

A Grace-Filled Home

by Blythe Thimsen
photos by Alan Bisson

EACH MONDAY NIGHT, AS THE REST OF THE RAT RACE IS FINISHING their work day, grabbing a sandwich on the go, too busy to enjoy dinner around the table with their families, one Spokane couple, Bo and his fiancé, are getting ready to greet 16 to 20 friends and guests who will be gathering round their table for dinner together. A large painting of the word "Grace" hangs in the dining room by the table, painted by a friend after her first Monday night dinner. "She went home and painted that, because grace is what she felt at the dinner," says Bo. Grace fills each dinner, as well as filling this unique home.

This table for 16 was designed and built by Bo and some friends, specifically for his Monday night dinners. When it came time to build his house, the entire layout of the house was designed around this one piece of furniture and the event which takes place around it each Monday evening.



The modern exterior of the house blends into the natural surroundings, thanks to landscaping choices, such as the grass covered driveway. The deck on top of the garage will be used as a rooftop garden.

Bo started hosting Monday night dinners in July 2005, and continues to do so every Monday evening. "We used to do dinners quarterly when I lived in Seattle," he says, explaining from where the idea came. "Then I was sitting in church one day and I got what I call the elbow in the head from God. It was a poke saying 'you need to do these dinners and you need to do them every week.'" You can't argue with God.

The rules for dinner are simple: No one has last names and no one talks about what they do for work. "I have had so many careers," says Bo. "Science teacher, camp counselor, sales, soft-

ware. People made decisions on how they would treat me based on what my career was. With that in mind, my perception was if I could have a group, and be me for who I was and not what I was, I would like that." He also realizes that in this community, a lot of people have names or family names that are well known. The goal for the dinner is to enjoy people, and not be caught up in their pedigree or family name. That means guests at times sit with people they normally would not associate with, were they not seated next to them at a dinner.



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The juxtaposition of clean lines in the kitchen with the rough metal of the hood above the range creates a room on which the eyes can feast, while numerous windows brighten the area.

"The reason people has such problems with Jesus eating with sinners was because, in Palestine, when you ate with someone, you were accepting them," says Bo. "And that is what we do here. This is a safe place where you are accepted."

There are regulars as well as a rotating roster of invitees who show up for Monday night dinners. "Emotionally, a lot of us are

orphaned," says Bo, who finds the Biblical call to care for widows and orphans as his inspiration for inviting people into his home. "Divorce can often be more painful than the death of a spouse," says Bo, who welcomes to his table those who have been widowed, whether because of death, divorce or separation. People who are new to a community and alone, those

who are separated from friends or loved ones, or those who are on the outer rings, waiting to be welcomed are the modern-day orphans.

For those who are regulars at dinner, they can always count on what they will be doing on Monday night, but recently, they had to change *where* they did it. After living in a downtown Spokane condo for

nine years, Bo needed to move.

"I lived in a condo right above a bar, and I kept waking up every night," he says. "It got so bad I developed symptoms of what they thought was MS." It was only after Bo started receiving treatment for MS, that his doctors discovered his symptoms were the result of sleep deprivation from the noise of downtown.

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One of Bo's good friends described the water feature, which runs between his original house and the one he built, as an auditory fence. Residents on both sides can carry on private conversations, which are muffled from outside listeners by the gentle sound of water, but at the same time, both houses are able to enjoy the beauty and sound created by this waterfall.

For the sake of his health, Bo started looking for a quiet neighborhood and home in which to move, and he found a great 1950s rancher with a spacious lot. After living there for a year, and dabbling with the idea of remodeling to accommodate his dining room table and Monday night dinners, Bo decided to use the extra lot to build a house. "It was such a cool house," he says. "I decided why remodel it and mess up such a cool rancher. Instead I decided to build in the lot next door." He sketched out plans for the house and took it to an architect. "I pretty much laid out where I wanted this table to go. I describe myself as socially liberal and fiscally conservative. The fiscal side of me says what a stupid idea to build a house around this one thing." Good thing fiscal doesn't always win.

Because Bo decided to build in an older, established neighborhood, he reaped the rewards of tall evergreen trees surrounding the house and making it look like it has been there for years. A stamped concrete walkway slopes up along the driveway and splits at the start of the walkway's railing. One fork of the pathway heads downhill, creating a walkway between his current house and his first house, next door. The path crosses over a water feature's gentle stream, which can be heard from the upper walkway, orchestrating a symphony of nature in the quiet neighborhood.

"My favorite part of the house is the path that comes by the waterfall," says Bo. "It reminds me of being in the mountains. If I can upon this in the woods while I was backpacking, I would want to set up camp in this spot."

