

PACIFICNW

The Seattle Times

SEPTEMBER 16, 2012

6522

Finding your place

Two homes, two life
phases, and the flexibility
to make it all work

ARCHITECTURE 2012

Preparing for life, or death, families make the homes they need

KELLY FORSYTH and her 14-year-old son, Lex, are finally lugging the last of their things into their just-finished, bright, sustainable and roomy contemporary house in Seattle's Greenwood neighborhood.

And, darnit, if they're not nostalgic about that sad-looking trailer out back.

The one with no hot water or working toilet but lots of drafty fresh air. Where they lived, using a Porta-Potty, for more than a year while their new house went up in front of them.

"Lex and I were getting pretty reminiscent," Kelly says. "We took some photos, and I want to blow one up so we can do a nice photo for the house. The experience was so emotional with my dad's involvement, so I don't want to forget it and say, 'Oh this is just a new house.' How many people get to build a house and have their dream realized?"

Indeed.

This is both a happy day and a sad day for the Forsyth family. Kelly's dad, Walter, was supposed to be here, too, moving into his accessible apartment downstairs, his daughter's vegetable garden right outside the door. But, in the middle of construction, Walter contracted shingles and died. He was 90.

This whole thing was his idea, actually. To move here from San Pedro, Calif. To put the money that would have gone to a professional-care facility into a new home for the three of them, family helping family across generations.

"Unfortunately, my dad waited until the last minute to move in with me," Kelly says. "That's my only regret, that we didn't start this sooner."

Down the road in Ballard, Kyle and Lauren Zerbey are on a deadline. They're working nights and weekends to finish their down-to-the-studs, six-year-long remodel. From tiny and tired "beginner Craftsman," 750 square feet, to modern, bright and 1,300 square feet.

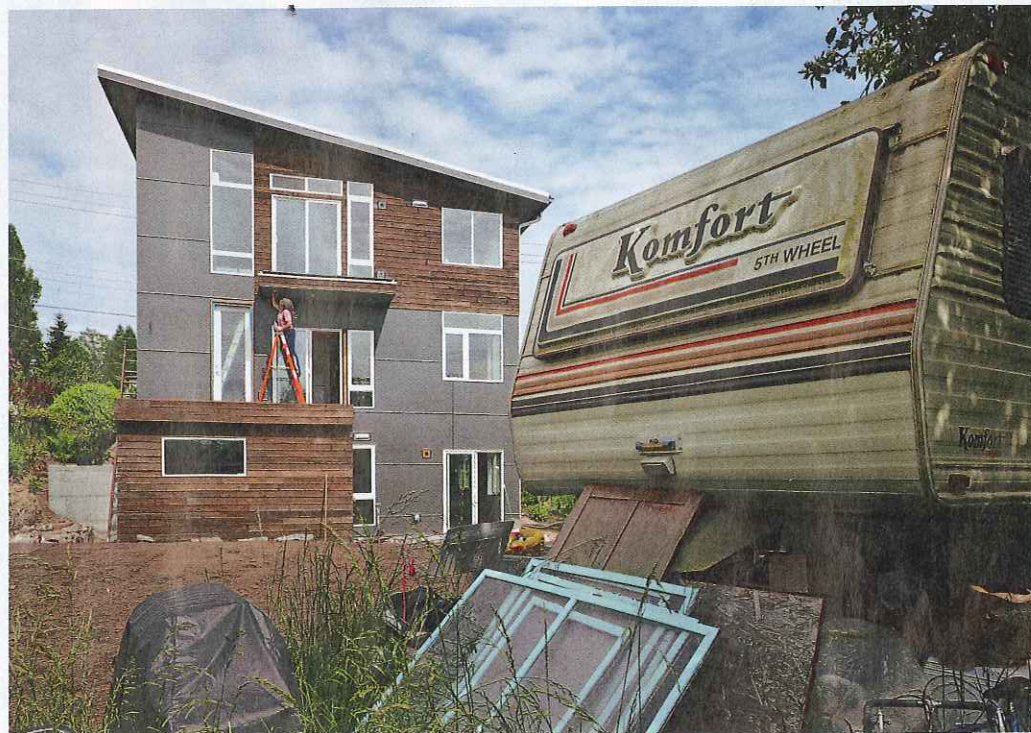
The Zerbey's beat out six other bidders in 2006, the heat of the housing market and the economy running on ▶



