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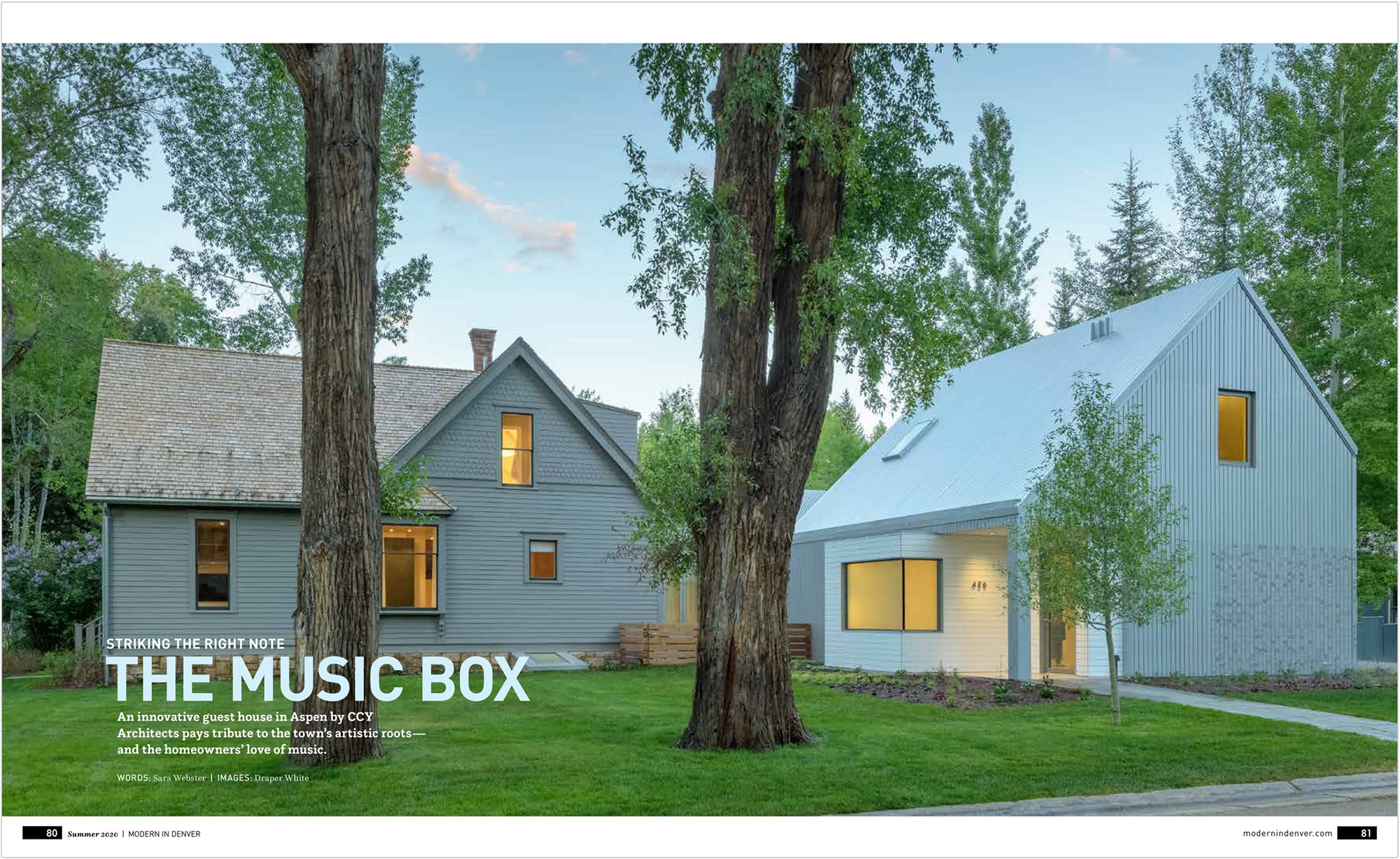
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STRIKING THE RIGHT NOTE

THE MUSIC BOX

An innovative guest house in Aspen by CCY Architects pays tribute to the town's artistic roots—and the homeowners' love of music.

WORDS: Sara Webster | IMAGES: Draper White

THE INGENUOUS RENOVATION OF AN ASPEN VICTORIAN AND ITS NEW GUEST HOUSE IS AS FINELY TUNED AS A STEINWAY GRAND AND AS CAREFULLY COMPOSED AS THE PIECE BY CHOPIN THAT SERVES AS ONE OF ITS INSPIRATIONS.

When a couple from Highland Park, Texas bought the West End property, it included an 1880s Victorian house, and its duplex addition. Both needed an update, but the process of integrating the airy, light-filled, modern style they wanted while keeping within the Historic Preservation Commission's (HPC) guidelines was far more challenging than they imagined. "We were really naïve; we didn't realize what we were getting into," say the new homeowners.

So they turned to CCY Architects, an award-winning Basalt-based firm known for its high-end design that respects place. "We really do work together—we don't have private offices in our firm. It's important to get everyone's input," says John Cottle, CCY principal, who oversaw the project, working with CCY project architect John Schenck and Evan Barrett, architect and project manager.