Back at the driveway level, the walkway continues toward the house, onto a long walkway bridge that winds past the garage and back toward the front door. The bridge walkway, with its rusted iron handrails, carries you over the waterfall and stream below. One reason for the sloped walkway and long ramp-like bridge, rather than stairs, was to accommodate a dear neighbor, an 87 year old woman who comes for dinner on Mondays. While Bo was working on the house, he got to know her as she would walk past every day. She told him that when he had a place with no steps, she

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Bo managed to keep the urban feel of his former condo by using clean lines, an industrial styled door and cutting edge materials like the wood grain cut travertine, throughout the home.

would come to his dinners. Henceforth, a ramp walkway, rather than front steps.

At the end of the walkway, chocolate brown steel surrounds the front door, while a wall of wood-grain travertine sticks out to the right, creating a small front porch that is cocooned from the street and is very private. The front door is a commercial-grade steel door, treated with muradic acid, creating a highly polished, beautiful finish, which looks like glimmering wood. A narrow rectangular window on the right side harkens back to classroom doors.

The wood-grain travertine continues immediately inside the front door, so it appears to cut through the house. The wood-grain travertine was originally intended as flooring, but Bo envisioned it as a wall.

Inside the front door, the cool, calming comfort of the of the house envelopes you and sets the tone for the comfortable and relaxed, yet sophisticated, look of the home.

On the floors are rich, dark colored wood planks, which anchor the room with its heavy darkness. The walls are coated in a calming grey-green and accented with white woodwork. The ceiling matches the dark tones of the floor, with a coat of dark brown paint. The result of these colors is a cocoon into which one immediately feels welcomed. Recessed lighting in the front hall casts a warm glow in the room.

Walking forward down a long hallway off of the front door, the hallway is illuminated by the long, narrow windows which hover near the ceiling. While the windows provide light, the tall height still allows privacy because no one can look in to them.

It's not just the windows alone that bear the responsibility for lighting the hallway; a five-bulb track lighting fixture which curves like a river also contributes to the room's light, as does door with a full glass window, which opens off of this hallway, onto a private deck. Situated toward the middle of the house, this deck offers views of the front, the street and the ambiance of the stream below, but it is tucked back far enough that you are not visible to any who walk by. You can even sit in your pajamas, sip-

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Time travel machine, glass room, or the world's most amazing shower? Award yourself ten points if you chose the latter. This high-end extreme shower was found online by Bo, and is one of his favorite finds for the house. It gives an incentive to get up and get going in the morning!

ping coffee and will still have a bit of privacy. The hallway from which the door opens, is somewhat of an art gallery, with a huge piece painted by Bo's friend, Dan Spaulding, taking up most of the wall.

At the end of the hallway, the walls open into a large room that takes up the entire back portion of the house. This includes the kitchen, dining room and living room. The far left wall on the east side of the house angles out as it extends toward the back. This entire wall is covered in the wood-grain travertine first seen outside the front door. Rather than being cut in the usual layers, it is cut against the grain, which gives it the look of wood grain. The travertine covered wall is interrupted by four nearly floor to ceiling windows which look out onto a lower-level deck.

As the wall angles out to the east, more room is created at the end of the house for a cozy living room. Extending further than the lower level of the home, the entire living room is supported by post and beam.

The same style track lighting fixture found in the hallway makes an appearance in the dining room, where it serves as back up lighting for the display that hangs above the dining table. This custom made iron and glass chandelier, which also holds 24 wine glasses.

In the kitchen, all of the cupboards are from a line called Snaidero. "I have a friend, Rick, who is a partner in the Seattle Design Center. He had been to several Monday night dinners when he was in visiting in town, and he picked this out," says Bo of the cupboards. "Rick has always wanted to build my house, and he said we needed a really simple look."

A central island in the kitchen houses a six-burner gas stove and grill. Above the island is what Bo calls the "manhood." Hand-crafted by an artist friend, the ventilation hood is truly a man's dream come true. Constructed of wrought iron and grommets, and hanging from iron posts, it is an industrial piece of art.

"The most fun about all of this is I



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The hallway leading from the stairs to the lower level of the home holds some of Bo's most precious artwork: paintings done by his talented daughter, Abby.

took friends of mine with specific skill sets and let them do their thing. I like to be able to have my friends do stuff where I can look at it and thing 'Rick designed that, Spaulding did that, Ligament put this together, and Smitty made this.'"

An Electrolux double Icon oven is a welcome addition to the kitchen when it comes to cooking for 16 to 20 people. The entire layout of the kitchen serves a double purpose: it is a great kitchen for a modern home, but it also makes preparation of Bo's Monday-night dinners easier. Two kitchen sinks and two dishwashers add to the ease of cleaning up from the festive dinners. One sink is a deep double sink, the other, located a few feet down the counter, is an even wider rectangular sink with a flexible faucet. Two beverage refrigerators, holding wine, beer and pop, ensure there is always something with which Bo and guests can whet their whistles.