Kelly Forsyth works at the table in the open kitchen/living/dining space on the main floor. "I know I spent \$15,000 more on cabinetry, because I wanted no-formaldehyde cabinets," she says. The dark cabinets are sapele, the lighter ones and the built-in bench are maple. The floor is Gyp-Crete.

RIGHT TIME, RIGHT PLACE

■ by Rebecca Teagarden | photos by Benjamin Benschneider



The old trailer sits out back, after serving as Kelly and son Lex's home for more than a year while their new place went up before them. The bottom floor is the apartment where Forsyth's father was going to live, with daughter and grandson on the top two floors.

◀ **RIGHT TIME,
RIGHT PLACE**

high, for the privilege of paying \$344,000 for the cottage with the sloping front porch, listing chimney, rotted roof, sagging floor, one bedroom and one bath.

It was what they could afford. And they felt lucky to get it. But baby Avery will be here soon. They need to be ready.

"We feel pretty strongly about making this house work with kids, and we think we can do it," Lauren says, sitting at the dining table beneath a patch of cloudy daylight framed by a large new skylight. She looks young and is pretty. But this is a woman who helped pour the new concrete floor in the basement while almost eight months pregnant.

"We tried to make it so much of a jewelbox that we could never leave," she says. Bailey, the Zerbey's lumbering golden retriever, slaps his tail on the dark-stained cork floor. Barn doors painted ocean blues slide aside to reveal the baby's room, their bedroom. Another glow from above comes from the new loft, the attic reclaimed. Open, white and bright, it serves as an office for now.

"Down the road we're thinking of a two-story, 800-square-foot DADU (detached accessory dwelling unit) and having the option to rent it out or use it as an office," she says, nodding toward the backyard. Outside is a garage, a big yard.

"And you never know what's going to happen to our parents," Kyle adds. "It could be a mother-in-law."

This is a story about life and death. About the life cycle and recycle of houses and the people they hold and protect. For some, sharing living space is a choice that encourages closeness and bonding across generations. As of 2010, 4.4 million U.S. homes held three generations or more under one roof, a 15 percent ▶

Lauren Zerbey, with her hand on "zerbebe," stands in the flex room, which has flexed into a nursery for their daughter. Bailey stands on the stairs to the newly opened attic, now headquarters for Studio Zerbey, Lauren's new architecture firm.



The Zerbey family was on a strict budget for remodeling their home. Cabinets are Ikea, a sink came from Craigslist, some windows were \$50, rejects from a school remodel project. To read more about their project, check out Lauren's tell-all remodel blog at www.chezerbey.com.



Lauren, eight months pregnant, and husband Kyle pour a new floor in the basement, this spot to be the new "flex room." They're hurrying to finish before the birth of their daughter. "I did all the electric, plumbing, framing, windows, all that," Kyle says. He figures they spent a little more than \$190,000 on the remodel over six years, about \$146 per square foot.

Lauren and Kyle Zerbey

The Zerbey family bought a fixer cottage and took six years to put together a home that works for a growing family.

• **Added second bedroom/nursery: \$5,000.** Converted portion of old living room into "flex room."

• **Added sleeping loft/home office: \$5,000.** Converted attic for 200 square feet of space.

• **Remodeled master bedroom: \$5,000.** Gutted existing bedroom; put in full-wall wardrobe closet.

• **Remodeled kitchen: \$20,000.** Gutted and opened up to rest of living area. Vaulted ceiling.

• **Remodeled living/dining room: \$20,000.** Gutted and reconfigured: Exposed original 1910 joists; vaulted ceiling.

• **Remodeled master bathroom: \$15,000.** Gutted and reconfigured.

• **Added front porch/mudroom: \$12,000.** Rebuilt existing porch

and enclosed it to create heated mudroom. New front stoop with larger roof overhang.

