ON LOCATION

Putting Their Stamp on It

PHOTOGRAPHS BY JESSICA BARRESI

A couple switches coasts, settling into what was once a library. Apparently, a former occupant approves.

1. Karen Gilliam and Sara Van Beckum's home was built as a branch library in 1915, in the same Craftsman style as the houses in the neighborhood. The garage on the right was added during the renovation.

2. Ms. Van Beckum, left, and Ms. Gilliam were ready for a change after years of living in New York apartments. So was their dog, Biggie Smalls.

3. As part of the renovation, the building's original diamond-pattern windows were refabricated in a larger size.

By BRIAN LIBBY

When Karen Gilliam and Sara Van Beckum began renovating their home in Portland, Ore., which once served as the local branch library, they weren't planning to live there full time. The couple, who are voice-over artists, were based in New York City and intended to split their time between New York and Oregon.

But after a few months of bicoastal living, they felt themselves pulled toward the West Coast. A superstitious person might say that a larger force intervened — possibly even a supernatural one.

It may have begun when they met their neighbors, who describe themselves as "intuitive readers," or clairvoyants. "They said the ghost of a librarian lives in our house," Ms. Gilliam recalled. "One told us: 'There she is under the archway now. She has a bun and gray hair, but she's really happy with what you did with the house.' "

Of course, it didn't hurt that Ms. Gilliam, who is now 45 and grew up in a nearby suburb, had spent 23 years in New York and was ready to return. "New York was really fun in my 20s, because you're up for it," she said. "In my 30s, I started throwing money at problems to make life easier: taking cabs instead of carrying groceries for 20 blocks. But it's not sustainable." It also helped that Ms. Van Beckum, a Milwaukee native who is 42, found the prospect of a freestanding house on a tree-lined street so appealing after years of living in an apartment. (So did their Chihuahua-miniature Pinscher mix, Biggie Smalls.)

It was Ms. Gilliam's father, Dennis Gilliam, who discovered the building, a 1915 Craftsman-style cottage that had also been used as an evangelical church. When she expressed interest in the house, he and her mother offered to give Ms. Gilliam her inheritance early so she could buy it.

The 1,500-square-foot structure was basically one large volume with no kitchen or bedrooms — although there was a bathroom and a basement with a dirt floor. As Ms. Gilliam said, "Some people may have seen it as a teardown. We saw it as a possibility."

Still, the house, which was bought in 2010 for $319,000, required $450,000 in renovations, including replacing the roof and siding. (Mr. Gilliam, who lives in the area, acted as the liaison with the contractors.)

Because the couple's clients are almost all in New York (Ms. Gilliam is the voice of many animated characters, while Ms. Van Beckum does commercials for several health and beauty companies), expanding the basement to accommodate a recording studio was a priority. They also extended the western facade, added two small bedrooms and reconfigured the bathroom.

The main space is now a great room with built-in shelving and library-style rolling ladders (which may have been what won the approval of the ghost). Larger windows were fabricated with diamond patterning that matched that of the originals. The holes in the Douglas fir floors made by the church for microphone stands were patched, and the floors refinished.

The dining table was built with reclaimed wood from a pipe organ. But in choosing most of the other furnishings, the couple's interior designer, Jessica Helgerson, sought to balance the home's boxy, historic architecture with curvy, modern pieces like the Fireorb wood-burning fireplace suspended from the living-room ceiling and the Tom Dixon chandelier in the dining area.

It has now been almost a year since they completed the renovation and settled into the neighborhood. And while they have yet to catch a glimpse of the ghost who first welcomed them, they are thrilled with the outpouring of support from the rest of the neighbors, including a retired landscape architect who has been mentoring Ms. Gilliam and a Catholic priest across the street who has befriended them. It's a big change from New York, Ms. Van Beckum said.

"Coming to Portland, I felt completely different," she said. "In a way I hadn't experienced since I was a kid."

4. The library was basically a single 1,500-square-foot volume, which became the couple's great room. The designer balanced the boxy, historic architecture with curvy, modern furnishings like the Fireorb stove ($7,582) suspended from the ceiling and the B&B Italia Grande Papilio chair ($5,479, with ottoman) on the right.

5. In a practical homage to the old library, rolling ladders provide access to the built-in cabinetry. "Every once in a while an elderly woman will come up to me and say: 'I used to check out library books here. I love what you've done with the place,' " Ms. Van Beckum said.

6. The dining table is made out of salvaged wood from an old pipe organ. Three Tom Dixon Beat Light Stout fixtures ($1,425 each) hang overhead.

7. A vintage ram's-head chair passed down from Ms. Gilliam's parents is paired with a Ligne Roset Ursuline desk in walnut ($2,155). The Douglas fir floors were repaired and refinished.

