

MANSION

BALANCE SHEET

# A New House Rises From the Ashes

A family replaces their burned Portland, Ore., home with one that lets them move forward and look back

BY NANCY KEATES

**SCOTT AND ROBIN CRAIG** were driving home from dinner at a friend's house on a Tuesday night at around 8 p.m. with their three children when Mr. Craig got a call on his cellphone from a neighbor.

"Everything's OK, stay calm, but your house is on fire, it's really big and firetrucks are here," he remembers the neighbor saying.

The fire in their Portland, Ore., home (a faulty laptop power cord is suspected) destroyed the house, killed their chocolate lab, Henry, and rendered most of their belongings too charred for use. In the ensuing months, as they shuttled from a friend's house to small rooms at the DoubleTree Inn and short-term rentals in various neighborhoods, they decided that despite the trauma, selling the property wasn't an option.

"Walking away from this house didn't feel right," says Mrs. Craig, 44, sitting in the new five-bedroom, 3½-bathroom house they completed in October on the same site, about two years after the fire. "This feels like our center in Portland. Everywhere else feels like visiting," says Mr. Craig, 45.

The Craigs, who met as students at North Carolina State College of Design, bought a three-bedroom foursquare house in the Sunnyside neighborhood of Southeast Portland for \$375,000 when they moved from Greensboro, N.C., in 2006. Mr. Craig, a general contractor, remodeled the kitchen, flooring and windows. Mrs. Craig, a landscape architect, focused on the yard. They loved the neighborhood and the friends they made through their children's schools.

After the fire, those friends and neighbors pitched in to help with clothing, food, and even erecting a shrine with photos, ribbons and cards in front of the house.

Architects Michelle La Foe and Isaac Campbell decided their contribution would be offering their design services. Ms. La Foe had lived through a fire when she was 12, the same age as the Craigs' eldest daughter at the time. She is a principal with her husband in Office 52, a small Portland firm that gained national recognition when it won the competition to design the new 109,000-square-foot Scott Hall at Carnegie Mellon University.

The Craigs asked the architects to design a home that would honor the old layout—to "keep the ghosts" and allow the memories of the old house to come through the new. But they also wanted a different kind of space—more open,

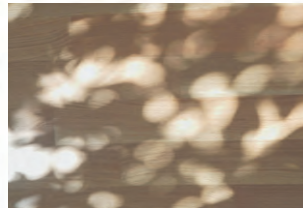


**FRESH START**

The open dining-sitting area of the new 3,500-square-foot house, above. The rebuilt home has an added third floor, right. Light colors and materials give the interior a modern look. Clockwise from below right: homeowner Scott Craig; one of the five bedrooms; the kitchen; one of the three full bathrooms.



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**MAJOR COSTS**

Permits	\$7,800
Demolition	\$24,400
Foundation/Masonry	\$41,600
Framing	\$40,400
Enclosure	\$104,100
Decks	\$12,200
HVAC	\$40,300
Electrical	\$17,000
Plumbing	18,000
Finishes	129,800
Appliances	\$9,100
Landscaping	\$4,400

modern and environmentally up-to-date. Most important, Mrs. Craig said they wanted something simple where the family could heal.

The two architects came up with a similar but expanded floor plan, with a living room, dining room and kitchen all in their original spots, but with the back of the house pushed out and a larger back porch. One major change was moving the staircase to the middle of the house and adding a skylight to let light pour in. A raised roof allowed a third floor.

It was a process fraught with emotion. At one point, to ensure durability, minimize upkeep and protect from fire, the architects came up with the idea of cladding the exterior in a traditional Japanese charred-wood treatment sometimes known as burnt cedar board in the U.S. That didn't go over so well. "We were still pretty tender and raw," says Mrs. Craig, and burned wood had bad connotations.

The house fits into the neighborhood of traditional homes, yet its floor-to-ceiling windows, radiant heating, rainwater system and cast-concrete fireplaces and countertops give it a more modern feel. The materials and colors (white oak floors, white walls) give it a clean and simple aesthetic. The window placement and the delineation of the front and back porches distinguish the house from the homes on either side, says Ms. La Foe.

Even though the design process was done by March 2013, they had to wait for the insurance claim before they could start construction. After 13 months of paperwork, they had 11 months to get it done under the terms of the insurance.

The new 3,500-square-foot house cost about \$500,000 to build—a sum that would have been higher but for the generosity of friends. The suppliers and subcontractors Mr. Craig used in his work provided unsolicited discounts on materials and appliances. To keep costs down further, Mr. Craig and his three employees did work such as painting that they typically would contract out.

A big difference in the new house is that every single item was chosen because it has meaning. Mr. Craig made the dining table and many of the desks and bookshelves; for dining chairs they used chairs that had been on the former back porch. "We didn't run out to Ethan Allen," says Mrs. Craig.

She says their experience taught them they could walk away from the home if necessary. "We know as a family we will be all right without the house," she adds.

BILL BURCELL FOR THE WALL STREET JOURNAL (6)

