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LIVING IN THE LANDSCAPE

THE ART OF MINIMALIST DESIGN

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PHOTO BY NANCY ANGERMEYER

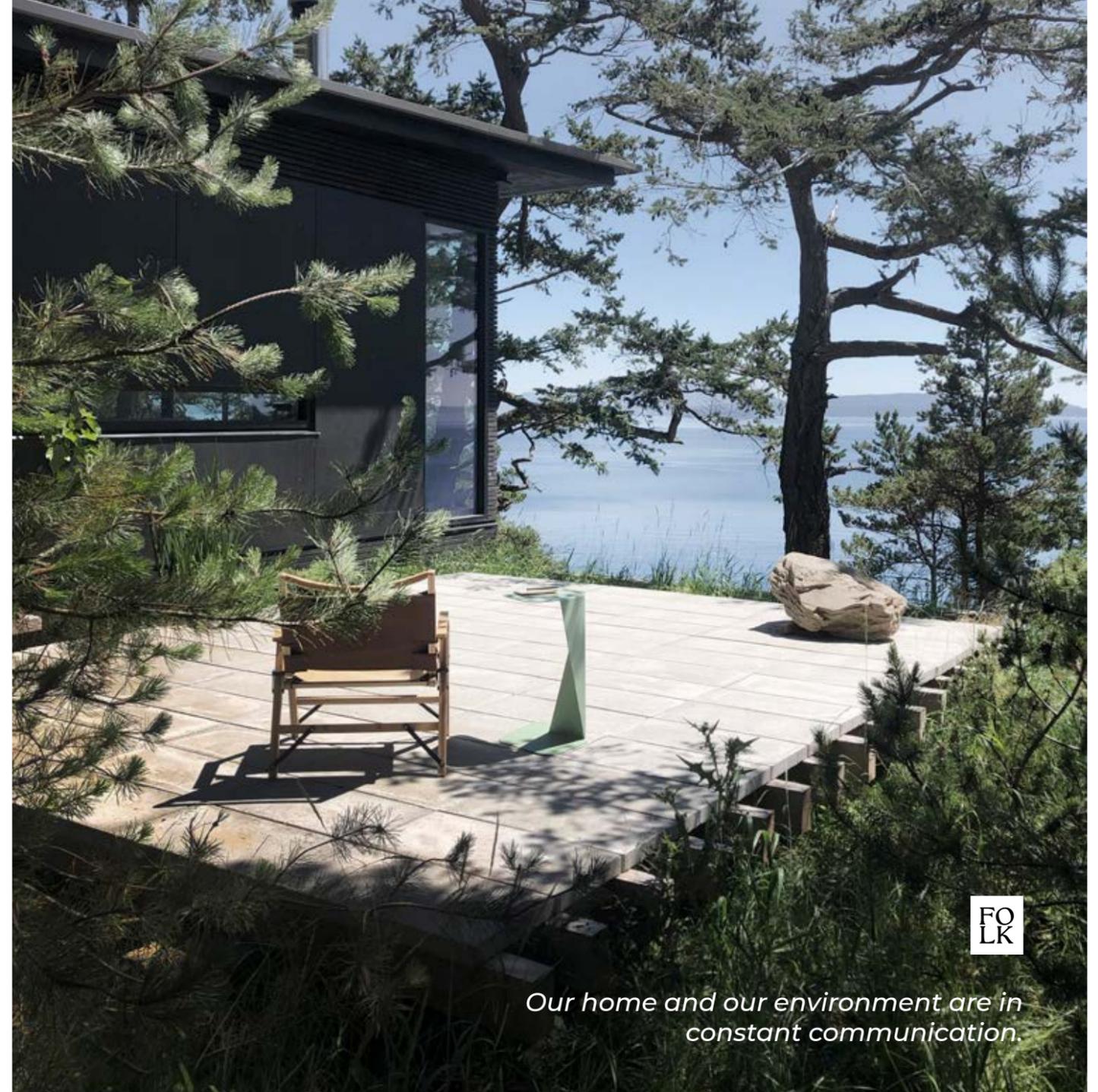
The journey

Six years ago, I travelled through British Columbia looking for a small property to get away from my hectic and crowded life in the Netherlands. On a serendipitous boat tour up the beautiful coastal fjord Suivoolot, otherwise known as Princess Louis Inlet, I met my partner, Noele. We had both just managed to squeeze on the boat, and we were the only two singles. I was struck by her elegance and mystery, and after a bit of conversation, we managed to keep in touch and reconnect before my trip back to the Netherlands.

With dreams in common, we began to envision a life away from the stress of the city. We yearned for a slower pace, for simplicity, and for more time for what matters most. Noele needed connection with a close-knit community that she could engage with through arts and culture, marine and ecological stewardship, and community service, and we both wanted a more sustainable and smaller footprint and a connection to nature, inspiration, and beauty.

Since I work mostly digitally as a landscape and garden designer and Noele has a movable private practice in clinical counselling, we had the freedom to relocate and we were confident that we could create the life we longed for.