• **Exterior restoration: \$18,000.** Removed metal siding, re-stored original cedar siding. Replaced all windows and trim.

• **New roof: \$10,000.** Complete tear-off and replacement. Chimney removed.

• **Structural repair and remodel basement: \$30,000.** Seismic retrofit; enclosed crawl space to create heated storage area. New guest bedroom/media room, second bath and laundry room.

• **Electrical: \$10,000.** Complete overhaul: new main panel, garage sub-panel, wiring, security system, multi-media home-run data panel; pre-wired for future outdoor speakers and photo-voltaic system.

• **Mechanical/plumbing: \$19,000.** Professional decommissioning and removal of oil tank and asbestos. New gas line and meter, high-efficiency furnace and ductwork, tankless water heater. New water supply and waste lines; venting throughout house.

• **Garage: \$1,000.** Converted to workshop.

• **Yard: \$25,000.** New Brazilian hardwood deck and steel planter boxes in backyard. New foundation waterproofing and drainage system. Professional landscaping at front and side yards. New cedar fences and gates around property.

Total = \$195,000
(over six years)

RIGHT TIME RIGHT PLACE

increase from two years earlier, according to U.S. Census data.

For others it's an economic necessity. Having a baby is expensive. A middle-income family who had a new child in 2011 can expect to spend \$295,560, adjusted for inflation, to raise that child to age 18, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

The largest portion of that? The roof over the child's head: 30 percent.

But pulling together and making the best of it is what we do, stuck in this slow-crawl of an economy, the longest-running downturn since the Great Depression. Despite recent upticks in the local housing market, we are not yet recovered. What the Forsyths, the Zerbeys and others like them require of their homes is flexibility and the ability to make what they've got work for them. A growing family, aging in place, room to dance, space for an office, rental income.

A house must serve.

The Zerbeys are young architects with the know-how to do almost all of the work on their remodel themselves. Kyle has designed homes at Balance Architects for the past seven years, and Lauren recently left a local architecture firm to open Studio Zerbey and do the same. Kyle figures their project, less than \$200,000, would have cost twice that had they not been their own designers and laborers.

Kelly, meanwhile, quit her job in human resources to shepherd her project: the deconstruction and recycling of the old house she had lived in for the past 14 years and the building of a new home, designed by architect Brad Khouri of b9 architects. Her efforts kept her on budget at \$172 ▶

Offer not to be used in conjunction with any other promotional or price discount. Contact store for further details.



september 8
13-23
EXCEPTIONAL
DAYS

Exceptional, once-a-year offers on the entire Roche Bobois collection

ATLANTA - BOSTON - CHICAGO - COLUMBUS, OH - CORAL GABLES, FL - COSTA MESA, CA - DALLAS - DENVER - HOUSTON
LA JOLLA, CA - LOS ANGELES - MANHASSET, NY - NATICK - NEW YORK - PHILADELPHIA - SAN FRANCISCO - SAN JUAN, PR - SCOTTSDALE
TROY, MI - WASHINGTON, DC

SEATTLE
1015 Western Avenue
Tel. (206) 332-9744

rochebobo
PARIS

www.roche-bobois.com

Mesmerizing



LUXE LIGHTING

8214 Greenwood Ave N • 206-457-8535 • www.luxelightingcompany.com • Open Tue-Sat



The open plywood stairs in the Forsyth home are topped with durable Paperstone. Leftover exterior siding defines the powder room. Travis Gaylord of Alchemy Building Company was the contractor. "He was an excellent guide," says Kelly.

2012 SEATTLE DESIGN FESTIVAL

THIS YEAR'S SEATTLE DESIGN FESTIVAL will be Sept. 20-23. The theme, Engage Your World, explores ways that design can improve and increase our interactions with the urban environment. The four-day program features activities, exhibits, films, tours, speakers and the pop-up Design Block, the hub of this year's festival, in South Lake Union. Some events require admission; others are free. The Seattle Design Festival is the region's largest interdisciplinary design event. For more information go to www.seattledesignfestival.org or www.designinpublic.org.

