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Our House

Tara Graham bought Grace Schlitt's home in Madrona, and found she fit right in.

By Rachel Solomon



Photo: Will Austin

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"THIS IS MY CONTROL STATION," says Tara Graham, leaning against the wide butcher-block kitchen island. Confident words, but she's nervous; you can tell by the frenetic way she dances her fingertips on the counter's smooth surface. Today, for the first time since last June, when Graham and her two young daughters moved into the Madrona home following a divorce, she's expecting a visit from the former owner, architect Grace Schlitt. In 2003 Schlitt bought this property with her husband Brian Lenz, a contractor. The couple redesigned and rebuilt the house, which dates back to the 1900s, then lived there with their two children for five years before hanging a "For Sale" sign on the front lawn last winter and moving down the block.

Graham needn't have worried. It's apparent from Schlitt's first muted "wow" that the architect approves of what Graham has done with the place. Schlitt praises Graham's rainbow of storage containers, utensils, and vases that provide punches of color to the neutrally toned kitchen, drawing out the stark beauty of the white subway tile backsplash and contrasting with the black ash cabinets. And the women

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soon discover strong similarities in the ways they use the house. Turns out the kitchen island was Schlitt's command center, too. "You feel in control, because when people come, it's got the commanding view of the whole house," Schlitt explains. "You stand in one place and see what going on everywhere." Moving into the front hall, the women learn that a stairwell crawlspace where Schlitt's dog once burrowed now serves as a sanctuary for Graham's cat. One floor up, they discuss how both sets of children made a play space from the "tree house"—a landing at the top of the stairs that feels like an arboreal fort thanks to a giant chestnut outside the window.

It's apparent from the architect's first muted "wow" that she approves of what new owner Tara Graham has done with the place.

Upstairs, Schlitt admires the color palettes of the master bedroom, where Graham has channeled a beach house with nautical blues and whites, and the master bathroom, which she has painted a creamy seafoam green. Down the hall is the children's room, split by sliding doors that can be closed to create two separate spaces. "When we designed this, our kids were sharing a room," Schlitt explains. "Because these rooms are pretty small, we put the pocket doors in, at some point thinking we'd close them off, but we never used them." Graham's daughters, Sydney and Saylor, will perhaps opt for solitude when they're teens, but for now the girls adopt the same open-door policy. A loft built along the length of one wall can accommodate two twin beds, one on either side of the room. Graham installed custom aluminum ladders for the climb.

The women go back downstairs and move outside to tour the "barn," a two-story studio that served as an office for Schlitt's architectural company. But the charming backyard building could also be a school or yoga studio, or a venue to host parties for neighborhood kids. "It could be a school in five minutes," Graham says. "You could do a little yoga, and a little Spanish, and you could do birthday parties." Using both her imagination and keen eye, Graham—whose only furniture purchase since the move has been a few bar stools—has transformed the space built for Schlitt's young family into one that's distinctly her own, where she feels comfortable and where her daughters can mark life's milestones. Schlitt clearly approves: "We worked on it and worked on it until we were sort of done. And then Tara came in and finished it off."

Grace Schlitt, Architect, 1630 34th Ave, Madrona, 206-793-3503; graceschlitt.com. Brian Lenz, Contractor, [Taconic Builders, 811 First Ave Ste 628, Downtown, 206-625-2119; taconicbuilders.com](http://taconicbuilders.com)

Published: November 2009

Comments 

By SeattleAnnie on Oct 26, 2009 at 8:29AM

Wow. This place is amazing! Is Graham a designer? The interiors are flawless. I especially love that ladder in the girl bedroom area.

By Marjorie on Oct 26, 2009 at 9:46AM

They say a home is a reflection of its owner, and this one is lovely. The kitchen island is fab -- love the black base, and those barstools! -- and the kids' bedrooms are sweet and fun. Beautiful!

By Beth on Oct 26, 2009 at 10:07AM

What a beautiful home - and I love the connections with the outdoors... everything from capturing a view or a grand tree as well as making connections between the main house and the studio/barn/classroom/? Well done!

By Marie on Oct 26, 2009 at 10:35AM

I love the lightness and the colors of this home--inside and out. It's quite cheerful on rainy Seattle days. And its modern style is quite inviting, not cold; the house looks very stylish but also functional and inviting. Very nice design!

By Marjo on Oct 26, 2009 at 11:27AM

I love the lines of the house, how each room flows so naturally into the next. The colors and materials are polished, but beneath the surface it's obvious the house has "good bones" and was designed for cheerful family living. Gorgeous!

By Tina on Oct 26, 2009 at 12:22PM

Grace's homes are filled with light and color. The design is clean and the spaces are so inviting. You can see it in these photos. She lives and breathes design; I have seen her work and she focuses on each little detail. I love that fireplace and even her choice of all that tile.

By Ivy on Oct 28, 2009 at 5:30PM

The design is flawless throughout - even the stairway is thoughtfully crafted with lots of natural light. It looks like a dream!

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