

MODERN LUXURY

ASPEN

MAGAZINE

MIDWINTER/
SPRING 2014

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MODERN LUXURY ASPEN MAGAZINE P.O. BOX 4577, ASPEN, CO 81611

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ISSN 1549-4622

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Interiors

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ALL COLORADO

MODERN FAMILY

Where is mountain design currently headed? We checked in with top architects and designers in Aspen, Telluride and Vail to assess the landscape.

By Cindy Hirschfeld

Bye-bye antlers and the once-ubiquitous mountain-cabin look. High-country homes are being transformed into modern, sophisticated spaces that reflect the individuality of their owners. Whether it's through an artistic roofline, a fresh palette for furnishings or a flowing floor plan, home design has become reinvigorated and of the moment. But don't think trendy over timeless. These homes are being designed from the inside out for discerning residents who value family time, especially within the beauty of their mountain surroundings, and are willing to invest as necessary to create a house that will last for generations. Here's how they're going about it. CONTINUED...

MOUNTAIN MAJESTIC

This award-winning residence from Charles Cunniffe Architects melds form with function and appears sculptural from above, making it well-suited to its site directly under the Aspen Mountain gondola.





SLEEK AND STREAMLINED

From top: Angled and arched elements add a sculptural component to the contemporary roofline of this home designed by Poss Architecture + Planning; an easy transition between indoor and outdoor living particularly appeals in the mountains, such as in this space designed by Cottle Carr Yaw Architects.

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A Move Toward Modern

Inside and out, the recent shift to mountain-modern style—characterized by clean, streamlined elements softened by organic materials and natural textures—seems here to stay. “Everyone is asking for contemporary now. People are trending away from mountain rustic,” says Bill Poss of Aspen’s Poss Architecture + Planning. That contemporary style can take a number of forms, but many are anchored by a strong, custom statement that truly reflects a homeowner’s lifestyle.

Rather than request a derivative design, notes Aspen-based architect Charles Cunniffe, many of his clients want something authentically, uniquely theirs. “They want to get to the essence of a good house,” he says. That often means “transcending the gap between aesthetics and practical function. They want comfort and simplicity, and they want it to be real. There’s a movement away from fluff.”

Both architects note a desire to blend art and architecture. Poss says many clients want signature projects that are “almost like an art piece.” For example, instead of the flat roof often associated with modern design, homeowners want more sculptural shapes. “They’re willing to experiment,” says Poss.

Custom furniture is more important than ever too. “With angular glass and pieces oriented to take advantage of views, you’ve got to design furniture to go with the space,” Poss says.

Despite the move to modern, don’t expect to see homes more suited to the Hollywood Hills or Malibu beachfront popping up in mountain meadows. “There’s an appreciation of more progressive and more modern forms than mountain-contemporary was five or 10 years ago, while maintaining a strong tie to the site,” says Alex Klumb, a principal at Cottle Carr Yaw Architects in Basalt. “We’re not forgetting that we’re in the mountains,” he adds. In addition to structural design, this translates into colors or textiles influenced by the surrounding landscape, and materials like stone being used on both exteriors and interiors.

“People are more connected to the site they’re building on than they used to be,” agrees Cunniffe. “They’re more thoughtful about why they are choosing to be where they are.”

The mountain influence is also perfect for cozying up contemporary interiors. Says Richard Mullen, a principal of Aspen design firm Caroline-Edwards, “The trend still means a warm modern, using wood and natural stone, not the glass-and-concrete thing you do in Los Angeles.”

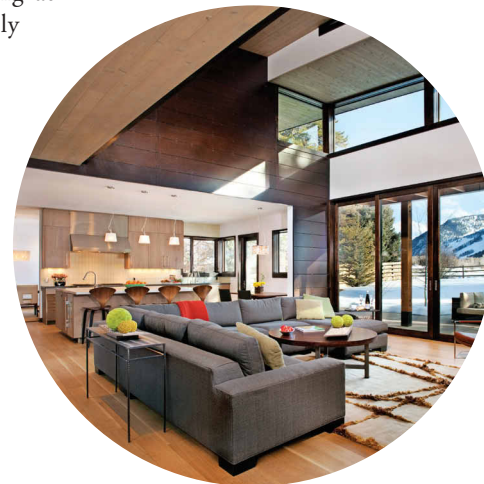
“Everyone is looking for a cleaner, tailored, more modern look, but not too city-slick. They’re keeping things pretty organic with wood and natural stone,” agrees Eddy Doumas, principal at Worth Interiors, with offices in Vail and Manhattan. His clients—whom he describes as young, hip and fashion-conscious—often ask for sleek furnishings from European design houses like Minotti. He points out that a traditional mountain look can still be done beautifully, citing Aspen’s Caribou Club as a prime example, but “buying log bunk beds is just not that cool.”

Shared Space

Open layouts that blend kitchen, living and dining areas have maintained their popularity, and mountain settings, especially, encourage a seamless flow from indoors to out. “One of the stronger trends that has continued is a focus on indoor-outdoor living,” says CCY’s Klumb. Floor-to-ceiling sliding or folding glass walls help blur the lines, as do outdoor heating elements like fireplaces or fire pits. Even baths are incorporating the outdoors, whether in atmosphere—a freestanding tub in front of a glass wall—or literally, with an outdoor shower (Klumb is currently working on a house with several of them).

