

# Fresh Take on Traditional

Those who are drawn to the Mountain West today usually want a home that speaks to the great outdoors and references regional vernacular. But they also want clean lines, modern amenities and, most importantly, plenty of light. In short, they want a fresh take on traditional.

In response, accomplished architects combined with thoughtful clients are collaborating on homes throughout the region in a variety of expressions of the “new old.” The most successful such homes are driven by clients who invest not only their passion but also their time in the project. Personal history plays an important role too. As the saying goes, the more you give, the more you get.

New York resident Kirk Davenport is a self-described frustrated architect. He studied architecture at Brown University, then considered attending Rhode Island School of Design for a graduate degree but went to law school instead. He had been involved with some renovations, but never a design-from-scratch project. When the time came to design a family home in Wyoming, then, he was more than a little involved.

As architect John Carney remembers it, “Kirk’s wife said, ‘I’m not sure you want to get this job. He’s going to drive you crazy.’ But we loved it. He gave us the opportunity to do a completely rustic house.” Over the past twenty years, CLB Architects has designed everything from commercial and mixed-use projects to residences, including affordable housing. They recently completed the LEED-Platinum-rated Interpreter’s Center at the Laurance S. Rockefeller Preserve. Their work for the most part has skewed modern, with a long-standing commitment to sustainability and a consistent emphasis on building site-sensitive structures in tune with the delicate ecosystem and natural beauty of the land.

The Davenports’ property had natural beauty in spades. An elevated site situated up off the valley floor at the end of a road and backed by forest, it boasted sweeping views to the south toward the valley’s famous Sleeping Indian mountain. Passionate backcountry skiers, the Davenports loved its proximity to Teton Pass as well as to the local saloon. “We have one foot in the wilderness and one foot in the little town of Wilson, and that seemed perfect to me,” says Davenport.

With a shared vision for honest construction, sustained effort and the clients’ unwavering commitment (manifested in weekly conference calls and the willingness to put work aside whenever a question came up), the project was completed in eighteen months. “I

was involved in every single decision,” says Davenport. “I wanted the place to look like it had been here fifty years from the moment we moved in. We picked out all the timbers, all the stones, all the hardware. We never had any problem, any friction. And that includes all subs. We had a party in June for everyone who worked on the house. The guy who made the doors came all the way from Idaho with his family. Everyone was really proud of the job. People say construction is hard,” he adds, “but for me, I was sad when it was done.”

Ultimately the emotional investment paid off in a home that is as original as it is beautifully crafted. Unique features—a fire pole, a bridge to a tower housing the guest suite, a secret passageway accessed by a hidden door, and a ladder from the billiards room leading into the closet of the son’s room above—add whimsy and fun. This balances the gravitas exuded by the house itself, which makes a significant architectural statement with its massive structural timbers, monumental stonework and visually arresting bridge. Lead architect Andy Ankeny, whose twin Jake Ankeny headed the team from Ankeny Construction Management, credits Davenport for pushing everyone involved to do his or her best work. “He was keen to challenge us in that way,” Ankeny says. “He brought a level of fun to the project from the beginning.”

On the opposite side of the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem, an equally committed husband and wife were making their dream a reality with the help of Livingston-based Miller Architects and interior designer Laura Fedro. In this case, the Connecticut family was emotionally invested in the project due to their long history in the area.

Joe Roodell, project manager for Miller Architects, explains, “The wife’s family had been Elkhorn Ranch guests since 1969. It had been

their dream for the longest time to have their own place. Their children love the West; in fact, one son was living in Jackson, outfitting. Now the husband is retired, and they're moving to Montana as their primary residence."

The site is private, surrounded by forest. "What's great about this design is that it lends itself to that sense of discovery," says Roodell. "They're looking toward Ramshorn Peak and the Gallatin Range. In the distance is a meadow they've spent time in. In the living room they've set up a spotting scope to focus on the meadow for observing elk and other wildlife." The design process involved its own sense of discovery. Site visits to other Miller homes were key; they helped the architects get a feel for what the clients responded to volumetrically. By the end of the process they had decided on a three-bedroom house. A guest barn offers the opportunity for people to visit on their own without having to open up the main house.

Stylistically, their vision evolved throughout the process. Originally they had wanted a round-log home, but ultimately they chose a combination: hewn for the majority of interior and exterior walls, and round logs for rafters, trusses and posts. Using reclaimed materials from the area gave the home a sense of history. At the same time, the chosen materials would continue to weather gracefully through time.

Understandably, the couple didn't want the house to be too dark. They chose a lighter palette for the floors and trim, while Candace Tillotson-Miller designed a kitchen with open rafters and a dormer above to flood the space with light. Interior designer Laura Fedro says that with this group the design process was a pleasure. "The wife was involved in all the decisions. It was such a delight to talk with her about all the options available. Because of her love of the Elkhorn, she didn't want to re-create a turn-of-the-century cabin, but she wanted the comfort and familiarity of one. Specifically, she didn't want to live in a gigantic volume."

The house unfolds in a series of livable spaces with grand views. These begin at the front door. "The clients were clear that they wanted to be able to walk up to the main entry and see into the space that then looks out to the landscape," says Miller. "The effect it gives is one of transcending space."

The house features a generous but not over-scaled living room, dining area and kitchen; a serene master bedroom; a six-bed bunk room designed around a 1940s "Cowboy High Style" dresser; a cozy sitting room tucked behind the living room fireplace; and a killer mudroom with plenty of room for skis, snowshoes and fishing gear. Ample outdoor spaces include a screened porch with dining table and fireplace, and open porches and patios overlooking a pond and waterfall designed in collaboration with the husband. A passionate fly-fisherman, he wanted to have live water on the property; the pond then became a natural attractant for moose, elk and other fauna.

"The intention was for the house to be used and loved. It's a generational home. We chose good pieces, but nothing you can't put your feet on," says Fedro. "The wife is a voracious reader. She has two big swivel chairs facing a beautiful view to the south and east. It's important to have a workspace where you can collect things you need for your life. But she said all she needs is the big chair in front of the window."

A home designed by Miller Architects and built by On Site Management for a family with deep personal ties to the Big Sky area references dude ranch cabins and rustic living while being carefully integrated into a forested site that boasts dramatic mountain views.





## Sense of Discovery



ABOVE LEFT: Square logs suggest timelessness, while extensive use of local stone grounds the building to its site.

ABOVE RIGHT: A screened porch makes the most of indoor–outdoor living in the best rustic tradition.



ABOVE: The lower media room provides a quiet getaway to watch a film or play billiards.

FACING: The great room is a central gathering space for the family, with upholstered seating, a live-edge table by Brandner Design and a custom wool carpet by Tai Ping. Views of Ramshorn Peak dominate the graciously scaled paned windows.





A Corbin Bronze chandelier centers the dining area, while a Ted Waddell painting hangs on the hand-finished plaster wall.





FACING: The light-filled mudroom with its oversized upholstered ottoman offers ample storage for summer and winter sports gear.

ABOVE: A bunkroom takes its design cues from an antique "cowboy high-style" chest of drawers, a gift from the wife's parents.



ABOVE: Laura Fedro Interiors specified the Victoria and Albert tub for its depth and dual ends. It's the perfect place to soak after a day on the slopes. Custom cabinets built by Crown Creations and a warm, rich mohair runner finish the space.

FACING: Layers of textures create a comfortable bedroom retreat.

