THE LANDSCAPE ARCHITECT carefully weighed the geological, botanical, historical, and even auditory context of this mid-sized San Juan Island residence with nearby views of a small horseshoe-shaped bay and distant mountains. The resulting design celebrates the strong views from the site while paying equal attention to the intimacy of the woods. As the view remains blocked by dense forest, a visitor must descend through the forest to the house. The walk offers a meandering engagement in all things minute and intimate. A pathway of local “alger green” rock marks the way. With the exception of two enclosed gardens, local and West Coast native plantings were favored. A “light tower” was a collaborative design element, acting as a beacon at night on the path through the trees to the front door. Ascending the tower takes one above the “forest canopy” and provides a view of the bay. “The landscape architect has created a romantic space with color,” jurors said. “The design is not obvious, which is very difficult to achieve.”

Each year, the American Society of Landscape Architects’ Professional Awards honor the best in landscape architecture from around the globe. Award recipients receive featured coverage in Landscape Architecture magazine and in many other design publications. The prestige of the ASLA awards program relies in large part on the high-caliber juries that are convened each year to review submissions.

F Rentals off the Washington coast is the setting for a woodland garden by Clair Enlow • Photography by Steve Dubinsky

An island off the Washington coast is the setting for a woodland garden By Clair Enlow • Photography by Steve Dubinsky
On the upland side of the house as shown in the plan, below right, where the slope descends to where the house and garden footprint and to heal the bad septic systems are not easy to site and limited in capacity. Before reaching the door, a footpath descends lightly into the newly constructed woodland and the entry sequence. From there, stepped pavers seem poised just above the forest floor, descending lightly into the newly contracted woodland and the entry to the house.

The site narrative begins with the enclosed garden above before joining the expansive waterside patio and its various courts. Either choice—into the front door and the light-flooded interior or around to the other side of the house—leads to a sudden encounter with water, the landing on the steep path to the beach. There are other limits to development, including a very aggressive enforced shoreline ordinance and a nature conservancy as far as the eye can see on one side of the bay. Respecting these conditions, care was taken to make use of the built and chaos. This shows in the site design. The exceptions change—the island environment of the beach. The pebble fence and garden had been. The pebble garden in a more permanent stone and milkweed that drifts out from the enclosures and along level paths as if volunteering to me where I was and the time of year. "What are the riches (botanically) we are creating in our built landscapes?" he asks rhetorically. "What plants can best fill these spaces?" He might have chosen any ornamentals for the forest floor. In- premise—based on science as well as aesthetics. "What are the riches (botanically) we are creating in our built landscapes?" he asks rhetorically. "What plants can best fill these spaces?" He might have chosen any ornamentals for the forest floor. In-
Resonances are largely seduced to the garden that it could be lurid enclosures, crafting an overlight for space emotional value.

The plan for the landscape, right, brings the forest understory and midstory through the compound at the back of the house, while the woodland is designed to accommodate the woods and gardens, top. Native plants and rock work edge the spa, above.

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From a bayside cliff near the foot of Lopez Island, the low screech of an eagle and the lapping of small waves are often the only sounds. Lopez is one of the San Juans, a constellation of islands inside Washington state’s marine waters. White peaks of the Olympics in the distance and the passage of the occasional orca whale or kayak complete the scene. This vastness is the final destination for the landscape sequence at the San Juan House, which sits very near the land’s edge above a small beach. Paul Broadhurst, ASLA, of Paul R. Broadhurst + Associates, has based his design for the site on the understanding that this reward should not be rushed. In fact, it is best when discovered after a walk in the woods. The site has its own story, and the closeness of trees and memories provides the forest yin to the yang of the cliff and water scenery.

Broadhurst points to one of the larger evergreens on the site, where a large winch is embedded in the bark—a tribute, he says, to the ingenuity of the former owners, who hauled their provisions up from the water. Still reachable only by ferry, Lopez has long been a refuge for artists and independent-minded settlers such as the two women who had made a life for themselves here. The new owners, who divide their time between Lopez and the Baja Peninsula in Mexico, were drawn to the place by the peaceful seclusion and the scenery and wanted to enjoy it and share it with guests. They brought Broadhurst, who had designed the landscape for their previous home in Seattle, to review the site from the air.

Broadhurst’s work began with a plan that includes a rebuilt and expanded main house, a garage, and a guest cottage. The geology of the shore limits development in a very natural way.
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Stepping to the Shore

An island off the Washington coast is the setting for a woodland garden

By Clair Enlow

Photography by Steve Dubinsky

AUGUST 2009

Landscape Architecture

Plantings at San Juan House blend in seamlessly with the breathtaking natural landscape and island scenery in Washington state.

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