

QUICK TOUR

Year built: 2001

Size: 1,870 square feet

Rooms: Three bedrooms, den, three bathrooms, kitchen, dining/living room.



The homeowners use a variety of antique wooden objects — such as an old newel post — as art on their plain white walls.

Beach house casual comfort goes downtown

STORY BY SUSAN DOWN / Times Colonist / PHOTOS BY RAY SMITH

IT COULD BE snowing outside, yet inside the compact James Bay house owned by Ron Aird and Tom Hoff summer would rein. As casual as sand between your toes and as

relaxed as wearing clamdigger pants, their one-year-old house would be right at home on a Nantucket beach.

Clean and light is what they were aiming for, said Hoff, who wanted to maintain the summer beach cottage look after they moved from Saltspring Island last year. They paint all their walls white, believing that the neutral colour highlights whatever they hang on the walls, conferring on it instant artifact status.

It's clear that the owners are good at assembling old castoff items and turning them into art objects. Pieces of old staircase spindles, old wrought iron brackets and even old shutters from their last house are displayed with reverence.

"We don't collect anything that becomes expensive," says Aird.

They are so clever at creating an indoor ambience that the men have sold the house and are moving again, back to Saltspring Island. They plan to open a new cottage decor store, called Houseboat, in Ganges in July.

Still they will be sorry to leave the neighbourhood after only a year of settling in. Created by Zebra Design, with interior design consulting by Sandy Nygaard, the house is one of a pair built by local developer Rob Mickelberry as



The entrance is halfway down the side of the long, narrow home. Only the garage door faces the street.

part of a small-lot subdivision. Each house is on a 33-foot-wide lot, requiring a long, narrow home.

"The neighbours were worried they would look like cereal boxes on their sides," said Mickelberry. Now their forms and finishes fit easily into an old neighbourhood without being dishonest replicas.

To improve the traffic flow inside, the front door is located halfway down the side of the building. "There's not a lot of room taken up with hallways. There are living spaces at both ends so you can get away (from each other)," said Aird.

The men bought the place last spring when Mickelberry was at the drywall stage, early enough so they could demand their own finishes, but they showed great restraint. They had learned their lesson after pouring money into their last house, a 1916 farmhouse they ran as a bed and breakfast on Saltspring Island.

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A shelving unit was built with a pointed top to resemble a little beach cabana. This view was taken from beside the sofa.



Tom Hoff, left, and Ron Aird enjoy the comfort of a small, outdoor sitting room. The little summer house provides old country charm in the heart of James Bay.