



House whispering on Queen Anne

By Mike Dillon

Buildings, too, are children of Earth & Sun.
— Frank Lloyd Wright

For Rob deGaetano, redesigning a house is not about square footage, faux Victorian turrets craning for a view, charming tear-downs or charmless build-outs.

"A home is about as emotional buy as you can get," DeGaetano says. "I pay attention to the emotional components. It's about doing what's right about that home. The market proves it."

DeGaetano, 46, is owner-president of redesign, which he operates from the home he shares with his wife Stephanie and their two daughters on Queen Anne's southwest slope. Stephanie, 48, is consulting partner and a graphic designer.

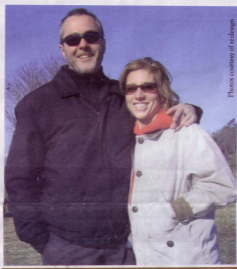
The couple approaches their work with a high-minded aesthetic sense paired with a chosen crew of carpenters, builders and an array of architects—a process to ensure hands are connected not only to the head but to heart.

"That approach implies a niche in the housing market—the presence of kindred spirits, if you will—with the same level of taste and sensitivity as the deGaetanos and the dollars to back it up.

That market, Rob says, exists. "He lets the space speak to him instead of tearing it down," Stephanie says of her husband. "He has an intimate relationship with a building."

Half-jokingly, she calls it "house whispering."

The deGaetanos, who moved to Queen Anne from the New York City suburbs, have made a financial and spiritual stand with their business. Both of their parents were in realty. The couple loves Rome, a city that respects old buildings, but Seattle is where they are making their statement.



Photos courtesy of redesign

Rob and Stephanie deGaetano's company, redesign, renails the ranch-style house at 169 Lynn St. into a work of art. The couple moved to Seattle from the New York City suburbs after the events of Sept. 11. "It was a wakeup call," Rob said.

What happened in New York City on Sept. 11, 2001 helped bring them here. On that day Rob was headed to a 9 a.m. meeting in Manhattan. The first tower had already been hit. He remembers looking up and his designer's instincts, unbidden, kicking in: "How are they going to fix that hole?" he

wondered. When the second plane hit he realized, along with rest of the world, that the first explosion had been no accident.

Rob was CEO of a New York City design firm at the time; Stephanie ran her own successful graphic design business.

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PG 8



This is not your usual furniture store. A PLACE OF WHIMSY ON CAPITOL HILL

PG 12



Wanderer's Janet Haberbusch takes time out to talk ABOUT HER BUSINESS

PG 4



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For the deGaetanos, as for numerous Americans, Sept. 11 represented an epiphanic moment.

The couple decided life was too short for their long commute to and from the Big Apple. They felt an urgency to change their lives and they act upon it.

"Life is really precious," Stephanie said. "If we were not going to live our dream, what a shame."

They arrived in Seattle in October 2002.

"What drove us was the desire for community," Rob says. "We looked at a few neighborhoods. Everyone said, Queen Anne, Queen Anne, Queen Anne." Queen Anne represents a more intimate way to live than where they came from, Rob feels, which comes with the "accountability that intimacy brings."

The couple says their Seattle business has taken off.

The redesign approach is summed up in its written materials. "The seven truths we hold self-evident," which includes such beliefs as, "Greatness is a long term average," and "Personal character is the foundation we build on." These points rest on an underlying

belief: "In every case," their philosophy runs, "we require ourselves to define our concepts by remembering the individuality of each property and the lifestyle of its prospective owner."

In functional terms this means the firm either redesigns a house for a client or purchases a house for redesign and resale with a particular type of owner in mind.

The house at 169 Lynn St. is a recent example of the latter.

That neighborhood, kinsely landmark—a 1950s, California ranch-style house sticking out among Queen Anne Craftsman—represents a two-year process performed with Espino-Serra Architects.

Today, it's Four Star Green showpiece. When work began, Rob imagined the potential home-owner as a male, professional athlete, a gregarious sort who entertained and liked the fact it was a short, social walk to Starbucks and Queen Anne Avenue North.

The house sold, it turns out, to a female Hollywood expatriate who had rented properties to the stars—wrong gender and profession, but a similar personality type.

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The house at 169 Lynn St. in its new incarnation. The project was undertaken by Rob and Stephanie deGaetano's company, redesign.



The living room: the definition of elegant simplicity—with interesting creative flourishes.

From Ranch Style to Four Star Green

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Sculpted fixtures.

The bathroom features 50,000 hand-set mosaic tiles. Solar technology, from 14 roof panels to an interior, thermal shaft, supply more than 90 percent of electric costs over the next four decades. There is plenty of natural light, low-flow eco-friendly plumbing fixtures and a rainwater retention system. On the second floor a floating glass staircase leads up to a green roof and three bedrooms and two baths. The overall fusion of form and function achieves an elegant, eco-urban style that can only be described as beautiful.

"Green consciousness is so much more pronounced in Seattle than in New York City," Stephanie notes.

As the Puget Sound housing market leans toward tear-downs, McMansions,

and architectural equivalents of lit cigars on elevators, a more subtle reaction is inevitable—an architectural movement toward respect for context, materials, beauty and the uniqueness of each home. The kind of attitude that translates to respect for—no other word will do—the soul.

And for house whispering. "It's a lot easier to take down an old building but there is a reason that building is there," Rob says. "Every house has a story to tell."

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~ Quick Takes ~

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