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Jane Gould's prefab Acorn Deck House blurs the line between indoor and outdoor living. **12**

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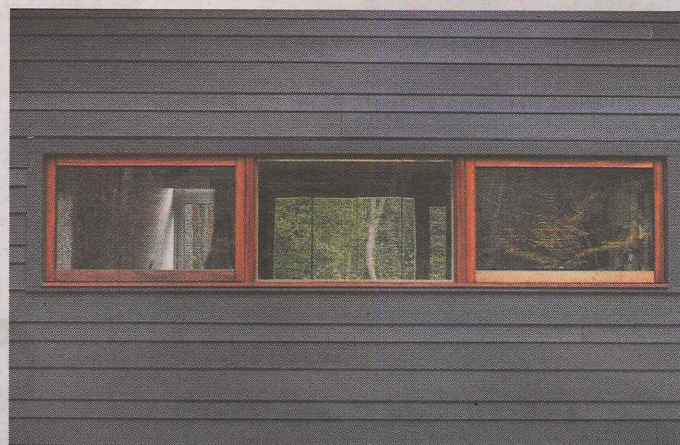
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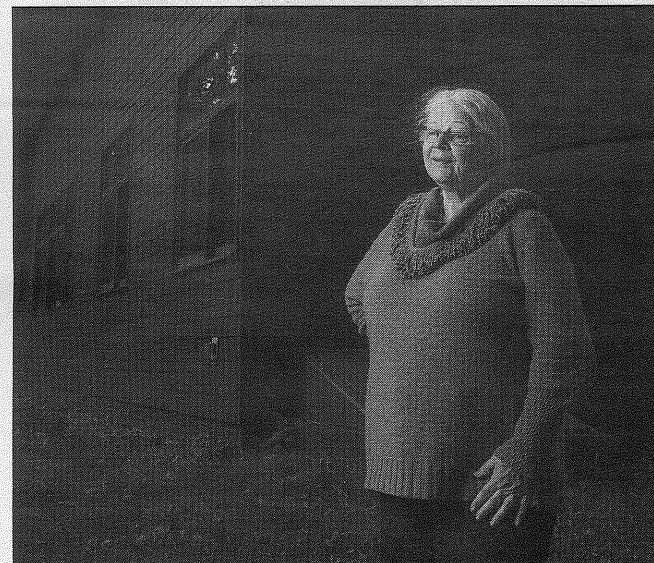
Airy & adaptable

Acorn Deck's kit homes blur the line between the indoors and outdoors



PHOTOS BY MATT MCCLAIN/THE WASHINGTON POST

Top and right: Jane Gould's home in Accokeek, Md., has many windows, which provide a lot of natural light. The raised two-sided fireplace, left, allows her to enjoy her patio even in the cold months. "There's a very happy flow. The design is simple but complex," Gould says, on opposite page.



MATT MCCLAIN/THE WASHINGTON POST

BY AUDREY HOFFER

Jane Gould lives in what could roughly be described as an upscale, upsized 21st-century version of the old Sears kit home. ¶ Her new house on a minimally cleared five-acre wooded lot in Accokeek, Md., was crafted by Acorn Deck House in Acton, Mass., which shipped the prefabricated parts to the site for a local builder to put together. ¶ Unlike the old Sears models, Gould's home has a barn-like look. The post-and-beam structure has soaring rooms with floor-to-ceiling windows — some on three sides — that allow sunlight and nature to flood in. Plus, it has custom features and is sustainable. ¶ "I love the interplay between inside and outside," said Gould over coffee on a recent Saturday morning. ¶ Sitting at her dining table in a large, open area where the living and dining rooms and kitchen meet, a space surrounded by glass, Gould looked almost as if she were outside.

Cambridge, Mass., architect Maryann Thompson designed the prototype, a prefabricated product line called "Hinge House," which is supplied by Acorn Deck House.

"I can tell a woman designed the house," Gould said, gesturing around the airy space, lofty ceiling, multiple doors, raised two-sided fireplace, oversized sliding windows and doors, and hidden bedrooms down the hall.

"The space is flexible, adaptable. There's a very happy flow. The design is simple but complex."

"Acorn Deck houses are beautiful," said Thompson. "They create a blurred threshold between inside and outside."

Durable and sustainable

The Deck component of Acorn Deck homes employs a post-and-beam construction that minimizes weight-bearing walls and gives the space a flexible structure.

Posts hold up the beams, creating a skeletal frame that stands on its own with the help of wooden decking at the ceiling. Everything in between the beams is non-

load bearing, allowing for large windows and doors.

"All our houses are bright and spacious with soaring ceilings and abundant glass walls. That's what we're known for," said Paul Buraczynski, general manager at Acorn Deck. "It enables us to open the house to the outside and create an indoor-outdoor feeling."

"There are no heads above windows, so we can bring the glass right up to the roof line," added Olga Ryabenko, director of design at Acorn Deck.

