



THE ART OF LIVING

ARCHITECTURE, ART
AND NATURE SUBTLY
COMPLEMENT ONE
ANOTHER IN A
SCULPTURAL
COLORADO HOME

In the dining room, neutral-toned furniture and finishes provide a quiet backdrop for the visual dialogue between two bold artworks: “We the People,” an acrylic-on-canvas flag by Andrew Baird, and Jeanne Bessette’s “Not Just a Number,” an acrylic-and-mixed-media figurative painting. The blue-stained walnut dining table can seat up to 14.

STORY BY **NORMAN KOLPAS** PHOTOGRAPHY BY **KIMBERLY GAVIN**



The exterior's walls of horizontal sandstone blocks extend into the house, past the custom offset-pivot entry door made of glass, wood and steel. FACING PAGE: Beneath a gabled roofline that was required by the community, the main entrance takes a sculptural twist with the support of subtly uplit Douglas fir columns. Each one is pitched at a slightly different angle from the next, visually balancing the asymmetry of the roof.



Its select collection of paintings and sculpture is superb, its architecture stunning.

Yet even the briefest conversation with the owners of this home on a mountainside site in Colorado confirms that, to them, nature is the biggest attraction. "The real art in this house is the outdoors, the natural beauty surrounding us," says the wife, who with her husband bought the site above the town of Avon for its sweeping west-facing vistas. "We overlook the valley and have 180-degree views," she continues. "We can see the storms rolling in. And the sunsets are unbelievable."

The couple, who collect artworks that make a strong impression on them, knew right away that a home in such a location needed to be a work of art in its own right. That desire led them to RKD Architects, a Vail Valley firm with a reputation for putting innovative contemporary spins on the Rocky Mountain vernacular. Working with RKD's president, Jack Snow, and his business partner and wife, Sally Brainerd, they arrived at a design that, says Snow, "feels like living inside a sculpture that is modern, transparent and open to the views." >>

ARCHITECTURE BY **RKD ARCHITECTS** INTERIOR DESIGN BY **STUDIO 80 INTERIOR DESIGN AND SLIFER DESIGNS**
CONSTRUCTION BY **GEORGE SHAEFFER CONSTRUCTION COMPANY**

ARTISTIC ENLIGHTENMENT

With its large-format artworks and bold yet subtly detailed architecture, the home presented particular lighting challenges. Lighting designer Greg Mackell of 186 Lighting Design Group in Denver worked with the architects and homeowners to create special solutions, including:

KEEPING IT HIDDEN

Narrow rows of LED lighting—“almost a tape light,” says architect Jack Snow—are hidden along the ceiling beams. The result highlights the sculptural structure of the rooms.

LIGHTING UP

Fixtures set at regular intervals along the base of the home’s exterior walls—as well as some inside, like the curved red-painted feature wall facing the dining room—send a soft wash of light upward.

SPOTLIGHTING THE ART

Hidden high-intensity MR16 LED bulbs are positioned in the ceiling to spotlight each work of art.

CENTRALIZING CONTROL

A sophisticated Lutron system allows the homeowners to control all of the fixtures from a computerized panel, which includes an “Art” command that instantly adjusts the lighting to the optimum configuration and levels for showcasing their art.



ABOVE: “Smile, Sonrisa,” an oil-on-canvas portrait by Daniel Ochoa, dominates the great room, its medley of earth tones and bold, expressionistic brushstrokes in harmony with the materials and forms of the surrounding architecture. Dove-gray Minotti sofas and red Maxalto Kalos chairs provide welcoming comfort while also appearing to be minimalist works of sculpture in their own right. FACING PAGE: A wall of window-doors opens to the covered portion of the patio, furnished with casual weatherproof furniture and sheltered on three sides from the high-altitude climate.



To accommodate the steeply sloping site while capturing the panoramic vistas,

the RKD team came up with a floor plan that staggers the arrangement of the main living spaces. The structure is organized around three gabled forms—one in the great room and kitchen, one in a secondary living area and one in the master suite—each of which features a sloping window wall that appears to soar into space. Ceilings as high as 20 feet at the ridgeline add to the sense of expansiveness while meeting the subdivision’s requirement that all houses have gabled roofs.

Using indigenous materials including dry-stacked sandstone and wire-brushed Douglas fir, the architects expressed their trademark creativity in details that range from a colonnade that appears to cascade along one side of the entrance, to blackened-steel panels, floated 3/4 inch off the wall, that compose the fireplace surrounds and a pass-through between the kitchen and dining room. Snow and Brainerd refined such touches down to the smallest detail, taking particular pride, for example, in the way that specially designed >>

“THE MATERIALS WE USED COULD BE DIFFERENT, EVEN WEIRD. BUT THEY ALSO HAD TO FEEL WARM AND APPROACHABLE.”

Jack Snow



ABOVE: Seen from outside at night, the master suite glows like a vitrine for displaying precious objects.
LEFT: Opposite the foot of the bed, the same limestone used for the exterior walls creates the fireplace surround.
FAR LEFT: In the master bedroom, the expansive vista is the featured work of art, on view through window walls including a gable-topped bay section that tilts outward, as if ready to soar into the sky. Behind the bed, faux-painted drywall resembles weathered wood that’s been dipped in molten steel. “It eventually may have a piece of art,” the homeowner says of the room. “Or it may not.”

The powder room offers a playful nod to high style with its sleek black-glass pedestal sink, floor-to-ceiling mirror and patterned wallcovering. FACING PAGE: Unlike the rest of the house, which has concrete floors, the library features a floor of rift-cut oak stained a soft blue-gray. One of the first pieces of art the owners ever purchased, a feather collage by David McCarthy, found a new home next to a door facing an aspen grove.




steel connecting pins make columns appear to float free of the concrete floor below and the eaves above. “We jokingly called this ‘the no-touchy house,’” Snow says.

Simultaneously understated and bold, the architects’ design provides an ideal setting for the homeowners’ collection of art. “They wanted to highlight a few pieces very well rather than show an extensive collection,” Snow says of the oversized works, each of which occupies its own stretch of stone or drywall. Yet, nothing in particular about the architecture was designed with a specific piece of artwork in mind. “We wanted to wait until the house was

done, and see how it felt, to decide what art we wanted to put where,” the homeowner explains.

The goal was for each piece to be able to make its own statement. “I’ve never grouped anything on a wall except for family pictures,” the owner says. “The art we buy has to stand out and be a real finishing touch. It’s easy to pick up a couch or table or pillows. But you could put the same couch in 10 different rooms.” On the other hand, a painting or sculpture that has found its own ideal place can make a room come alive. “An artwork is what brings in your personality,” the homeowner adds. “It makes the house yours.” ○

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