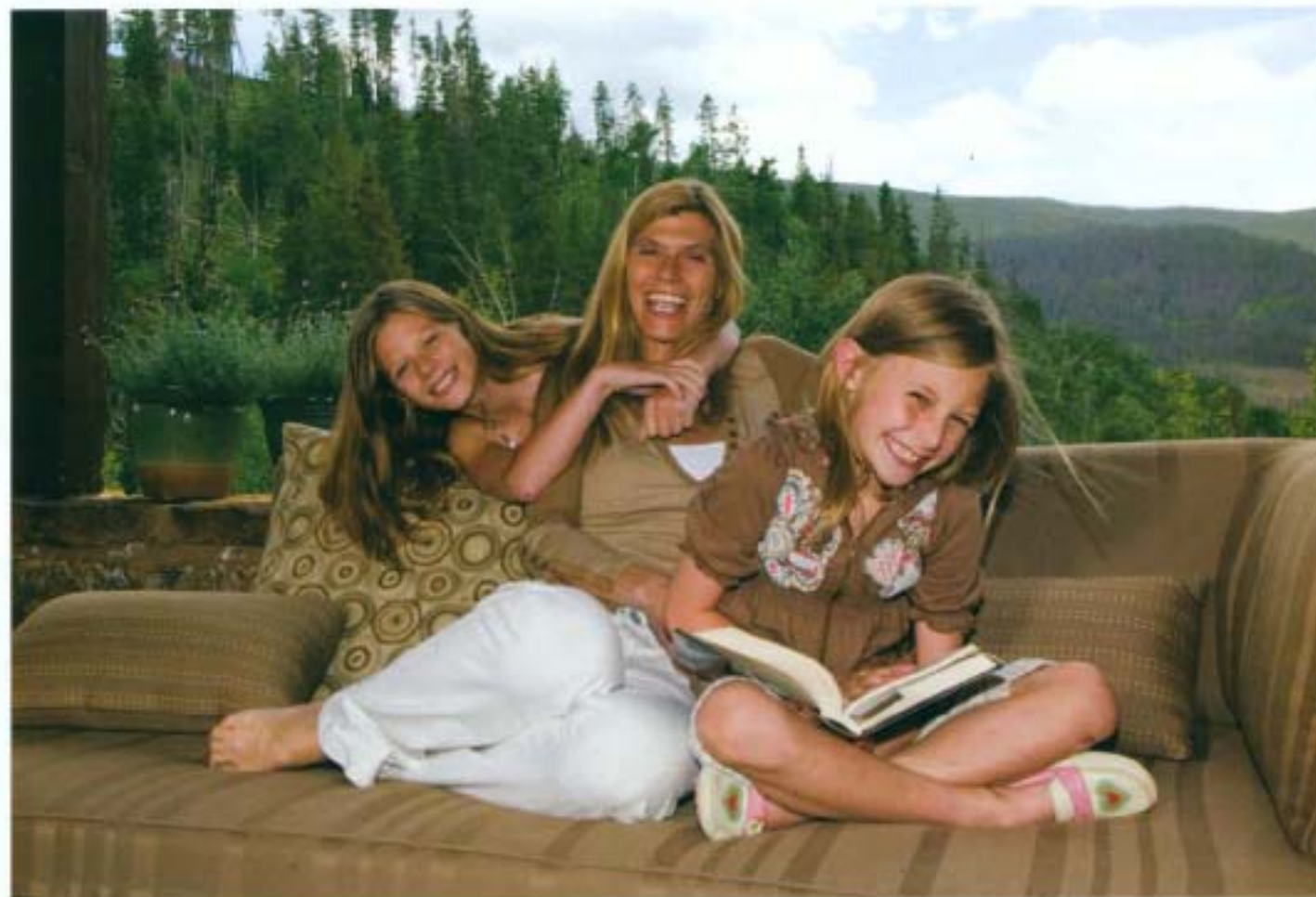


MOUNTAIN CONTEMPORANEOUS

HOME DESIGN IN VAIL TURNS THE CORNER
WHERE URBAN LOOK MEETS MOUNTAIN FEEL

BY STEPHEN LLOYD WOOD
PHOTOGRAPHY BY BILLY DORAN



Claudine Brandt enjoys time outside on back patio of her contemporary home in Vail's Buffehr Creek neighborhood, along with her daughters Amreek, 11, and Maxima, 8.

They say nothing conveys a community's identity better than its architecture, particularly that of its homes. In that case, Vail — known for its world-class recreation, state-of-the-art resort facilities, open-minded spirit and fanciful flair — long has been suffering an identity crisis.

