

A Perfect Storm

It All Comes Together for Home in Portland, Oregon

by John Reinan, senior director, Fast Horse

(Editor's Note: John Reinan is senior director of media relations at Fast Horse, a Minneapolis marketing agency.)

After 37 years of designing homes, Michael Barclay knows that it's rare to get the perfect storm. That's what happens when the client, the site, and the materials all come together to allow the designer free rein to do his best work. But Barclay got his perfect storm in the mountains outside Portland, Oregon. When it ended, it left behind a 15,000-square-foot home on two acres that Barclay calls a highlight of his career. "This will definitely be one of the homes I look back on. You don't get too many like this," he said. "When you factor everything together – the cooperation of the owner, the skill of all the players, the freedom to select the best materials – it was just a delight."

Above all, the owners wanted generous glass areas to let in the often-scarce sun in the rainy Pacific Northwest. That opened the door for Barclay to design in the mold of Frank Lloyd Wright, one of his major influences. He penned a house with long, tall walls; low roofs; and an abundance of corner windows.

Inside, there are open spaces, graceful level changes, and built-in features. Sapele, an African hardwood similar to mahogany, was used for all interior trim, while the floors on the main level are of slate. Barclay incorporated boulders from the site into several areas of the home, including a fireplace adjoining the main entry. Extensive soffiting allowed for up-and-down lighting throughout the house and helped break up the height of the interior walls. Natural ventilation is provided by large operating casements and patio doors in all the main living spaces. The home was situated to

provide a view of majestic Mount Hood from the master suite, while privacy was gained through landscaping with mature trees brought to the site.

The key to the entire design was glazing, Barclay said. He chose a variety of Marvin Windows and Doors products, including 18 custom corner assemblies, as large as six units, and 12' tall; sliding patio doors; Ultimate Casements, and hinged doors. All were clad in extruded aluminum with a 70% PVDF finish. Barclay said the quality of the Marvin products allowed him to increase the glass area. "When I'm using high-quality windows, I tend to be more generous on the amount of glazing I use. The constraints you frequently have, you don't have with Marvin." And even with the large expanses of glass, energy efficiency wasn't a concern. "A number of years ago, we were constrained on the percentage of glass to wall," he said. "Since then, manufacturers have ratcheted up their thermal performance to where, if it were possible, we could make the house 100% glass."

Barclay's design was recently named a winner in the 2011 myMarvin Architect's Challenge, recognizing the best architecture submitted by practitioners in the United States, Canada, Ireland, Israel, Japan, Spain and the United Kingdom. Winners are chosen based on solution-driven design, classical beauty, innovative use of windows, and sustainability.

Barclay praised his collaborators on the winning home, all hailing from the Portland area. In addition to his clients, they include contractor Gerald Rowlette, interior designer Ron Reiter, and window dealer Portland Millwork. "It's a good one, it really is," Barclay said of the finished project. "Everything just came together to make it a real joy from start to finish. This is the kind of job you always hope for, but don't often get."

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