

Two Families and No Room for Guilt



Lisa Bauso for The New York Times

The Gaylords and the Worthingtons call their home Miner's Refuge, a reference to the valley's mineral heritage. A narrow sloping entryway plays on the idea of a mineshaft.

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AFTER vacationing in the Methow Valley of the north Cascades of Washington for two decades, Bill and Lindy Gaylord of Seattle bought property there in 2005 — but they had misgivings almost immediately. Although they planned to build a vacation home among the valley's ponderosas and aspen groves, they weren't entirely comfortable with the idea of owning a second residence.



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A Shared Home in the Cascades

“Everyone we knew who built a second home said, ‘Oh, you feel guilty if you’re not there all the time,’ ” said Mr. Gaylord, 55, a partner in the Seattle architect firm of G.G.L.O.

So when Ms. Gaylord, 55, a principal at the Seneca Group, a development management company, learned that a colleague and her husband were scouting real estate in the area, the couples devised a plan to maximize vacation time and minimize cost — and guilt: They would share a custom-built residence on the Gaylords’ one-and-a-third acre.

The colleague, Amy Worthington, 40, had met Ms. Gaylord while handling a joint office project for another firm in 1997. Six years later, the pair worked on the Gates Foundation headquarters.

“We figured if we worked so closely on those projects and survived,” said Ms. Worthington, who now also works for the Seneca Group, “this would be a piece of cake.” Her husband, Mark Worthington, 43, a corporate securities lawyer, drew up the partnership.

The fruit of the collaboration is a 1,750-square-foot home they call the Miner’s Refuge, a reference to the valley’s mineral heritage. Bordering a 40-acre meadow, the asymmetrical V-shaped residence is set into a slope and includes interior walls clad in cedar and bamboo, a bank of south-facing windows and metal siding engineered to develop a patina of rust.

The modern aesthetic reflects the owners’ common design sensibility. “We have similar tastes, but we all have things we are passionate about,” Ms. Gaylord said, “It’s been great fun.”

By agreement, the Memorial Day weekend is the only time the couples stay in the house together. A calendar put together by Ms. Worthington and Mr. Gaylord denotes a schedule of alternate weekends and holidays, which “is nice if you want to make plans with family or friends,” said Ms. Worthington, who was holding the couple’s 6-month-old son, Kyle, on a Memorial Day weekend tour of the home.

The couples describe themselves as friends who socialize occasionally in Seattle, but even so the contract includes a buyout clause, Mr. Gaylord said.

The partnership’s roots run deep. Over the weekend, the Gaylords and the Worthingtons attended a birthday party for the architect, Ray Johnston, who met Mr. Gaylord 29 years ago when they were architecture students at the University of Washington and now lives part time in the valley town of Twisp.

Throughout the design, the owners were remarkably “cohesive in their thinking,” Mr. Johnston said.

The initial plan was for a two-bedroom 1,200-square-foot house. But Mr. Worthington pressed for more space. “We kept saying, ‘Where are kids going to stay?’ and that was before kids were in the picture,” he said. The final design included an alcove off the living room that doubles as a bunkhouse for four.

In Seattle, Mr. Gaylord designs contemporary mixed-use projects. In the Methow Valley, he researched the local industrial architecture to develop a design metaphor. “Silver, azurite, there are mines all over the place,” he said, adding that a nearby hike leads into a defunct copper quarry. Evoking that past, the home’s inverted roofline suggests that “the earth is being lifted up,” Ms. Gaylord said, while a narrow sloping entryway plays on the idea of a mineshaft.

In keeping with the theme, Ms. Gaylord, who was in charge of lighting, considered stringing bare bulbs along the pine veneer ceiling, an aesthetic that was ultimately deemed “too raw,” Mr. Gaylord said. Today, white pendants provide a more finished interpretation.

The owners pointed out other signs of collaboration, and individuality. The identically sized bedrooms are outfitted with master baths and cherry furniture built by a company owned by Ms. Gaylord’s brother-in-law. But since one room has an extra 18 inches of ceiling height — and different views — the couples plan to switch each year.

In the kitchen, which features concrete floors stained dark brown and an oversize stainless-steel refrigerator, Mr. Gaylord opened a drawer to reveal a row of restaurant-grade cutlery, meticulously arranged on a white cloth. “This is Amy,” he announced with a flourish, a reference to Ms. Worthington’s status as resident neatnik and chef.

Ten months after the house was completed, the couples are enjoying their favorite pastimes. In winter, everyone skis in and out from the meadow, which intersects with the valley’s 120-mile network of groomed cross-country ski trails. Mr. Worthington is planning a 20-mile backpacking and fishing trip to Hidden Lakes nearby, while Mr. Gaylord aims to keep up with his wife, a competitive runner and avid hiker, skier and mountain biker.

There is still work to be done. The couples are replanting the property with native grasses and are looking to supplement the current art collection: a pair of aerial and topographical maps of the valley made for Ms. Gaylord by the Pacific Biodiversity Institute.

That process, too, is expected to go without a hitch. “There are so many decisions to make when you do a house — is it going to be a red sofa or a green sofa?” said Ms. Gaylord. In another sign of happy compromise, the ultimate decision was brown.