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## **Surrounded by Nature** by Laura Butalla, Senior Editor

In Bothell, Wash., located near Seattle, builder CamWest Development created a Craftsman-style neighborhood set within nature - the North Creek Project. This eight-acre site consists of a collection of small homes on small lots at a density of 14.5 units per developed acre, for 33 units in all. Clustering the homes preserved 60 percent of the site as permanent protected wetlands. Both the architect, Mithun, and builder, CamWest, found this project a great opportunity to show that a small community of homes can be built with minimal disturbance to the existing natural surroundings.

### **Opportunities**

What makes the North Creek project so unique is the location and nature of the land. This nestled-in-nature location creates a sense of privacy for the homeowner, yet it's across the street from a major business park employing 2,500 to 5,000 workers. "North Creek is a great location, two minutes from the major freeway," says **Eric Campbell, president of CamWest Development**. "It's the perfect access point."

Mithun's plan called for concentrated development as opposed to the usual suburban plot. "The major focus of our work is what we think of as smart growth - concentrating growth rather than spreading it out," says **Bill Kreager of Mithun, principal director of the North Creek project**.

The concept of high quality architecture and specifications in smaller, more functional homes has broad appeal throughout the Puget Sound region. According to Campbell, "Many people share the belief toward a simpler life combined with less is more." Because of this, the target market for North Creek grew to include active adults and single parents as well as the originally targeted young professionals.

Architectural design at North Creek was Mithun's doing. Bungalow design, found throughout Seattle and the West Coast, and cottage style architecture served as a theme throughout North Creek. Campbell turned to "The Not So Big House: A Blueprint for the Way We Really Live" by Sarah Susanka and Kira Obolensky as a guide for developing the smaller home, while still offering quality architecture and specifications buyers find in high-end homes today.

### **Obstacles**

Although building around the wetland and salmon-bearing stream made for a beautiful setting, it was quite a challenge to work around. With site preservation laws in Bothell, the permit process dragged on for almost four years and the costs for consultant and



The exterior of the Leschi plan is true to the Northwest heritage of cottage architecture, with Craftsman-style detailing and a blend of complimentary materials.

### **Vital Stats** **North Creek Project**

**Location:** Bothell, Wash.

**Builder/Developer:** CamWest Development, Kirkland, Wash.

**Designer/Architect:** Mithun, Seattle, Wash.

**Interior Designer:** False Creek Design Group, Vancouver, B.C., Canada

**Models open:** September, 2003

**Home type:** Single-family detached condominium

**Sales to date:** 33 units sold from September 2003 to August 2004

**Community size:** 14.5 units per developed acre on an 8-acre site

**Square footage:** 800 to 1,500

**Price:** \$250,000 to \$350,000

**Buyer profile:** Active adults, single parents and young professionals



The rooms blend together to give a larger home feel for the size of the smaller floor plan.

architectural fees were higher than normal, which CamWest wasn't able to absorb into the higher density condominiums.

The Northwest region strives to preserve its wetlands and streams and "due to the proximity of the stream, we had to oversize our detention vaults," says Campbell. A detention vault is similar to a detention pond except it's a concrete structure. Campbell explains it as an underground parking garage built to detain storm water. "These structures are why the cost of the housing in the Northwest are so expensive in the urban areas," says Campbell.

At North Creek the detention vault totaled amortized cost is in excess of \$14,000 per homesite. One detention vault alone is over 300 feet in length. "That made home and utility placements very difficult," says Campbell.

Zoning also created a glitch at North Creek. The only option for CamWest to build on this land was to build condominiums. "The developer really didn't want to do that, but he also wanted to do something unique so he went ahead with the condo even though it's detached housing," says Campbell.

When it came to the city planners Campbell says they were very supportive to help get through this maze. "They realized the downfall of their code, but they have to enforce their code," says Campbell. "At the same time, if you get a good planner, they can really help you through it and figure out a way to get something innovative done."

Keeping as much of the natural setting as possible was part of the master plan. At North Creek, CamWest and Mithun used the area where an old existing house resided and turned it into a duck pond. "We kept that area open so when this landmark duck pond opens up to the whole wetland and into the stream," states Campbell.

In terms of the interior, the architectural design, marked by a diagonally positioned open staircase, creates angled views throughout the models and expands its visual size. "By building it this way," states architect **Dick Bruskrud of Mithun, project designer and manager for the North Creek project**, "I could create a load-bearing wall at a diagonal and cut a hole diagonally instead of at right angles."

"Structurally it was very easy to do and spatial-wise it did create some oddities, but it opened up the kitchen more to the living area," says Bruskrud.

With North Creek, Bruskrud says, "I wanted to show how small homes can work to fit the needs of what has typically been done at a density range of townhouses, but still deliver a detached house." His attempt to create space that lives larger in a smaller overall square footage worked well.

### Outcome

The Leschi plan, one of six plans offered at North Creek, offers, at the heart of the home, a great room with a kitchen in a size typically found in much grander dwellings. This living space forms at an angle around the diagonally positioned staircase. A command center off the kitchen can be used for various purposes. The main floor "flex room" can be a home office or den or can be optioned into a



Most of the homes in North Creek have back porches for a place to sit back and enjoy the nature when the Seattle weather doesn't quite cooperate.



The kitchen is set at an angle to create the sense of a larger kitchen [See the floor plan](#) (shown below)

master bedroom on the main floor with an optional full bath. The upstairs holds a second loft/living space providing informal living adjacent to the master and second bedroom. An attached garage along with a covered front and back porch add to the value of the house.

The exterior remains true to the Northwest heritage of cottage architecture with Craftsman Style detailing and a blend of complimentary materials. **This character alone, both interior and exterior, helped to make this a regional Best in American Living award winner.** Darcy Garneau, vp/associate principal for EDI Architecture and BALA 2004 judge says, "We liked the fact that they took the detailing of the exterior architecture with the theme inside. They had a real tight concept and they took it all the way through."

The square footage of the models at North Creek ranges from 800 to 1,500. The models priced out at \$250,000 to \$350,000. The Leschi plan spans 1,486 in square footage and priced out from \$310,000 to \$350,000. The North Creek project opened in September of 2003 and sold out by August 2004.

Since North Creek was a condominium site, a binding site plan was part of the approval process. Because of this, the number of each plan to be built was determined before the sales started. Overall this project turned out to be a success for both CamWest and Mithun. Hard cost for materials and labor on the condominiums alone stabilized at \$82.00 per square foot.