While discriminating buyers of new high-end, luxury homes in some other resort towns, such as Aspen and Telluride, have been driving a trend toward more modern design inspired by the surrounding mountain landscape, home design in Vail, considered to be a relatively progressive place, has seemed stuck in a rut. The result? Most newly constructed homes here — even veritable palaces worth many millions of dollars — tend to resemble the same ol' mountain cabin or lodge, albeit on a grand scale.

That's changing fast, however, as a new look the experts call "mountain contemporary," an increasingly popular blend of bold, modern lines, shapes and finishes with the traditional colors, textures and materials found here in the mountains, begins to take hold.

"I believe Vail is ready for the next wave," says Claudine Brandt, who came to Vail from Chicago, where she and her family owned a "very contemporary" loft apartment, looking for a home that offered a similar look, yet blended warmly with the

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— Claudine Brandt



alpine environment. "We wanted to combine the look of our loft with our love for the mountains. There was nothing like this on the market, so we had to build our own."

Asymmetric, yet natural

High above town in the secluded Buffeloh Creek Valley neighborhood on a lofty, south-facing property steps from BLM-owned land populated by miles of aspen and pine forests, Brandt's six-bedroom, seven-bathroom, nearly 6,000-square-foot residence — designed by Basalt-based CCY Architects and completed in 2005 — is one of the first high-end-luxury, single-family homes in Vail designed, constructed and decorated in true mountain contemporary spirit. The open floor plan offers a main living area that integrates living room, dining room and kitchen into one modern, state-of-the-art space dominated by an enormous array of windows offering unobstructed views of Vail Mountain.

Walls, ceilings and floors meet at asymmetrical yet seemingly natural angles. The home's various wings are of distinct geometric



A native of Holland, Brandt has a flair for the modern in her design choices, which she calls "minimalistic."



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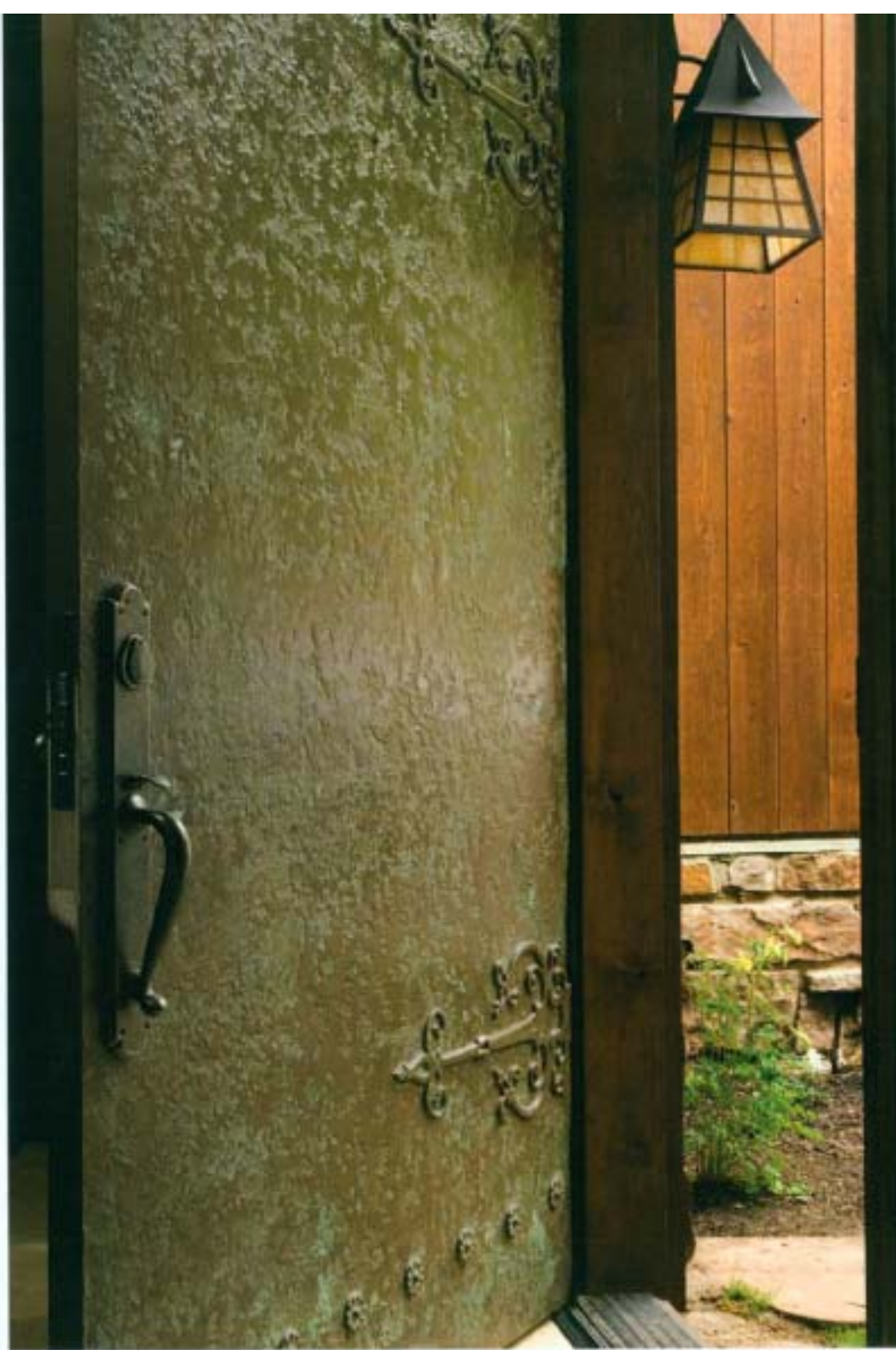
— Claudine Brandt