Design in Public, creator of the Seattle Design Festival, is a multidisciplinary nonprofit organization that promotes the role of design in improving the community.

RIGHT TIME RIGHT PLACE

a square foot for her 2,100-square-foot home.

Kelly Forsyth and Lex live in the kind of neighborhood where folks wash their cars at the curb. Joggers are free to run down the center of the road. Big yards and no sidewalks give the area a rural feeling just a block off busy Greenwood Avenue.

Kelly's property is on a triple lot. "I bought the house for the land, really. I even had a trowel with me to check out the dirt." She laughs.

Waving an arm across the dining area of the open main-floor living space she says, "I just wanted a big table and a long, built-in bench in here. We're just a bunch of old hippies, and we like to have our friends over for dinner, push the table aside and we dance." She shoves her hair aside, long and wild, tributaries of gray through the black. She is not yet 50.

Kelly is more Seattle free-spirit than hippie. If she can make it, why ever would she buy it? (Something she learned from her dad.) If it's a nice evening, why not take a bottle of wine and have a sit at the picnic table out front? Perhaps a neighbor will drop by.

It's a spirit she intends to instill in her son.

"When I built a chair with my dad, he even made me make my own dowels. It made me appreciate the concept of how we use stuff. I want Lex to have something similar," she says. "And he helped me make a dropped ceiling for the powder room.

"With all the computers and technology the kids have, it was not easy pulling him away from that. But it's so empowering to be able to do things yourself. I refuse to let him walk out of this house at 18 or 22 without some of these basic skills."

And, for that, their new house has already served. Lex, however, might not walk out of the house at 18 or 22. According to the Pew Research Center, one in five adults ages 25 to 34 live in multigenerational households. Pew defines multigenerational as homes with parents and adult children 25 and older. Perhaps the downstairs apartment will be there for him. And maybe later for Kelly, because there are also numbers to support that move: One in four U.S. households now cares for an elderly relative, according to the AARP, citing one estimate.

Kelly, a single mom, could not have afforded her new home, as environmentally friendly and healthy as possible, ▶

Kelly Forsyth

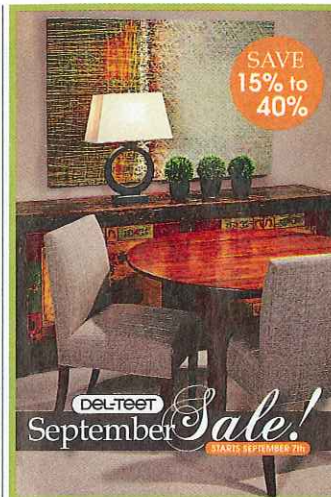
With financing from her dad, Kelly Forsyth had a clear budget for building a home that would accommodate her aging father and reflect her environmental values.

	BUDGET	ACTUAL	THE DETAILS
General	20,000	20,000	Fencing, waste disposal, rental, cleanup
Site	20,000	19,700	Demolition, water piping, utilities, paving
Concrete	19,500	19,650	Footings, flat work
Metals	13,700	13,600	Structural steel, railings, stairs
Wood	38,000	39,500	Recycled-tire deck pavers
Thermal	37,300	39,000	Cellulose insulation instead of foam
Doors/Windows	27,000	37,000	Specialty doors/vinyl windows with better thermal performance
Finishes	46,600	45,200	Drywall, paint, tile, tile labor, wood floor
Specialties	40,000	58,500	Top-end appliances in both kitchens and custom formaldehyde-free cabinetry
Mechanical	46,000	48,000	Plumbed for solar tubes on roof
Electrical	20,500	20,500	Service and distribution, fixtures
Engineering	1,500	1,500	Structural
Architectural	26,000	26,000	Agreed upon because project aligned with b9 architects' values and occurred during economic recession

TOTAL* \$356,100 \$388,150 *plus about 10 percent for contractor fees



The powder room is compact but light and bright with a window and lighting behind a dropped ceiling (which incorporates wood from the original house), crafted by Lex. "I wanted him to understand the concept of reclaiming and reusing," Kelly says.



