

# Just Do It

Living in a state that's saturated with rain for much of the year, Oregonians rightly have an obsession with sunshine.

**By:**

[Amara Holstein](#)

**Photos by:**

[John Clark](#)

**Project Name:**

Segerholt Residence

**Architects:**

[Robert Rummer](#)

**Location:**

[Portland, Oregon](#)

**Published in:**

April 09



[view in slideshow](#)

## RELATED

Topics

Architecture

[View All](#)

## TOOLS



[Sign in to  
Bookmark](#)

[Print](#)

[Email](#)

Once October rolls around and with it the clouds, a sense of plodding forbearance becomes the daily mien of locals. Depression-alleviating lightbulbs line grocery shelves; travel agencies tout packages to Mexico and Hawaii; and pedestrians whip out hooded windbreakers, having given up on umbrellas long ago. It's no wonder a duck is the state university's mascot, a feathered chap whose webbed feet elicit satirical speculation on the state's likely course for human evolution.

So when Jennifer and Mattias Segerholt decided to move back to Portland after five years in sunny Los Angeles, a shared climate-based trepidation shaped their real estate search. As a child, Jennifer had lived in Eugene, a city that enjoys even more rain than Portland. "I grew up in a ranch house with trees around it," she says. "It was so dark, I didn't think I could live in Oregon again." Mattias is a Swede with a love of his native country's plentiful use of windows in its architecture. The couple, who met 16 years ago in Tokyo, lived in Portland after getting married, then moved to Providence, Rhode Island, so Mattias could attend the Rhode Island School of Design, and then moved on to Los Angeles for work. Jennifer is an account manager, and Mattias is a photographer and creative director for Ziba Design. After having their first child, Moa, they returned to Portland so their daughter could spend more time in a backyard than in the back of a car.

The initial plan was to buy land and build their dream home, one that incorporated Jennifer's love of light and Mattias's Swedish upbringing with functional modernism. "But then our Realtor called us and said she found a mid-century house called a Rummer," explains Mattias. "It was in really bad shape, but we bought it." The five-bedroom, 2,400-square-foot post-and-beam house exemplified the couple's ideal layout. "We were initially talking about how we

wanted a box within a box,” Jennifer says. “We like homes where when you open the front door, you can see all the way through to the back. And with the atrium and the fact that it hadn’t ever been altered, it had all that we were looking for.”

A perfect example of low-key mid-century modernism set in southwest Portland, the house takes its name from a local developer, Robert Rummer, who built more than 750 such homes throughout the area and more than 60 in the Segerholts’ immediate neighborhood. Reminiscent of California Eichlers, to the point that there was talk of legal action against Rummer for copyright infringement, the houses were constructed after Rummer paid a visit to the Bay Area in the early 1960s to meet with A. Quincy Jones and tour some Eichler developments. The result is a series of homes that copy Eichler’s iconic architecture, including the great expanses of glass, wide-open interiors, and indoor-outdoor living styles. When asked if he’s noticed the resemblance, Mattias pulls out a floor plan of his house. It’s an exact replica of Eichler model OJ-1605, with only minor modifications, such as grooved wood-paneled siding indoors and a brick-and-cement-block fireplace. “The other day, a man was parked in front of our house,” Mattias recounts. “He told us he lives in this exact house in San Francisco, but his is an Eichler. We invited him in and he said he felt like he was walking into his own house.”

Not everyone appreciates the home’s architectural pedigree. The two lawyers who sold the house to the Segerholts had bought the place intending to fix it up and quickly flip it for a profit. “But they were clueless,” says Mattias. “They had a Home Depot list of stuff to do, they were putting down Berber carpets and planning to paint it a dark brown, and we said, ‘Please, just stop.’” Though the original owner hadn’t changed a thing since 1966, “the roof was shot, the landscaping was bad, the foundation was falling over, the radiant heating didn’t work, and the plumbing, electrical, and gas systems were all broken,” Jennifer says with a wry grin. The couple made an offer, with the understanding that the problems would be fixed.

Four months later, the Segerholts moved to Portland, packing themselves into their car and leaving their stuff in storage in Los Angeles. They arrived to find their home “nowhere near done,” says Jennifer. Quick fixes and shoddy workmanship were among the many mistakes made by the sellers. “We had moved into a hotel for two months, and we were getting calls telling us that the workers had put up the drywall without testing the wiring and that there were now two electrical lines shot in the back bedroom with smoke billowing out of them,” Mattias says. “We were standing in the hotel’s breakfast buffet line, thinking, Why did we ever do this?”

In response, the couple sunk more of their own time and money into the project. They paid \$25,000 in cash to have poured white concrete floors installed and the radiant heating fixed. They laboriously picked a mosaic of hand-cast Heath Ceramic tiles out of boxes of seconds at the company’s outlet store in Northern California, which they packed in the family’s Passat and drove up to Portland. In an effort to save some money, Mattias retooled cheaper products to fit the house, fronting Ikea cabinets with wood veneers and installing Ikea bedroom closets that he finished with Flexform panels.

“We push things a little too much sometimes,” says Jennifer, and a quick scan of the space shows the results of their almost obsessive level of detail. The interior walls are painted with matched hues from Le Corbusier’s *Polychromie Architecturale*, a book that the pair pored over for months to find the perfect shade of light blue for the living room, and they stayed up until three in the morning installing and leveling new doors. “It’s like our hobby together,” Jennifer says, remembering Mattias calling Finland every night for a month, trying to cajole a non-English-speaking store owner into selling him some vintage wallpaper. The wallpaper now adorns their dining-room wall, acquired only after Jennifer wrote to a Finnish design blogger and enlisted her translation skills in the transaction.

Two years later, the family has expanded to include a one-year-old daughter, Freja. On sunnier days, the family uses their large backyard as an extra room, with a trampoline set to one side and a screen of young bamboo shoots fencing them in. Mattias proudly points out a small garden burgeoning with tomatoes, strawberries, pumpkins, and flowers, and he notes, “You can’t do that in Sweden, with its minus-28-degree winters,” then indicates how he also planted the plush green carpet of lawn in lieu of the previous boulders and cascading layers of mud.

Now, when the family spends their hours indoors, a bright lemon-hued door

welcomes guests and frames the scene inside. Moa and Freja tumble through the atrium, and a soft white incandescence smiles on them from the surrounding windows as their parents cook dinner and watch their daughters play. It seems, after all, that this sun-seeking Oregon family has finally created their own beacon of light in the gray winter landscape.