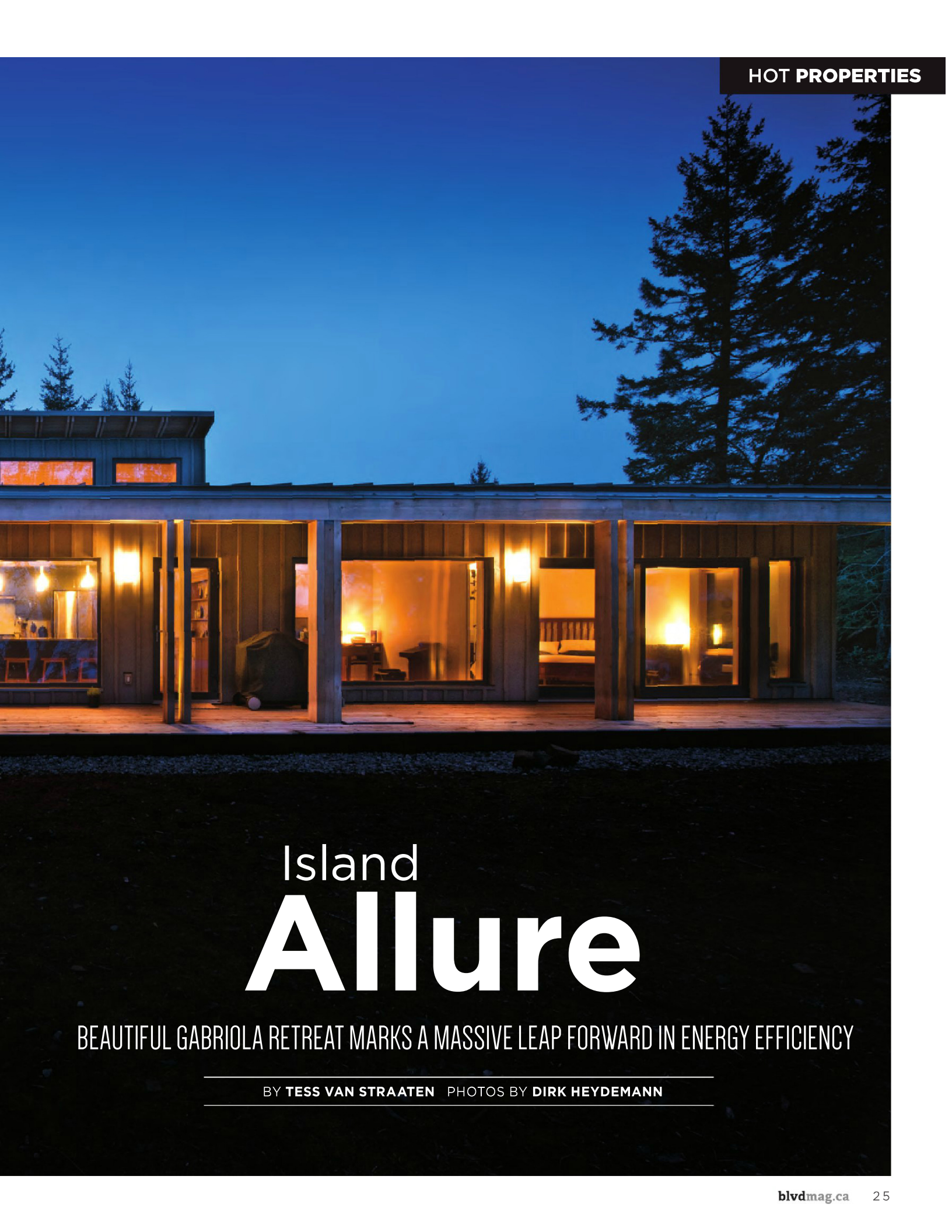
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Island Allure

BEAUTIFUL GABRIOLA RETREAT MARKS A MASSIVE LEAP FORWARD IN ENERGY EFFICIENCY

BY **TESS VAN STRAATEN** PHOTOS BY **DIRK HEYDEMANN**



SITUATED ON TOP OF A long bluff on a gorgeous Gulf Island overlooking the Salish Sea, sits one of the most energy efficient homes in Canada.

"This is the new definition of a high-end home," says Pheasant Hill Homes co-owner Jason Schmidt of the state-of-the-art luxury residence with a very small environmental footprint.

The 3,300-square-foot custom Gabriola Island house with a modern linear design was completed in 2015 by Nanaimo-based Pheasant Hill Homes. Designed by architectural technologist David Kominek of DRK Design, it's one of the first homes in this part of the world to be built to the new 'passive home' standard.

"A passive house uses only about 10 to 15 per cent of the energy that a typical new home constructed today would use, so that's a remarkable improvement," says Schmidt. "While the energy savings are impressive, another tangible benefit is the increased comfort — the even, constant temperature in a passive home is hard to appreciate until you've experienced it."

For the homeowners, a retired couple who moved to the island after more than 40 years in Horseshoe Bay, finding the right spot to build — and the extensive planning process — were

TOGETHER WITH NATURAL STONE,
THIS SUBSTANTIAL AND GRACEFUL
TIMBER FRAME FEATURES OAK PEGS
AND A QUALITY OF CONSTRUCTION
THAT IS RARE IN TODAY'S BUILDING.

years in the making.

"We traversed the Gulf Islands for five to six years to find the lot," explained the couple, who asked not to be identified. "It was paramount for us to face due south and to have a view and to take advantage of the light in both summer and winter."