SAVE
15% to
40%

It's our September
Furniture Sale

Save 15%-40% now on almost everything at Del-Teet during our September Sale!

DEL-TEET

Specializing in our
Right Sized™ Furniture

10308 NE 10th Street,
in Downtown Bellevue
425-462-5400 | www.delteet.com
Open every day

Haven't used it
in years?



Toss the Tub!

Porcelain tile showers for the price of acrylic plastic. Installed in 3 days. Learn more at tosssthetub.com or call 866-264-8960



HunterDouglas holiday
style event

Sept 15-Dec 15



CALL TODAY

Make an appointment and RECEIVE a Major

\$100 GIFT CERTIFICATE

Also ask about the \$100 Hunter Douglas Customer Sept 15-Dec 31

MAJOR BLINDS

Blinds, Shutters, Awnings & Solar Shades

FREE IN-HOME CONSULTATION
12 months NO interest (OAC)
206-623-1379 • 425-453-3216 • 253-472-1379
www.majorblinds.com



Where tools,
talent and
technology meet

nwjobs.com



The blue barn sliders close off the Zerbeys' bedroom and the bathroom. "In a small space, swinging doors just get in the way," Kyle says. "I've always liked that aqua color on Lauren, with her hair and fair skin. That's how I chose that. The other blue Lauren chose because it's pretty much my eye color."

RIGHT TIME, RIGHT PLACE

without her dad's help. Father and daughter worked together during construction. Just like they did when she was a kid and he taught her woodworking, let her help remodel the family house.

Their house remains his, too. The things he taught her and the things she is teaching her son live on. "I'm excited to celebrate the house," Kelly says. "All of this concept of reusing stuff is from my dad. He was just a stingy Irishman!" She laughs and a tear threatens.

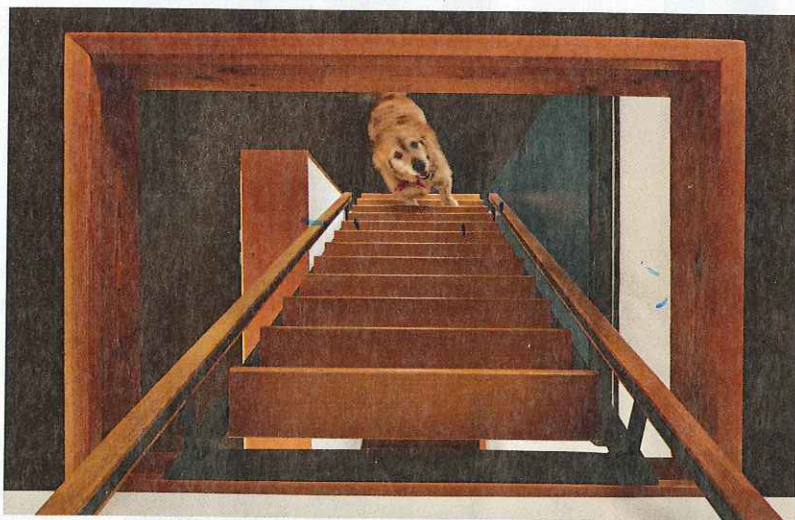
"I knew my dad needed me. I thought, yes, how can I now repay him? I was overwhelmed by the concept of perhaps taking care of my dad, but there was no question in my mind I wanted to do that. Not only was he asking to live with me, he was helping me do stuff I loved."

A big part of the motivation for the Zerbeys' remodel is due any day now. The new "flex room" has already flexed into Avery Elizabeth's bottom-of-the-sea-blue nursery.

On the verge of growing their own, the Zerbeys very much miss their families in Oklahoma. "We go back to Lauren's for the holidays: It is so much fun there with everybody running around," Kyle says with a grin.

"Kyle's grandfather was a master woodworker, and Kyle inherited his wood shop," Lauren says, nodding toward the garage, now her husband's shop.

