





by Sarah Hauge
photography by Mike McCall

A Fresh Start in Historic South Hill



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Tucked into a historic South Hill neighborhood, Mary and Bill Murphy have created an urban garden oasis from a lot that was left empty and leveled by former occupants.

Previously, the Murphys had lived in another South Hill home for thirty-eight years. But Mary had been keeping her eyes open for about a decade, seeking a place to potentially build or move in Spokane.

Their last home “was a three-story home built in 1941 and I loved it. It was historic, by the same architect who did St. John’s Cathedral,” says Mary. But as the couple got older, they increasingly thought of moving to a home where all the essential functions existed on one floor and they could age in place.

Even before it went on the market, this property had piqued their interest. “We had watched this lot—it had a beautiful home on it—and all of the sudden the house was gone. Then someone cut down all the trees,” says Mary.

The owners tore down the existing home and then removed forty-two trees on this site. “The neighbors were beside themselves.” And then, it suddenly went on the market. Mary remembers Bill saying, “Get in the car, we have to go now!”

“The next week we bought it.”

That was in 2017. They knew the lot would accommodate a new

build that suited their needs and where they could create a new landscape that would honor the original lot and bring it into the future.

Early on they hired Sam Rodell of Rodell Architects. “He’s a man of few words, but he just instills confidence,” says Mary. They appreciated that he works with a team and is hands-on throughout the entire process, even going so far as to shop with Mary for plumbing fixtures and appliances to get a sense of her preferences. Sam connected them with Edwards Smith Construction as their builder.

To hone in on her design preferences early in the process, Mary sat in Sam’s office two or three times a week, paging through his “incredible library of books” to identify designs and concepts she did and didn’t like. (Mary steered the ship from the homeowners’ point of view. “This was my project,” she says good humoredly. “The only thing [my husband] had any say on was his office and, kind of, the garage.”) Then they looked at some drawings. The design began to come together over the course of their conversations.

The resulting home combines a serene, flowing, and layered interior surrounded by a collection of garden spaces and courtyards. Indoor functionality was critical, but the outdoor areas were just as important. “I love the out of doors,” says Mary. “I love flowers and gardens, so I wanted to be able to see from every room



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my flowers and my yard. I wanted all the rooms to have a view.”

The home was designed around its courtyards—one in front, and a more

private one in back—and has a mix of grass, concrete walkways, an expansive covered gazebo, and a front-yard firepit that has partial walls blocking it from any passing street traffic. Then there’s the water feature that meanders around the property, contributing further texture and dimension to the one-of-a-kind home. “It’s just a real treat,” says Mary. “I had told my



husband I wanted to live by a stream, and that was his idea. It's just so fun to sit and look at it."

Since the home was designed for aging



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in place, “everything is handicap accessible. No steps, no lips, no barriers,” says Mary. “I want to stay in this house until they take me out feet-first.” The only exceptions to the one-story rule are a second-story guest room, Bill’s office, and the covered

patio his office opens onto, which is positioned to take in the neighborhood’s impressive backyard gardens, as well as the wall of maple trees and big ponderosas that comes up to the rear of the property. “It has a beautiful view up there,” says Mary. “I love





the fact that our whole backyard faces that green space.”

Special care was taken in choosing each material inside and outside of the home,

from waxed plaster to steel to illuminated glass to wood. The exterior is clad in Neolith (a sintered stone material), which means that Mary and Bill will never have to paint or do exterior work, and selectively placed snow melt means they don’t have to shovel in the winter. “Those little things make it easier for us to live in place,” Mary says.



Lighting choices were considered with particular care. "Because I'm getting older, light is really important to me." The many stand-out light features include

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the gorgeous, organically-shaped glass pendants in the dining room and kitchen, a striking light fixture that illuminates the vast workspaces in quilter Mary's craft room, and even in the walls themselves. "The glass wall between the living room and the dining

room, that has lights in it," says Mary. "When it's dark you turn them on and it just has the most incredible glow to it. Again, that was a Sam thing. I'm just amazed of what he thought of."

Mary appreciates the big things—like the gardens and the





lighting and the way the spaces flow together—but just as important are the smaller, smart details, one example being the ability to pass platters from the kitchen

to the dining room underneath the open shelving. “The kitchen cabinets, you can serve and slide food underneath,” she says. In the living room, smart design is evident in the fact that the big television screen is concealed when not in use.

The house is also incredibly efficient. “The home uses advanced passivhaus technologies



throughout, so even though it is a large home with abundant expanses of glass, it is extremely comfortable in all climate conditions,” Sam Rodell explains on the

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company's website. "The interior air quality is maintained at pristine levels of purity and there are no drafts or ductwork noise. The interior is totally silent."

"It was a decision early on to have it be a passive house. I want

to be responsible for the environment and forward-thinking," says Mary, "...not using 1990 technology in a house we were building in 2017."

Since moving into the home last fall, Bill and Mary have been





enjoying every aspect of it. In the mornings, Mary appreciates her office space for coffee, reading the paper, and meditation. Then there's the main bedroom, with stunning

outdoor views on two sides. The living room has become the go-to spot for the friends in their pod to come over and watch Gonzaga games. And outside, they've spent hours sitting and chatting under the covered gazebo, escaping the hot sun of last summer. It's given the Murphys everything they wanted.



“Like I said,” reiterates Mary, “I want to be able to stay here until I can’t move anymore.” 📞



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