The goal for both CCY and the clients was to take the Victorian and addition and create two distinct, updated structures that maintained the historic integrity and fit the scale and texture of the town's West End, known for its home preservations. They wanted to make the guest house a slightly smaller version of the Victorian, both in deference to the historic nature and to establish unity on the lot. Inside both structures, the clients wanted bright, sun-filled environments—but they also wanted to accommodate their love of music in the guest house by creating an airy recital space that engaged with the outdoors.

Music is important to the owners. In fact, it was during their annual visits to the Aspen Music Festival that they fell in love with the town. "Aspen was intriguing to us and attractive on a number of levels: on a personal level, on an intellectual level, and also a creative level," says the owners.

The main house has classic, gorgeous bones that served as the North Star for the guest house, dubbed "The Music Box." The challenge was the limited space. At 1,600 square feet, there wasn't much room to elaborate into a multifunctional design. The solution was to scale down and make the structure's exterior appear traditional in form. "We wanted to honor the site and the history of the place, and tried to find a number of ways to do that," Cottle says.

The build has a below-grade program that allows the tight space to live bigger without overwhelming the lot or interfering with the neighborhood scale. Above grade, to reference the original Victorian and create cohesion with the guest house, CCY included a gable roof and brought down the eaves. The result is something "like an iceberg," with most of the living area below grade, while the space at elevation is clean and airy.

The Music Box had to accommodate many requirements, but primarily this was a musical refuge meant to weave into the cultural fabric of the West End. First and foremost, the architects needed to consider the listening experience. As Cottle says, "It wouldn't be much of a music box if the music didn't sound very good." To that end, the ceiling is acoustical plaster overlaying Acousti-Mat, which dampens reverberation time. By the staircase, a warm oak wall is detailed with vertical kerf cuts that give a textured appearance like



Aspen Historical Society, Reid Collection

Aspen's West End maintains its beauty through historic preservation guidelines. Working with the codes, CCY created a guest house come recital space that both pays deference to the 1880s style while integrating modern design. The vintage image was taken in 1961.



The build has a below-grade program that allows the tight space to live bigger without overwhelming the lot or interfering with the neighborhood scale.



1 VICTORIAN
2 MUSIC BOX
3 COURTYARD
4 GARAGE W/AUTO LIFT

corduroy, further regulating the space's acoustical qualities.

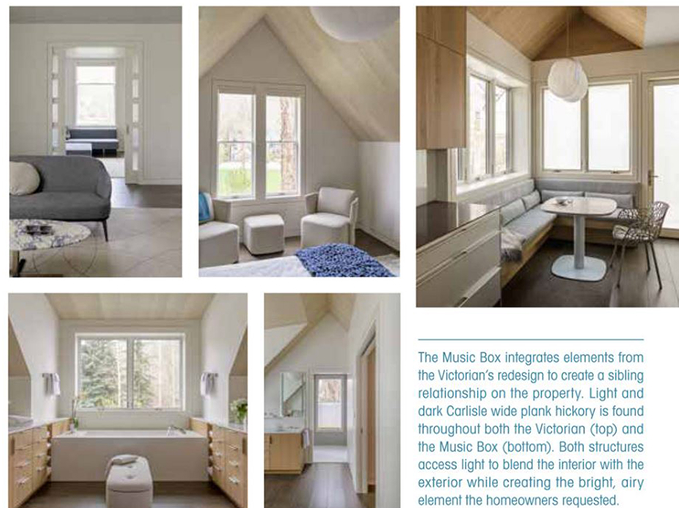
The musical experience extends outside. Pivot doors open up to an outdoor living space and courtyard that can serve as a second recital space so music can be enjoyed during a patio party or even from inside the main house when the windows are open.

For exterior continuity, the Victorian's horizontal siding influences the Music Box's vertical siding. When restoring the Victorian, CCY restored and reused most of the siding, among other materials like windows and bricks, which accommodated the HPC's wishes that the rebuild include as many original materials as possible. To keep the structures united, each has four-inch boards, but the siding on the Music Box is a Galvalume aluminum metal bent to the same texture and scale as the Victorian's.

The coda to the project is truly musical: An alley runs beside the Music Box, with a neighbor's house just on the other side, creating a privacy concern. To complicate matters, that wall is a west-facing source of afternoon light, and in the arid mountains, the late-day sun is harsh.

So CCY got creative, integrating a metal scrim with strategically drilled holes to provide privacy and let in gentle sunlight. For the scrim's motif, they found inspiration in the concept of a player piano; when a rolled-up scroll of perforated sheet music on the piano unravels, air passes through the holes and plays the notes, free of human interaction.