Months before she arrived, Avery's room already displayed a photograph of five generations of the women in Lauren's family. To stay in touch, Lauren started a blog about their construction adventures at www.chezerbey.com. It begins like so:



Bailey peers upward to the office from the loft ladder. "Only part of the house he can't get to," Kyle says. "I took a welding class just to build the ladder."

"We met as first-year architecture students in 2000 and became an official studio couple by 2001. Although we both grew up near Tulsa, after graduating in 2004 we decided to move west to Seattle. We soon found that we liked each other even more when we weren't pulling all-nighters and surviving off Easy Mac, so we decided to get married. Then we got a dog (Bailey, our bigheaded golden retriever). Shortly thereafter, we did what any young architect couple feels compelled to do — we bought a crappy old house. In 2006, after six months of searching and six different

offers on other houses, we closed on our fixer-upper and have since been immersed in the remodel, retrofit, and reconstruction of what we have affectionately named chezerbey."

Her honest approach, step-by-step explanations and photographs caused word of the blog to spread. It now gets about 40,000 hits a month.

Doing what architects always advise their clients not to do, the Zerbeys lived in the house during the work, two years without heat or insulation. "When we did the bedroom we slept in the living room," Kyle says. "And when we did the kitchen, we cooked in the basement. With a George Foreman grill, a microwave and a toaster we tried to maintain healthy eating."

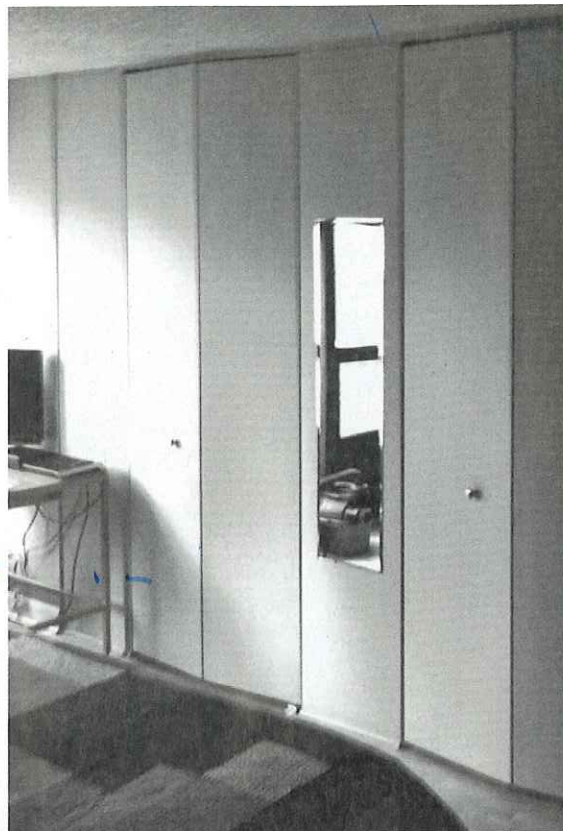
Six years later, the little bungalow-gone-modern-right-at-the-ipe-front-stoop has appraised for \$500,000. The architect pair were particularly adept at wringing usable space from every square inch. One bedroom, one bath is now three bedrooms, two baths, a loft. The house is trim and was strictly budgeted — sliding doors, Ikea cabinets, home-made wall décor, no closets — a vision professionally executed by two designers who now require that their tiny home function in their new roles as Mom and Dad.

"We don't want anything bigger than it needs to be," says Kyle, spoken like a true architect.

But it was just this sort of can-do ingenuity for good design that lured the couple to Seattle in the first place.

"Seattle had this density of architects who are achieving high design with all kinds of projects," Kyle says. "People in Seattle seem to value that design offering." ■

Rebecca Teagarden writes about architecture and design for Pacific NW. Benjamin Benschneider is a magazine staff photographer.



4:00 PM



6:00 PM

Give your closet a makeover in a matter of hours.

WE'RE HIRING GOOD PEOPLE!

Please email your resume to hr@slidingdoorco.com

Seattle 2911 4th Ave. South, T 206 467 1869

www.slidingdoorco.com

**THE
SLIDING DOOR
COMPANY®**

The signature choice for today's interiors.