shapes, set into the landscape with different aspects to take advantage of natural light and views. Exposed structural supports, as well as the floating main staircase, walkway and railings, are of welded steel; vast parts of the roof are of rusted, corrugated steel; kitchen counters are of the one-piece, stainless steel variety. Bathrooms are encased in glass tile, with custom-designed, 3-inch-thick concrete counters.

'Minimalistic'

"We didn't use any stucco, and there's zero carpet. It's the cleanest look, and it's what I grew up with," says Brandt, a native of Holland, who furnished the home contemporaneously, as well, including living room furniture by Minotti, a dining-room set by Holly Hunt

The clean, modern, "minimalistic" lines extend to the master bath, encased in glass tile and custom concrete counters.



This 300-pound, hammered copper door at the front entrance is a prime example of the traditional materials and textures found at Rollie Kjesbo's mountain contemporary home in East Vail.

and a tub by Phillippe Starck in the master bath. Yet, despite finishes some people may see as stark — she calls it “minimalistic” — this home is inviting, even cozy. No space is overwhelming; the colors and textures are familiar and blend with the surroundings; the outdoor living spaces are appropriately sheltered, comfortable and inviting. Basically, this modern place in the mountains just feels good. “We bought the lot in the fall, and that had a lot to do with our early design decisions. We played with the elements of Colorado: copper, stone, the colors of the aspens, the blue sky,” says Brandt, a Realtor

who shares the place with her daughters Aimeé, 11, and Maxime, 8. “I like the contemporary look, but it has to feel warm. That’s what mountain contemporary is all about. This place, though contemporary in design, complements the mountains. It belongs here.”

Not ‘totally dated’

Like Brandt, Rollie Kjesbo and his wife, Jeanne Nedrelow, both of Norwegian descent, share an affinity for contemporary home design, owning an “extremely modern” place in Denver, in addition to their new home on the south bank of Gore Creek in East Vail

Kjesbo's master bedroom combines what he calls “ultra-sleek” lines with the colors and textures of the mountains.



designed by Vail-based K.H. Webb Architects, one of the more contemporary-minded firms in the Vail Valley. Longtime Vail residents, having operating Nedbo Construction in Vail since 1982, they wanted to build a home for themselves that took advantage of the latest contemporary designs — but wouldn’t look “totally dated” a few years down the road.

Their new five-bedroom, six-bath residence is of modest contemporary design — new-look roof lines, modern window shapes and an open floor plan, for example — but it’s finished in traditional materials and textures. For example: cedar siding and roof shingles; wide-plank floors of hand-scraped ash; American clay plaster walls; limestone tile flooring, leathered granite countertops and alder cabinets in the kitchen; and a 300-pound front door made of hammered copper.

“You won’t find us going extremely modern here, using only blacks, whites and pastels, stainless steel and glass. That just doesn’t belong here,” says Kjesbo. “You can tell what year some of the more contemporary homes around here were built. Blending those ultra-sleek and modern ideas is not easy, and a lot of times it just looks out of place here.”

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“This is a nice contrast. It may be super unique for Vail, but it fits here.”

— Todd Kalstrom



A one-piece, curved metal roof is just one of the many distinctly modern, high-tech features of the Kalstrom residence in West Vail.