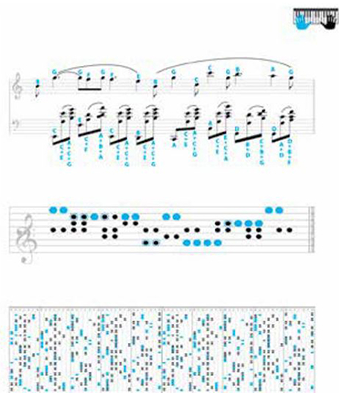
CCY created space by working below grade. Because the original build was designated as a duplex in existing codes, below-grade, a wall joins the Victorian with the Music Box to uphold guidelines. There is no connection between the buildings, however. A garage was also built on the lot, with an extra carport that lowers into the ground.



The Music Box integrates elements from the Victorian's redesign to create a sibling relationship on the property. Light and dark Carlisle wide plank hickory is found throughout both the Victorian (top) and the Music Box (bottom). Both structures access light to blend the interior with the exterior while creating the bright, airy element the homeowners requested.



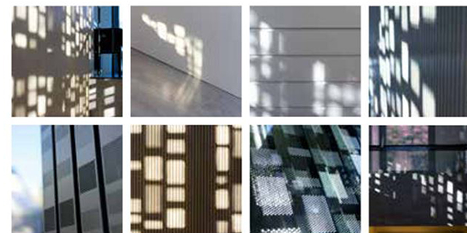
The owner chose the scrim's score: Chopin's Nocturne in E-Flat Major, Op. 9, No. 2. "Of course, it's not really about the scrim," says Cottle. "It's about what happens inside of it. It's about the light quality, and how it makes the music real, and in an unexpected way."



CCY replicated the scroll's perforated note concept for the scrim, but to apply the score to the facade, each musical element was reinterpreted by a new variable. Most importantly, the round notes are represented by squares that vary in size according to note length. To control light, each square note contains tiny holes drilled into the metal. The scrim's score is one of the owners' favorite pieces: Chopin's Nocturne in E-Flat Major, Op. 9, No. 2. "Of course, it's not really about the scrim," says Cottle. "It's about what happens inside of it. It's about the light quality, and how it makes the music real, and in an unexpected way."

In daylight, the sun filters through the scrim, so notes dance across the walls as the sun lowers in the sky. A perforated metal staircase (fabricated by Living Design Studio) winds beside the scrim and ascends to a bedroom,

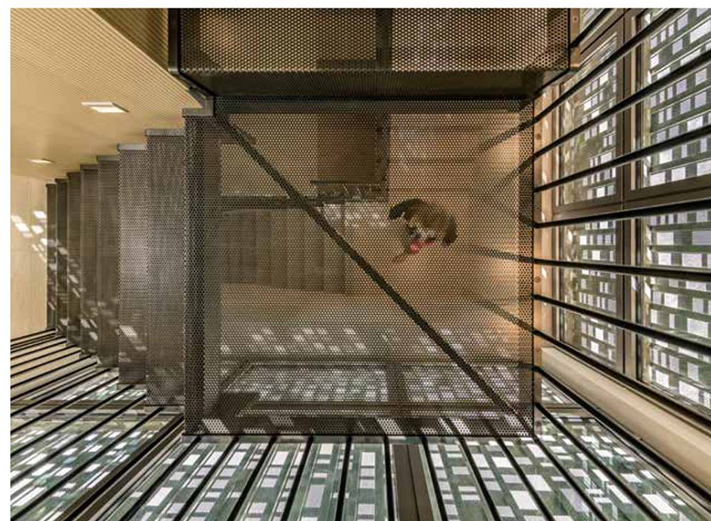
A new nomenclature uses concepts from a player piano. In this score, the bass and treble clefs merge into one staff. Each note's hole size signals pitch and the number of holes inside a square indicate the note's duration.



Above images: Lena Nicholson



A dance of light flickers on the walls with the midday sun. Notes shift with the sun to add a magical element and create movement. The light floods down the stairs to add natural sunshine to a subgrade level.





PROJECT CREDITS

ARCHITECTURE

CCY Architects

INTERIORS

Cheryl Troxel

GENERAL CONTRACTOR

Koru Construction Limited

STRUCTURAL ENGINEERS

KL&A

CIVIL ENGINEER

Roaring Fork Engineering

LIGHTING CONSULTANT

Scott Oldner Lighting & David Electric

KITCHENS

bulthaup

LANDSCAPE

BlueGreen Landscape Architects

STAIRCASE CRAFTSMEN

Living Design Studios - Metalsmiths



OPPOSITE: Pivot doors open to a courtyard patio to blur the boundaries between the outdoors and interior. When open, music flows to the courtyard and can be heard inside the Victorian just on the other side of the patio. A small seating bleacher is perfect for summertime music performances.

and descends subgrade to three more bedrooms. Because the stairs are translucent, the sun's rays wash down to the lower level to provide natural light in an area normally inaccessible. The Victorian has the same stairs, which also allow light to shine below grade, while keeping the sibling relationship between the buildings intact.

But something else happens, too. At night, when the sun sets and the notes

no longer shine inside the Music Box, the house lights up. Yellow lamplight filters through the scrim, so the notes glow to the outside.

The property is truly a magical, musical respite. "It's so harmonically tuned," says the owners. "It's a masterpiece." ■