

MOUNTAIN ZEN

A MONTANA ARCHITECT AND AUSTRALIAN HOMEOWNERS JOIN FORCES TO CREATE A SLEEK AND SERENE HIGH-COUNTRY RETREAT THAT PUSHES THE ENVELOPE OF MOUNTAIN DESIGN

STORY BY LAURA BEAUSIRE

PHOTOGRAPHY BY GIBEON PHOTOGRAPHY

The windows of the great room were meticulously calibrated to frame the spectacular view of Pioneer Mountain. Walls clad in local stone add warm shades of pewter, and a twelve-foot-long fireplace, paired with a quartz bench, balances the elongated lines of the custom leather sectional sofa.

ARCHITECTURE BY REID SMITH ARCHITECTS

INTERIOR DESIGN BY LC² DESIGN SERVICES

CONSTRUCTION BY TETON HERITAGE BUILDERS

WHEN A WELL-TRAVELED AUSTRALIAN COUPLE DISCOVERED THE TOWN OF BIG SKY, MONTANA,

they knew their extensive search for the perfect ski destination was finally over. “After only a few days at the Yellowstone Club, we knew we had found the spot for our dream mountain home,” homeowner Steve Taylor confesses.

The Taylors were committed to maximizing their new homesite’s magnificent views of Pioneer, Cedar and Lone Mountains. Bozeman-based architect Reid Smith, of Reid Smith Architects, helped them realize their vision. “They told me, ‘We just want to float in the trees,’” Smith recalls.

Determining the shape of the home’s structure proved complicated, but ultimately rewarding. What Smith refers to as a “bony rock ridge” divides the property, creating a steep drop-off to the south. That stony spine provided just the inspiration the architect needed, sparking the idea for an axial stone wall that passes through the home and out each end. On the northern side of the wall are the public living spaces, while the private rooms are located on the southern side.

Smith explains that he and the owners “pushed each other” throughout the design process, and that synergy led to a stronger and bolder result. “I was inspired by the Taylors’ philosophy of keeping things simple but keeping the richness and the beauty in the materials,” he says. As Taylor explains, “Mountain contemporary with a Zen feel was our goal.”

While they were eager to bend some of the rules of conventional ski lodge design—the unabashed

use of steel and glass might be more familiar to skyscraper-dwellers than to Montana lodge aficionados—the owners also wanted to honor local traditions. “We wanted to create something that was true to the Montana mountain feel whilst introducing new materials that push the boundaries,” Taylor says. Smith chose reclaimed siding made from vintage corral boards to clad the structure’s jutting planes, while local Prairie fieldstone and Deep Creek ledgestone walls add rich, earthy color and texture.

Inside, the home is bathed in natural light. “Winter is long, and light is good,” Smith says of the large and dramatic windows he carefully placed to welcome sunshine into the open, airy rooms, while also capturing the jaw-dropping mountain views.

A palette of woody colors inspired by the home’s mountain setting adds warmth to the interior spaces, designed by Len Cotsovolos of LC² Design Services, while also blending perfectly with the home’s clean, contemporary look.

The kitchen is a perfect example of that aesthetic. The same weathered-gray corral boards that clad the home’s exterior provide a backdrop for the kitchen’s darker wood accents and espresso-hued quartz countertops. Inspired by the seamless, minimalist style of contemporary Italian kitchen design, the flush-set wenge cabinets have integrated hardware and recessed finger pulls. “The kitchen needed to be open to the view corridor in front and toward Lone Peak,” Taylor explains. “We love the way the space seems to fit naturally in the home.”

The serene simplicity of the home’s “mountain Zen” character continues to inspire Smith, who says, “There’s a purity to it.” Sometimes a fresh approach from the other end of the world is just what it takes to see familiar traditions through clear eyes once again. ○

FACING PAGE: Industrial steel and weathered timbers provide a frame for a 1960s vintage Eero Aarnio bubble chair that dangles playfully beside the window without obscuring the majestic vista. A coffee table fashioned from Kaabu root from Indonesia rests on a custom silk-blend shag rug.





ABOVE, TOP: The home's jutting volumes are designed to maximize the views. ABOVE, BOTTOM: The counter surface in the powder room is crafted from a charred Douglas fir beam and the sculptural sink is custom cast bronze, with a planked reclaimed wood mosaic on the wall behind. RIGHT: A custom-patinaed Italian bronze pivot door marks the home's elegant entrance, with a slight step down to the level of the kitchen and living areas. The stairwell leading to the lower level is lit by a sensationally dramatic chandelier from Hudson Furniture in New York.



The open kitchen is sleek and uncluttered, set against a vintage corral board wall, with wenge cabinets, quartz counter surfaces and no protruding hardware in sight. RIGHT: The dining area is lit by a cast bronze chandelier that evokes delicate branches, custom-designed by Len Cotsovolos, who also designed the chairs. The table, featuring a massive fourteen-foot slab of reclaimed mahogany, is from Hudson Furniture.



“THE OWNERS’ INSPIRATION WAS TO FEEL LIKE THEY WERE ‘FLOATING IN THE TREES.’”

Reid Smith



GOOD-LOOKING GLASS

Architect Reid Smith is a master of glass. Here, he shares some cutting-edge tips for making the most of the windows in your mountain home.

BE FOCUSED ON SPECIFIC VISTAS

"We used a glass façade to capture the panoramic views, but we also created some articulation within the wall of glass to frame specific mountains," Smith explains. "Although at a quick glance it appears as a wall of glass, there is subtle definition within it that relates to specific view corridors."

BE ENERGY EFFICIENT

These particular windows are part of a wind-resistant, triple-pane glass curtain wall system with a very high insulation factor from a German company called Unilux. The window-walls are designed to conserve heat while offering considerable passive solar gain.

BE BALANCED

Complement the hard, reflective surface of glass with a softer texture or color, as in the warm gray shades of the corral boards used on both the exterior and interior of this home.

BE CREATIVE

"I'm pretty proud of that staircase," Smith says of the home's sculptural stairway. His pride is well-founded: Backed by a glass wall, the open tread design features steel stringers and European white oak steps. "It spills light into the home," the architect says.



The master bathroom features beautiful Italian porcelain tile on the walls and floor, while the freestanding tub is paired with a custom cast metal table inspired by twisted animal horns. The sink is hand-carved alabaster. LEFT, ABOVE AND BELOW: The master bedroom suite has a cozy fireplace and sitting area, plus panoramic views.



“THE KEY ARCHITECTURAL AND DESIGN GOALS WERE THAT THE VIEWS AND THE MOUNTAINS MUST COME FIRST.”

Steve Taylor

Nestled against a slope in the Yellowstone Club, the home is boldly contemporary. With a floor-to-ceiling wall of windows beside the kitchen, the artfully lit home glows like an ember in the dusk of evening. A cleverly integrated fire pit and chimney in patinaed steel anchors the broad patio space. Reid Smith likens the tower structure to a contemporary teepee.

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