In 2016, we found our place on a tiny island in the Salish Sea. We were mesmerized by the open view, the extended bluffs, and the sound of baby seals at the bottom of the cliffside. And we felt welcomed by the community. We put everything together and went for it! I got my Owner Builder Authorization, and we created a house design inspired by the landscape. It took two intense years to go through the building process and to finally realize our home, but it was worth it.



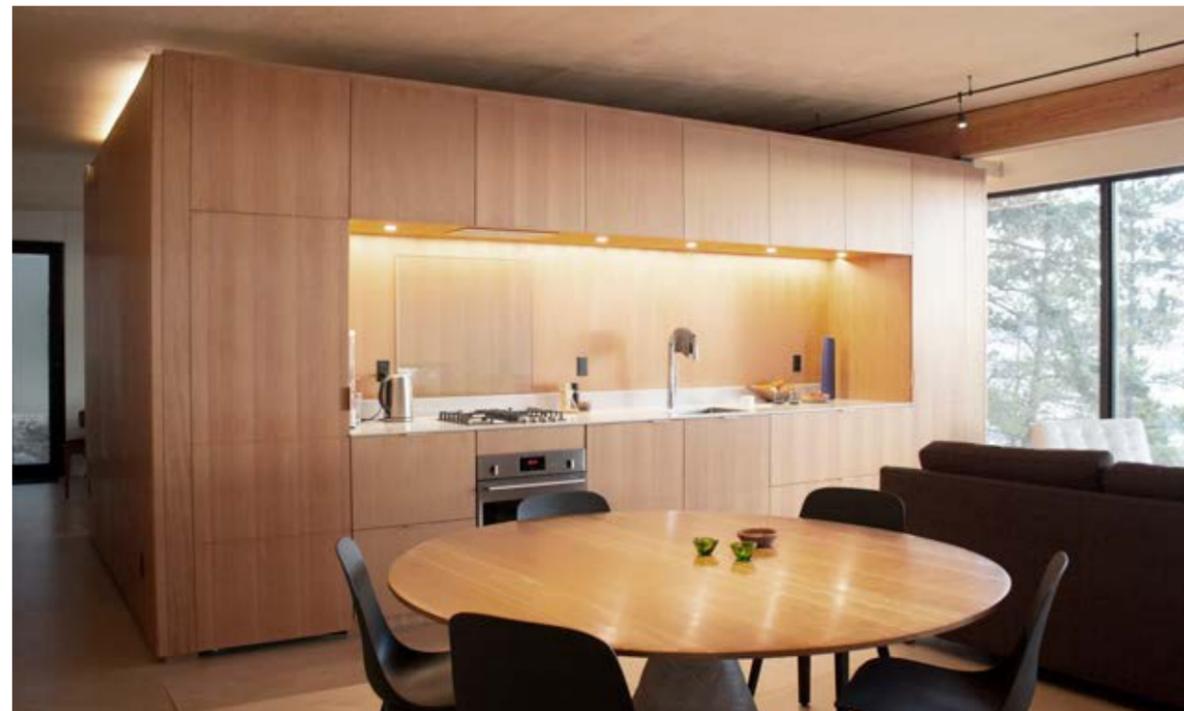
Minimalist design in a poetic place

Our private residence is perched on a pristine bluff of grass overlooking the ocean and the surrounding islands.

The idea behind the design was to fit the dwelling into the setting in a humble way so that our home and our environment are in constant communication. From a distance, the house blends into the Douglas firs and shore pines.

The design of the residence is simple. It's a rectangular box set on top of a long wall of concrete that acts like an artificial rock face. This was inspired by the linear natural rock faces already existing in the geography of the bluff. The interior is one open space with a surface area of about 1,000 sq. ft. A large central unit built out of fir panelling contains the kitchen, the bathroom, and a walk-in closet, and divides the house into two main living areas. One area is a combined living room, dining room, and kitchen, and the other is the bedroom and music room.

The house is the lens through which we see and connect to the land. The birch floor is built slightly higher than the windowsill, creating an infinity effect that allows us to feel connected to the grass bluff, the old, windswept Douglas firs, and the vastness of the ocean and sky.



The property needed minimal landscaping to subtly enhance the beauty of the site. The main design consists of long lines following the geology of the island. One line consists of a cement wall over which the house cantilevers. This wall provides a reference to two existing exposed sandstone surfaces in the bluff. A second line is a rock wall behind the house built out of sandstone from the site.

The plants include a base of native trees, shrubs, grasses, and perennials, complemented by a selection of non-invasive cultivated bulbs, perennials, and biennials. Everything serves the identity of the land by adding to and enriching the natural carpet and ecosystem instead of taking away from it.



Minimal landscaping to subtly enhance the beauty of the site.

Living in the landscape

As we go about our day, the environment changes like a living painting, with the movement of the sun and moon, the wind and storms, the deer and small birds, the eagles and turkey vultures, the whales and the wide sky. We are humbled watching the orcas and humpback whales from shore as they travel back and forth to feed.

Although we are not off the grid, we are able to be self-sustaining during power outages with the help of our water catchment system, propane stove top, wood stove, and outhouse.

We are so fortunate to be able to do our meaningful work remotely in a setting and small community that keeps us connected to what matters most. 



The landscape changes like a living painting.



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