Natural light floods the home, helping to warm it in the cooler months. Following passive house building principles, it's also shaded by overhangs and trees to reduce solar heat gain in



summer, yet it's far enough back to allow light in when the sun is lower in winter.

From a "Passivhaus" point of view, it was imperative to develop a good design, notes the male homeowner, who was very involved in the design process. And when they started, there were only a handful of experts in Canada.

"So I talked to them all," he says.

The design and layout was inspired by the beauty of the West Coast. Using lighter, watery colours to reflect the outside environment, the homeowners' vision was to bring the outside in.

"I'd seen a house on Bowen a few years ago where you could stand in the middle of the house and see the view all around — and I loved that," the female homeowner says. "We're surrounded by arbutus and Douglas fir trees, so what I really wanted to do was bring that in the house. That's why the windows, which are aluminum on the outside, are clear pine on the inside."

The kitchen sits at the centre of the house and a stunning Brazilian granite was chosen for the countertop. The specially designed cabinets are "blue corn" — a custom colour that's grey with blue undertones.

"I was worried grey in the centre of the home might be dark but I lived with cream cabinets for 25 plus years and I needed a change," she explains. "I wanted something that would ground the room."

Maple hardwood in "champagne" runs throughout the main living areas and there's plush carpet in the master suite, which is located in the opposite wing of the house for privacy. Above the garage is a two-bedroom guest suite and there's also an extra shower on the garage level for when the homeowners come back from the beach or kayaking.

"We learned from our other house after having to trek

upstairs to the shower when we were wet or muddy from the garden," she laughs.

However, what makes this three-bedroom, three-and-a-half-bath home most unique are the pre-fabricated exterior wall and roof panels, built off-site in a factory. They're packed full of cellulose insulation and then carefully air sealed, which results in an incredibly airtight home — about five times more airtight than a typical new build — and with double or triple the R-values.

Even the panel construction, which is computerized, results in less wood waste. But with panels built in Pemberton by BC Passive House and special aluminum-clad wood windows that are triple-glazed with

dual layers of low-e coatings shipped from Ireland, the planning process took a lot longer to make sure everything was right.

"It took close to a year to finish the design and then we had a small replica model made so we could see it in three dimensional form."

Building on a small island can be challenging enough,

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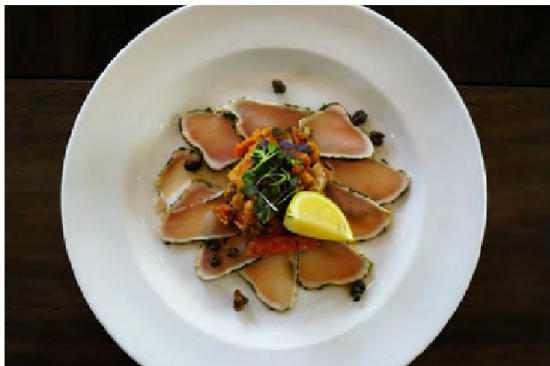


Table 21

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especially when at least one ferry route is involved in shipping supplies to the job site. And while you would think trying to send a house over in pre-fabricated sections would be even more difficult, the homeowners say it was anything but.

“The panels were loaded on a truck and could be shipped anywhere — the only consideration was to make sure the height and width of the load would fit on the ferry. But really any large truck can go on the ferry,” they explain. “Once the windows were packed and put into a container they could be sent anywhere in the world so it wasn’t an issue at all.”

In the end, all the meticulous planning paid off.

“There are so many things we can do to lessen our impact on the earth when building a home,” Schmidt says. “In this home we incorporated on-site water collection and storage as well as installing the necessary infrastructure to allow for the addition of a photo-voltaic solar system in the future. As with all our projects, we also made every effort to select durable, high-quality materials that will be easy to maintain and that will stand the test of time.”

One of the builder’s favourite features is the clear yellow cedar ceiling throughout the main areas of the house that provides a stunning canopy over the neutral white walls, helping to create a bright, calm and tranquil setting.

“The use of a natural wood product on the ceiling adds a richness and warmth to the space that is very inviting,” says Schmidt. “Our talented carpenters scribed the ends of countless boards to ensure the interface with drywall was perfect because it wasn’t covered by any trim.”

For the homeowners, picking a favourite feature is impossible — they love everything about this super-insulated, highly



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“THE EVEN, CONSTANT
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YOU’VE EXPERIENCED IT.”

energy-efficient house.

“We have no water bills and a very, very low utility bill,” the woman says. “But more importantly, the house has turned out to be everything we wanted because we put so much thought into it.”

Even though it’s more expensive up front, the couple hopes more people decide to build this way since passive homes are not only better for the environment and cheaper to run, but also result in extremely well-built houses.

“This is absolutely the house of the future,” the husband says. “Like anything new it might take a while to catch on, but as more architects and builders come on side, more people will do it.” **B**

SUPPLY LIST

Builder: Pheasant Hill Homes

Design: DRK Design

Lighting: McLaren Lighting

Painting: Indigo Painting and Decorating

Flooring: Pacific Rim Flooring; Wingren Floors

Fireplace: Pioneer Fireplace

Insulated Structural Panels: BC Passive House

Kitchen: Classic Kitchen

Tile work: Cornerstone Tiles

Windows: Budget Glass

Stonework: Glenn Houle Masonry

Exterior cedar: Weatherwise Cedar Products

Specialty Lumber: Canadian Bavarian