The company began making beams with solid wood timber. But since then, it has moved to advanced technology, using an engineered wood product called Glulam that is environmentally friendly.

Glulam is a composite material formed by small pieces of wood bonded with adhesives to make the required beam dimensions. "It looks a little like butcher block," said Thompson. "It doesn't shrink, lasts longer, is stronger than comparable dimensional lumber and you're not cutting down enormous trees, so the product is sustainable."

Acorn Deck House ceilings are based on the heavy timber tradition of New England barn building, updated with Glulam technology.

When you look up at the ceiling, you see beams, and between the beams, you see a wooden ceiling that appears decorative but actually isn't. Between the beams is overlaid Acorn Deck's signature wood "decking," a structural part of the ceiling made of two-inch thick wood decking. This decking holds the frame together and takes the horizontal loads, keeping the open, airy buildings from falling over.

Deborah Grubbe and her husband, Jim Porter, are living in their third Acorn Deck house in a Rehoboth Beach, Del., waterfront development. Their living room has a 30-foot ceiling and a loft offering dramatic views inside the house and out to Rehoboth Bay through 12-foot-wide and 8-foot-high sliding glass doors. "The whole upstairs of four bedrooms and two baths are supported by the posts and beams, not the walls," she said.

'Like building with Legos'

"We create a custom design or work with an architect on a design as a collaboration like we did with Maryann. Architects come up with edgy ideas and we make them come true," said Buraczynski.

"We break the design into wall panels. We make a plan for the house — for all the wall panels that will form the house — and label it to show where the pieces go. It's like having a road map to do a puzzle. That's what it is . . . a road map to build a house. We show the builder what to do," he said.

"It's actually like building with Legos," said Thompson, "because the pieces get put together on site."

In typical prefab construction, pieces come panelized, walls are built and sent in a shipping container to the site. Sometimes, the entire house is built in advance and delivered to the site.

In contrast, Acorn Deck, like the Sears kit homes, manufactures a kit of parts made up of the columns, posts and decking in its factory. The company ships them on an 18-foot trailer to the site, where a builder puts them together based on the Acorn Deck plans.

Acorn Deck visits the site in advance to determine optimum placement of the house in relation to sun, view, topography and trees.

"We have standard floor plans, but nobody gets a house as is," said Ryabenko. "The plan is more of a style guide. We have a conversation with the customer, who explains what they want. Then we design a custom home. Every home is unique and based on their wish list."

The Grubbe house is three stories, 3,300 square feet, five bedrooms, four bathrooms plus a long wish list.

"We wanted a longer living room and a wet bar adjacent to the kitchen. We pushed out the screen porch, added a room for our pool table and pushed up the ceiling to accommodate equipment in the exercise room. We made room for an inside hot tub and an office with two desks and bookcases," she said.

"The Acorn Deck people were able to jostle things and move posts and beams to meet our needs. All you have to do is tell them what you want," she said.

Gould's 1,600-square-foot, one-level Hinge House with two bedrooms and three bathrooms is made up of volume structures linked by a covered outdoor space.

The two structures are a house and a garage plus adjoining studio, which was on Gould's wish list. The two structures are placed non-orthogonal to each other, creating an outdoor living room or patio between them.

"There's a lovely playful feeling when the [grand]kids are here. They go in and out, and we adults sit on the patio in front of the fireplace, and we can all see each other," Gould said.

The studio adjoining the garage "gives me an extra dimension, and it's a place I can escape to," said Gould, who paints, writes and makes small-scale sculptures in her free time. "I love the interaction between the studio, the big glass doors and the children mulling about."

The central living area, housed under a single slope shed roof, allows for windows on three walls. "That's really unusual. Most residences, even those with open concept living areas have light coming in from only one or two sides," said Thompson.

A black slate-tiled hallway runs from the living room to two bedrooms. Standing in the master bedroom with your back against a floor-to-ceiling window, you can look down the length of the house to the woods behind.

"I feel bold and proud of myself for building this house on my own," said Gould. "To me, the ideal home embodies the concept of a fluidity between spaces. Here, there's lots of glass and my outside and inside are practically one."

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Here's how the design-and-building process works:

Land/budget: Site is analyzed to maximize the relationship between design and landscape. Budget and schedule are discussed. A plan is established.

Design: Working with a customer's wish list and budget, a personalized home is designed from concept sketches to full construction drawings.

Panelization: Final design is panelized into component parts, including posts, beams, wall panels, floor and roof framing, windows, doors, rails and hardware.

Fabrication: Design becomes a custom kit and is manufactured in a controlled environment.

Delivery: Prefabricated house panels and components are delivered to site, where the builder assembles.

Cost: Price per square foot ranges from \$250 to \$350.

Size: Acorn Deck can build any size house. The smallest built is 600 square feet, and the largest is 27,000 square feet.

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To see more photos of the Acorn Deck House, go to [washingtonpost.com/realestate](http://www.washingtonpost.com/realestate).