‘A nice contrast’

At the other end of Gore Creek, near its confluence with the little-known Willow Creek in West Vail, is the brand new, part-time residence of the Kalstrom family, with a new-look, one-piece, curved metal roof supported by high-tech, curved beams of wood and steel, an iPod-integrated home electronics system, a state-of-the-art kitchen, floating steel staircase and other features straight out of “The Jetsons.” The architect, Vail’s Hans Berglund, carefully devised an open floor plan that projects attention through generous banks of windows to the riparian environment outside, where Gore Creek itself is the dominant feature.

“We’ve had people knock on the door and ask to see the place,” says Pam Kalstrom. “They just love the design.”

The Kalstroms also have what they describe as a “very contemporary” home in Denver, with white walls, stainless steel finishes and other features that look entails. But when they come to their four-bedroom, five-bath mountain retreat, they want to enjoy details associated with the surroundings, such as a two-story stone fireplace in the living room, earth-tone granite slab counters in the kitchen and cherry wood floors throughout.

“I’m not a big fan of the ‘mountain chalet’ — which I think has been overdone here — nor the word ‘contemporary.’ I prefer ‘modern,’” says Todd Kalstrom, the son of an architect, who enjoys fishing the creek’s gold medal waters right out the back door. “Whatever. This is a nice contrast. It may be super unique for Vail, but it fits here.”

‘The Best of Both Worlds’

While just a handful of completed homes in Vail can be described in design vernacular as “mountain contemporary” — a blend of urban modern with mountain traditional — a veritable slew of homes incorporating the style are in the design phase or well on their way to completion.

Jamie Farquhar of Prudential Colorado Properties, broker for the Willow Creek residences in West Vail, is listing a similar project called SolVida. The five-bedroom, six-bath home is one of three new mountain contemporary homes under construction high above Vail on Potato Patch Drive.

“SolVida will be the new, leading edge of mountain contemporary,” says Farquhar. “When you’re up there, it’s obvious this one’s different than anything else.”

Farquhar has become an authority of sorts on what he calls a “movement” toward the new design theme in Vail and throughout the Vail Valley. He says it’s been in the works for a few years, as evidenced now by giant condominium projects like the Solaris Residences in Vail Village, schools like Vail Christian Academy and restaurants like Spago at Bachelor Gulch and the Golden Eagle Inn in Beaver Creek Village. There’s a new breed of homebuyers coming to Vail, he says — urban dwellers who are most comfortable with the look of a contemporary home in the big city and want “the best of both worlds” when they come to the mountains.

“Obviously there’s a draw,” Farquhar says. “I’ve had a dozen or so open houses at Willow Creek, and some people say it’s just too contemporary for them. But for others, it’s exactly right. There seems to be a growing pool of people looking for something more modern.”

Exposed elements

Architect Hans Berglund, who designed the Willow Creek residences, says new, more open-minded design themes allow him to be more creative, innovative and efficient.

“I love being able to use exposed structural elements, like steel beams and timbers, instead of doing a lot of work to hide them,” he says. “We may even design something differently knowing those elements are going to be seen.”

There’s not only been more demand the past few years for homes of modern design, Berglund says, but the avenues toward change have opened, paving the way for contemporary forms to pass through what for many years was a rather conservative-minded, governmental approval process.

“It’s taken awhile for many of the architectural firms here, and their clients, to get comfortable with the mountain contemporary look. But as people get more exposure to it, they see it as fresh, comfortable and cozy,” says Berglund, who came to Vail from Aspen more than a decade ago. “The town of Vail’s design review board used to have a different vision, but they’re now more open-minded.”

One of Berglund’s latest projects is a very “lofty-looking” residence under construction on Vail’s Fairway Drive. The home is composed of a series of curved roofs supported by stone walls and an exposed steel and timber frame. Banks of steel-framed windows will provide expansive views of the Vail Golf Course.

‘Loosening the grips’

Fellow architect Kyle Webb designed another mountain contemporary project now being built on Forest Road; and colleague Michael Suman of Suman Architects has at least two similar projects in the works, one on Beaver Dam Road, the other in East Vail, on Black Gore Drive.

Suman agrees with Berglund, saying the town’s design and review board — perhaps following the lead of others in nearby gated communities like Mountain Star and the Cordillera Valley Club — has become more open to new ideas, “loosening the grips” on how guidelines are interpreted.

“It’s now more about keeping the intent of the guidelines without stifling innovation. It doesn’t change the palette of materials, but it does open up ways for them to be utilized,” says Suman, who’s been designing homes in Vail for 11 years. “It was frustrating when I first came here, with guidelines that were imposed in a hard-fisted way. Now, there’s an excitement of place here in which architecture plays an important role.”

— Stephen Lloyd Wood

