



Blocks of living spaces rest on concrete walls to support 2,100-square-foot, late '60s home designed by former UO architecture professor and dean Robert Harris, now of Southern California.

Hallmark heritage REVIVED

Eugene woman buys and restores childhood home with cubed living spaces designed by her professor father.

By Shirley West

FOR SPECIAL PUBLICATIONS

Photos by Collin Andrew

THE REGISTER-GUARD

In 1969, Robert Harris, then a professor of architecture at the University of Oregon (and now dean emeritus), paid \$5,000 for a sloped lot on Hendricks Hill in Eugene. He then designed a home for the lot that was suited to his family of five.

In 1981, when he accepted a position as dean of the University of Southern California School of Architecture, Harris sold the house and moved his family to Los Angeles. Now, more than 30 years later, Harris' youngest daughter, Janet, has recaptured a bit of her childhood and saved the house for future generations.

"From the time we sold the house, I planned and plotted and schemed to get it back," says Janet Harris, an independent media analyst.

That opportunity arose six years ago when Harris visited the old neighborhood. The same people who had purchased the home from her family were still there, albeit now retired. Harris approached them, hoping they would be ready to sell.

Initially they weren't, but then the call came. The owner was willing to sell.

Preserving a legacy

The 2,100-square-foot house rests on 8-inch-wide concrete walls that extend to support massive wood beams, which in turn support the two-story structure. Each floor contains 11-foot-square cubes of living spaces; on the main floor, one cube opens to the next, increasing interior light and views.

Below stairs, Robert Harris had rotated angles 45 degrees to create sleeping alcoves for each of the family's three children.

To blur the line between inside and outside,



Blue skybridge connects home to street on steep south Eugene lot.



Each floor contains 11-foot-square living spaces. On main floor, one cube opens to the next for extra light and views.



After designed in 1969, the novel Harris home received an award from the Southwestern Oregon Chapter of the American Institute of Architects.

Harris clad the exterior with 4-foot by 8-foot sheets of redwood siding, using the same material to panel many of the interior walls. The redwood was meant to age naturally, add depth of character.

To maximize light and views, Harris used low-profile aluminum windows, some mullioned together to fit wall-size dimensions.

Janet Harris remembers sitting on the stairs at one of the home's oversized windows, looking downhill toward the UO campus, where she could see her school, Condon Elementary (now Agate Hall) and Mac Court.

After built, the house had earned a merit award from the Southwestern Oregon Chapter of the American Institute of Architects. And after 30 years, the new owners had not changed a thing. The penciled marks recording the Harris sisters' growth were still visible alongside a mirror in their former playroom. Yet the years had taken their toll, too. The home required repairs before it could qualify for a bank loan.

While still living and working in Washington, D.C., Janet Harris struck a deal with the owner: He would carry her mortgage for a year. After that, the house would need to be in good enough shape to qualify for a bank loan.

"The bank gave me a laundry list of what needed to be done to qualify for a loan," Harris says.

Phase one would be repairing the foundation and installing a central heating system.

"When it was time to repair the



Will Dixon's architecture firm in Eugene consulted with Robert Harris on each phase of renovation.

foundation, I spent a weekend 'en charette' with my niece, who is a structural engineer, and my dad, going over the blueprints, discussing what could be done. I have a picture of them at the table, granddaughter and grandfather discussing what was needed to repair the foundation," Janet reminisces. They didn't always agree, she adds.

Jacking up the house to replace the beams was quite a feat, given the steep grade of the hillside.

But the real challenge came when it was time to replace the siding and windows, both an integral part of Robert Harris' design.

Started with a nickel

The redwood siding used on interior walls retained its rust-red color through the years. But outside, the wood had been power washed and was now warped and covered with lichen. Frustrated with options that would not fit the house's aesthetic and her tight budget, Harris stopped by architect Will Dixon's "Architecture 5" booth at the Saturday Market in Eugene and plunked down 5 cents for some advice.

Travis Sheridan, an associate at Will Dixon's studio, was staffing the booth that day. After talking with Harris about her father's house, Sheridan proposed



Janet Harris on same perch she liked as a kid.



The home's original redwood walls and red-oak hardwood floors have refreshed patinas.

they use Corten steel for new exterior siding. The patented product, also called weathering steel, forms a stable rust-like patina when exposed to the elements for several years.

Sheridan contacted a supplier to manufacture panels to his specs and put Harris in touch with general contractor Tim Stephens of Frontier Builders in Veneta.

At every turn, there was a challenge: conceal all the screws, invent unique trim pieces, separate new aluminum windows from the steel building, and rebuild bridges from street to home that had suffered severe dry rot.

Throughout the process, Sheridan consulted Harris' father, Robert, especially when it came to adding a window near the home's entry.

"Bob was a little concerned," Sheridan says, "but when it was installed he was delighted, saying it added to the original design."

Harris can't say enough about the creative solutions and craftsmanship the team brought to the project. "They were unbelievable," she says. "They moved heaven and earth to make this happen."

Sheridan agrees. "It's the people

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Renovation work completed two years ago left most of the home's original details intact, including the round kitchen island.

involved that made this project work. Building trust between us all and committing to a flexible and creative approach is the only way the building could be done. It would have been torn down otherwise. We would have lost a piece of history."

Janet Harris points out small details preserved from her childhood: bookshelves above the built-in desk in her father's former study; the wall phone with a rotary dial; the round kitchen island where she and her sis-

ters ate breakfast, baked cookies and hung out with friends. Since moving back in two years ago, Janet Harris' family members have returned some of the original furnishings.

"It's been one of the great joys of my life to do this to honor my dad's vision in this way," Harris says. "It's one of the best examples of his work."

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Corten steel now replaces the home's original redwood exterior siding.

ID: 5822364

size: 2.072 by 346

FITNESS EQUIP OF EUG-SEDONA

ID: 5838917

size: 2.072 by 346

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