The counters and backsplash are Uba Tuba granite with a satin finish that resists fingerprints. Amazingly, it is one of the least expensive granites available, but with the satin finish looks extremely luxurious. "When the light shines on it at night, there is richness to it," says Bo.

Back in the foyer, instead of traveling down the hallway, a turn to the right takes you into an open area. Off of this area is the master bedroom, where a comfortable loop carpet adds warmth to the room, replacing the hard wood floors found in the rest of the house. The bathroom off of the bedroom is the definition of impressive. For most people, a trip to the shower in the morning is a basic experience; hot water pours out of one showerhead and gets the job done. In this house though, showering in the 22-head shower with steam capacity is an event. Mood lights, aromatherapy, a rain shower effect, steam units, music, two built-in seats and a circular form all combine to create a unique experience.

Not to be outdone by the shower, the tub is a beautiful piece as well,

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The bathroom in the lower level truly “rocks” with large boulders placed around the bathtub as well as the open, rock floored shower, which is surrounded by corrugated metal and an overhead rainshower.

encased in a green concrete border topped with rocks. The tub’s faucet is tucked into the rocks, creating a waterfall from which the tub is filled.

A stairway in the hall winds down to the lower level, which was designed to someday possibly be used as a rental apartment. It has a bedroom, full bathroom and a large family room, which also houses a workout space. A portion of this level is ready for plumbing and gas, should Bo decide to turn a back alcove into a kitchen. “The lower level gives a space a few years down the road for people who are between houses, for people who need support...or for really quiet retired nuns!” says Bo.

The hallway in the lower level also serves as an art gallery for Bo’s daughter, Abby’s, artwork. A “man-cave” is found on the lower level as well. Located beneath the garage, it is a place where Bo’s toys can be set up, as a providing a welding station for Bo and Abby, who both enjoy welding.

In the bedroom suite downstairs, is a bathroom that truly “rocks”. Corrugated metal walls, concrete counter tops and exposed copper pipes combine with an open rock shower. There is no wall or shower curtain on the shower; instead, it is an open area with an overhead rainforest showerhead, which sprinkles water down upon a large area of boulder rocks that have been used to create a rugged shower floor. Next to the rock bottom floor, through which the shower water filters to a hidden drain beneath, is a large soaking tub that is encased in rocks.

The door to the lower level bedroom is an old wood trimmed, glass swinging door from the Peyton Building in downtown Spokane, with the number 209 painted on it, and a worn brass plate that still reads “Push.” The door has been in all four homes Bo has had over the last 12 years.

A door off the hall by the bedroom leads outside to the gravel path that climbs the hill in the other side of the house and meets up with the driveway.

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Using boulders, corrugated metal and open copper pipes gives the lower level bathroom an industrial feel that harkens back to Bo's days of living in a downtown condo. It also makes for a truly unique bathroom.



fence between the houses, this opens it up," says Bo of the waterfall and gravel path. "There is a value. They have a better view of the water feature than I do, and it is creating a common area between two houses, rather than separating them. The water is an auditory fence." It allows privacy

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because the noise makes it so you cannot hear neighbor's conversations while outside, but it gives both neighbors something to enjoy, visually.

Taking the stairs back up to the main level and continuing up to the topmost level leads directly into an open room that is a full office for Bo. Working from home, he is able to "got to the office" by climbing the stairs. Separated from the rest of the house this dedicated workspace allows him to have all the space and resources of a tradi-

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Above: An open door is what guests always find at the end of the walkway on Monday evenings.
Below: The top level of the home is where Bo's office is located. A doorway opens from the office onto the top of the garage, which houses the hottub, and offers fantastic views; eventually it will have a rooftop garden.



tional office, but without the commute.

A door from this office opens out onto the top of the garage. The house was designed for this flat, walled-in space to be rooftop garden. Bo is planning to plant tall grasses, along with a crop of corn. Maybe he can one day harvest it for Monday night dinners.

"That's where my priority is," says Bo of his Monday night dinners and the room in which they take place – the room that inspired the design of the house. "I never thought I would say that. I'm the last person in the world to preach, but the bottom line is I felt called to do it and I did. I will do it until I don't feel called anymore." How very graceful, indeed. **S**

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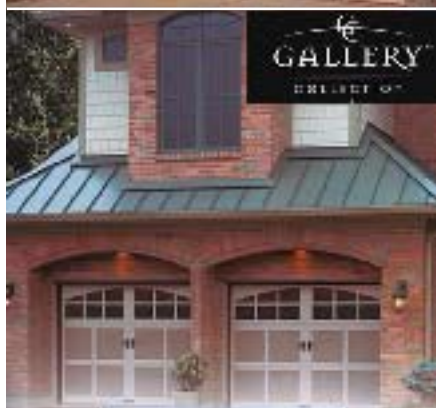
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