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8. Cubbyholes for night lights and flowers were built into the cabinetry surrounding the velvet headboard in the master bedroom. The bird sculpture is by Mark Chatterley.

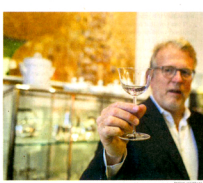
9. Ms. Van Beckum and Ms. Gilliam's bedroom is small, but the built-in cabinetry provides plenty of storage. "We like a small bedroom," Ms. Gilliam said. "I think when it gets too big you have a tendency to say, 'Let's put a TV in there.' I like that it's just for reading and for sleeping."

10. French doors in the bedroom open to the backyard. The Spinning Light ceiling fixture is from Hive Modern ($640).

11. The bathroom was reconfigured and expanded; now there is room for an Iris soaking tub from Chevoit ($4,672).

12. Jessica Helgerson, the interior designer, chose a black-and-white encaustic concrete tile floor that "has a vintage feel even though it's new," she said. The Luisita sink is from Porcher ($763), and the mirror is a thrift-store find.

13. Ms. Helgerson's design reconfigured the side entry to create space for a foyer and powder room. The Alice Sconce ($420) is from Visual Comfort & Co.



DIXON BAXI FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

The architect Brad Cloepfil, who designed a tasting room in Oregon, with a Patrician glass designed by Josef Huffmann, at the Neue Galerie Design Shop on the Upper East Side.

SHOPPING WITH
BRAD CLOEPFIL

Squeeze silver-plated wine server: $670 at Christofle, (212) 308-9390, christofle.com.

Silver and rosewood wine coaster by Josef Hoffmann: $1,250 at Neue Galerie Design Shop, (212) 994-9496, neuegalerie.org.

Wine & Bar foil cutter; $17.50 at Normann Copenhagen, 45-35-27-05-30, normann-copenhagen.com.

Live Edge bottle stopper; $20 at Uncommon Goods, (888) 365-0056, uncommongoods.com.

ANDRÉ BAUGNIET

Set of three decanters for Blue Hill by Deborah Ehrlich; $945 at mossPDR (212) 204-7100, mosspdr.com.

Patrician stemware service by Josef Hoffmann; from $130 per piece at Neue Galerie Design Shop, (212) 994-9496, neuegalerie.org.

Wine and Bar pourer; $29 for two at Normann Copenhagen, 45-35-27-05-30, normann-copenhagen.com.

Tina Frey Designs resin ice bucket; $110 at Barneys New York, (888) 222-7639, barneys.com.

Palette Pleasers

Well-designed wine accessories highlight any vintage, and maybe even that $6 bottle of merlot.

BRAD CLOEPFIL, an ARCHITECT known for designing buildings like the Seattle Art Museum and the Museum of Arts and Design in Manhattan, developed his interest in wine in a roundabout way.

"I've done a couple of houses for collectors of wine," he said. "And I just got a little envious."

Business dinners — "the only way I get introduced to really good wine," he said — were another influence. "I'll take a photo of the label and then go buy a few bottles."

But his relationship with wine took a serious turn when he was hired to design a tasting room for Sokol Blosser winery in Oregon, something he described as "a dream project." The angular building he created, which opened in July, was covered inside and out with wooden slats. As Mr. Cloepfil, 57, put it, "We made a contemporary agricultural building."

Appreciating wine, he has discovered, is about more than what you can taste. "Fifty percent of it is the ritual," he said, noting that the experience is elevated by well-designed accouterments.

He found a notable example at the Neue Galerie Design Shop on the Upper East Side: the Patrician stemware service designed by Josef Hoffmann in 1917. "This is my most favorite thing in the universe," he said. "Nowadays everything is so big, but these are so elegant."

Hoffmann's sterling silver and rosewood wine coaster also caught his eye. "There's a great richness to the material palette," he said. And the design, with its simple pattern of rectangles, is timeless, he said.

At the Christofle store on Madison Avenue, he found something else to admire: the Squeeze wine server, a squiggle of shapely silver that cradles a bottle. "It's a really beautiful way to present a bottle," Mr. Cloepfil said. "Rather than just setting the wine on the table, it becomes a ceremony. It monumentalizes the act of drinking, eating and celebrating."

Even better, he said, the shape is "just one line, like a drawing. I strive to find that elegance of form in architecture."

Online, he chose several practical items, including the cork-covered Wine and Bar foil cutter from Normann Copenhagen. Unlike many bar tools, he said, "it's not stainless steel, but a tactile material. The feel of the cork would make it a pleasure to use."

He also liked the chunky walnut Live Edge bottle stopper from Uncommon-Goods. "It's incredibly elemental," he said.

"And 'stoppers are important,' he added. "I'm trying not to finish every bottle of wine I start." TIM MCKEOUGH