One byproduct of the shift to open gathering spaces is the demise of the home theater, which is starting to go the way of pre-HDTVs. “It seems like people don’t want to lock themselves up in a dark room anymore,” says Doumas. Instead, entertainment centers are taking up residence in open living areas or family rooms.

“People still like the idea of being at home, but they want to be in a family setting that happens to have a great AV system,” comments Mullen. Today’s simpler interfaces also help. Instead of extensive electronics and projection TVs, an iPad, a large flat-screen and some audiophile speakers can now rival the local multiplex—and there’s no need for a separate room to stash all the equipment. CONTINUED...



POSS EXTERIOR PHOTO BY DAVID O. MARIOW; COTTLE CARR YAW INTERIOR PHOTO BY BRENT MOSS

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Shades of Gray... and More

Whether it's through pops of color or a new take on classic wallpaper, mountain interiors are livening up. "Our clients are definitely going away from the traditional mountain home and choosing decor that is more up-to-date and fresh," says Victoria Crawford, founder of Telluride's Tweed Interiors. For one, the palette has shifted from the mountain-cabin standards of burgundy, camel and hunter green to brighter hues like orange or peacock blue.

"People don't seem to be as afraid of color as when we started seven years ago," says Robyn Shaw, Crawford's partner at Tweed. "We try to add it in to give each project some life." That could range from a piece of furniture in colored leather, which Shaw says is making a comeback, to an African Bamileke table that the designers have spray-painted in high-gloss red or even navy.

Doumas notes that even neutral foundation palettes have shifted, with taupes and grays now serving as backdrops. "It's surprising how much gray we're using these days, colors you wouldn't typically associate with the mountains," he comments. In addition, he says, orange and purple in all shades have become popular. "Orange started as an accent, and all of a sudden you're seeing it everywhere, not just in a pillow." Bright colors are showing up in furniture pieces like upholstered chairs.

Another comeback element: wallpaper. "People are excited about it," says Crawford. "It's whimsical and fun."

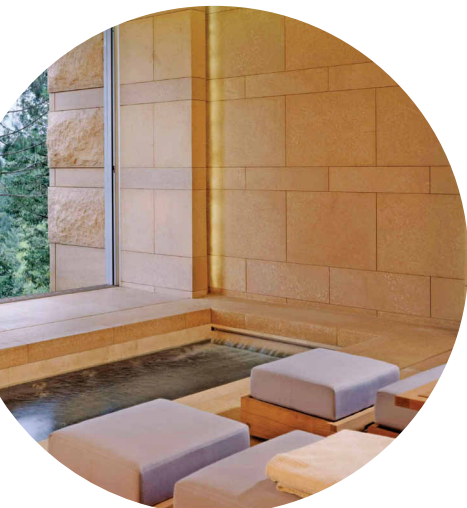
"We are doing so much wallcovering," concurs Doumas. "People are tired of hand-troweled plaster walls with rounded corners." Whether it's traditional wallpaper, grass cloth, paper-backed linens or silks, Doumas says he's using it within an entire living space, not just in a powder room or on an accent wall: "It brings in the warmth and texture of plaster, but it's something different." In addition to wallcoverings from Phillip Jeffries, Doumas' go-to source, he's been using some stunning hand-painted and hand-embroidered silk-on-paper designs from UK-based Fromental (their Travertine pattern is a beauty) to add some dimension to walls.

Family Over Flipping

Homeowners are experiencing an attitude shift toward buying and building, say architects. Rather than focusing on resale, they're thinking long term, often planning to pass on a home to their children.

"Ten to 15 years ago, people were building more for the moment or to flip for profit," says Cunniffe. "But, now, they're building not just for themselves, but for the people who will inherit their home."

The multigeneration approach affects layout and design, too.



NEUTRAL TERRITORY

From top: Gray is becoming a popular neutral, as shown in this recently completed Four Seasons Vail private residence designed by Worth Interiors; An indoor lap pool appears nestled in the trees, as the lines between indoors and outdoors are increasingly blurred in this home by Poss Architecture + Planning.



For instance, Poss has recently worked on several projects that he terms "legacy ranches," consisting of several buildings on a large piece of property that function as a family compound.

Quality Time

Within the move to functional, modern design that updates the mountain aesthetic, homeowners are insisting on premium construction. "Almost everybody is asking for better building quality," says Poss. That quality also extends to a home's green cred, with energy-conserving windows and more efficient mechanical systems getting the nod.

Along those lines, smart home systems are becoming simpler to operate, too. "Before, you almost needed an electrical engineering degree to run them, but now almost anyone can do it," says Mullen. That means you can do anything from vary lighting power as needed to control heating from thousands of miles away.

Overall, notes Cunniffe, it's a particularly rewarding time to be an architect. "More value is placed on doing things well. Great architecture is valued more than it was 10 years ago, and extraordinary architecture is valued even more." Whether we're building our own home, or enjoying someone else's, that's good news for us all. ▣