

BIG SKY SURPRISE

IN MONTANA, A CONTEMPORARY HOME REINVENTS THE CABIN
VERNACULAR BUT KEEPS THE FOCUS ON THE VIEW.

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ARCHITECTURE / LARRY PEARSON, PEARSON DESIGN GROUP
INTERIOR DESIGN / LISA KANNING, LKID
HOME BUILDER / TODD THESING, HIGHLINE PARTNERS



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It was mountains, mountains, mountains,” the owner of a Big Sky home says of the first time she laid eyes on the view from the lot where her and her husband’s vacation getaway would eventually stand. The homeowners didn’t plan on building, but the special parcel, which looks to Lone Mountain, Cedar Mountain and Pioneer Mountain, immediately won them over.

In short order, they hired architect Larry Pearson, who had previously created a “little gem of a house” for a friend. Picturing a smallish, modern dwelling (the wife is an avowed modernist), the couple was surprised when he proposed a larger structure. Recalls Pearson, “They said, ‘Well, this isn’t what we were originally thinking about, but we like it. In fact, we love it!’”

From the front elevation, the residence appears modest. “It’s one story and very understated,” says general contractor Todd Thesing, who translated Pearson’s concept into a reality. “It unfolds as you experience the house and start moving through it.” Set deftly into the side of the mountain, the full scope of the 9,000-square-foot structure only becomes entirely visible from the back elevation. “When the client has the confidence to be a little bit original—and they did—they invite the possibility of both transparency and a low-slung design.” The shape harkens back to the ranch-style homes that the architect remembers from his Southern California boyhood. “I always loved the simplicity of that style,” he says, “As an architect, I have a predisposition for not giving it all away. This is a house that is designed around those principles.”

While the home’s front exterior was intended to blend into its surroundings, the interior was conceived to celebrate them, with large expanses of glass created to showcase

those exquisite views. “Ten years ago, the engineering existed but windows of this size were not as accessible and had less thermal performance,” says Pearson. The structure itself also works to frame the views. Originally, the visible steel trusses were to have been clad with timbers. Instead, the team opted to have the steel carry its own weight, aesthetically speaking. The result, which carefully balances the home’s rich materials with the lightness and transparency of its design, keeps the focus on that spectacular scenery.

Integrating art and furniture into this framework so that it didn’t disturb the delicate balance that had been created fell on the shoulders of designer Lisa Kanning. “Everything was kept pretty simple,” she says. “You don’t want to detract from the views, but you also want enough interest in your interiors.” Kanning nimbly navigated her task, tipping toward a neutral palette and natural materials with subtle touches of color—like an olive-hued leather in the mud room, a red base for the breakfast nook’s table, the bright yellow of a chair in the den and the gray-green wash on the barn doors in the game room—pulled from the outdoors and the couple’s art collection.

She placed elegant, low-profile sofas in the living area, the game room and the den, all upholstered in gray tones, to echo the streamlined design of the house. “They tend to like cleaner, more European lines,” Kanning says of the homeowners’ preferences. The forms anchor the family’s collection of art by the likes of Charles Arnoldi, Rudy Autio, Joyce Scott and Squeak Carnwath. “That way, the colorful pieces can come in and make the impact they were meant to,” says the designer.

Touches of whimsy—a Sam Maloof rocker in the den, an overstuffed lounge chair and ottoman in the master, and Owen Mortensen’s ethereal tumbleweed chandelier in a guest room—ensure that the interiors hold their own against those stellar views. Striking the right balance so that, despite the sparsely furnished rooms, spaces felt warm and inviting rather than cold or empty, was also a factor—every piece needed to pull its weight.

That was especially true when it came to lighting. “We had to get fixtures that wouldn’t interfere with the views but that would give you some light,” says Kanning, who worked with designers from Lindsey Adelman and Gabriel Scott to CP Lighting and Commute Design Studio to create custom pieces that, in addition to illuminating these spaces during short winter days, are sculptural and arresting in their own right.

The final effect is a home that, while large and spare, feels warm, abundant and inviting. So inviting, in fact, that soon after it was completed the owners decided to spend more of their time in Montana. Such is the primal, mesmerizing lure of the majesty of these mountains—and a home designed to celebrate its beautiful setting. **L**



A sculpture by Adrian Arleo rests in a niche in the entry of this Big Sky, Montana house. Designer Lisa Kanning placed a vibrant Cassoni lounge chair in the adjacent den, creating a comfortable spot to relax while being warmed by the fire. Select Stone supplied the stone pavers, while the oak flooring is from Burchette and Burchette Hardwood Floors in Elkin, North Carolina.



Assembled below a Lindsey Adelman chandelier in the living room are B&B Italia sofas, a pair of Minotti club chairs and Mimi London coffee tables. The rug is by Brunswick & Fils. Montana Sash & Door supplied the windows.



Opposite: Kanning paid tribute to traditional mountain decor in the kitchen's breakfast area, opting for a Maharam plaid for the banquette, a fixture by CP Lighting that resembles branches, and a wood table by Integrity Builders featuring a bright red base. The painting is by Italo Scanga.

Below: Architect Larry Pearson's skillful marriage of old and new shines through in a hallway, where traditional stone and timber elements play off the contemporary metal windows framing views of the landscape conceived by Design Workshop. Matthew Fairbank Design sconces makes the space glow.



Right: Even the lower powder room received bespoke touches. Elements Concrete fabricated the custom concrete vanity. Mounted on it is a WS Bath Collections sink with Blu Bathworks fittings, all from Earth Elements. Reflected in the RH mirror is lighting by Richard Hays.

Opposite: A guest bedroom's pale palette turns compelling through the use of whimsical, textural accents such as the acrylic Eero Aarnio Bubble hanging chair and the Owen Mortensen Tumbleweed pendant.

