

NEIGHBORHOODS

Highlands' funky old house has heart

By **KAREN STORY**
For the Reporter

Gayle and Bob Birrell live on Hidden Hills Pond, a small, man-made lake in the north end of the Highlands neighborhood. They bought their house in 1984 from Nancy Wilson, one of the founders of local celebrity band Heart. Bob and Gayle had been going to look at another house down the street, but when they drove past this one, they fell in love and looked no further.

The house was built in 1975 by George Reynoldson, an architect and builder with a passion for green building. His Space Time Homes company designed unique homes that used solar principles and salvaged materials. He built numerous homes in the Seattle area, including several in the Highlands neighborhood.

He named all his houses, and the Birrell home was christened "The Original Funky House." Neighbors began referring to it as "The Heart House" after that band moved in.

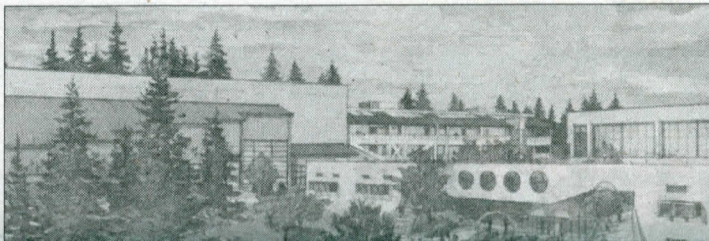
The thick, hand split cedar shake roof and siding serve as a backdrop for colorful trim work, custom stained glass windows, a cable spool sculpture above the front door, and a terra cotta bust salvaged from an old building on Capitol Hill.

The Birrells have created a garden oasis around the home. When they purchased it, the original landscaping was lost in a sea of waist-high grass and weeds. They cleared the lot by



Karen Story/Courtesy photo

Gayle and Bob Birrell in front of their "Original Funky House" in the Highlands neighborhood.



Then they jackhammered the slab into chunks. "The neighbors thought we were nuts!" Gayle said.

Inside, the home radiates earthy comfort. The large, exposed beams, posts, and wooden flooring were salvaged from warehouses. Stovepipe is used as track lighting in the kitchen, a ship's ladder serves as a bookshelf, and iron grating provides a screen between rooms. Large windows look out on Hidden Pond.

Bob's photography, paintings, and other creations adorn the walls. I was especially taken by an old car door hanging in the entry, with a mirror for a window. "Gayle wanted a mirror by the front door," Bob said, "so I made her this."

When Gayle and Bob first moved in, semi trucks would often turn around on their

See *HOUSE*, page 15

MORE HIGHLANDS

The annual **Freeway Cup** softball tournament against North Rose Hill is June 16. This all-ages event is a ton of fun, and a great way to get to know folks from our sister 'hood across the bridge. Watch for more information about the event on our Web site and our email list.


Kirkland Police Capt. Eric Olsen and Lt. Rex Caldwell spoke at the **Highlands general meeting on May 17**. They said crime in the Highlands is no higher than elsewhere in the city, but they are seeing an increase in mail theft and daytime burglaries city-wide.

Several Highlands residents have reported that a multiple unit locking mailbox costs about \$125 per unit, installed.

See *HIGHLANDS*, page 15

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weeds. They cleared the lot by hand, discovering many native Northwest plant treasures in the process. Over the years they have moved and added countless plants, created a water feature, and constructed pathways and trellises.

They also added kinetic sculptures by Orcas Island artist Tony Howe. Gayle's pride and joy are the gorgeous Japanese maples she planted years ago. "I'm a maple nut," she said.

The result is like a combination of a Japanese garden and the edge of a Northwest forest — it feels completely natural and balanced, belying the countless hours of labor that go into creating and maintaining it.

When they wanted to use broken concrete chunks to build a path from front to back, the Birrells came up with a novel idea. First they poured an exposed aggregate slab in their front yard, worrying neighbors who feared RV parking.

NEIGHBORHOOD

HOUSE: Home expresses residents love for neighborhood

From page 14

street. The trucks had driven up 116th Avenue hoping to get through to Totem Lake. Gayle asked her neighbors to sign a petition, then contacted the city and requested a "No outlet" sign. The result was the

"No outlet to commercial area" sign we now see on the corner of 114th and Northeast 87th, and no more semi trucks on 116th. "People really can make a difference," Gayle said.

Besides being a passionate gardener and tree advocate, Gayle is also passionate about

sidewalks. "We need sidewalks on both sides of 116th," she said. In addition to being safer for pedestrians, Gayle said, sidewalks "create a sense of community by getting people out into their community, and they help calm traffic."