

a fresh take

❖ ON TRADITIONAL ❖

The Big EZ Lodge stands as an example of the new American rustic style

WRITTEN BY CHASE REYNOLDS EWALD ♦ PHOTOGRAPHY BY AUDREY HALL



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 important of all, plenty of light. In short, they want a fresh take on traditional.

This can be difficult to achieve, yet 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 of such homes are driven by clients who put not only their passion but their time into the project. Personal history plays an important role too. As the saying goes, the more you give, the more you get.

CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: 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. • The guest barn entry features white-washed walls, reclaimed oak flooring and custom interior doors. • A favorite place for family meals and après ski tapas, the cozy east-facing breakfast nook is furnished with a custom tin-topped table, handcrafted light fixture and whimsical Ralph Lauren upholstery. • A fire glows in the hearth of the screen porch, which overlooks a rambling brook and pond just off the kitchen. Vintage and new hickory furniture provide comfortable seating for evening cocktails.

ARCHITECTURE
Miller Architects

CONSTRUCTION
On Site Management

INTERIORS
Laura Fedro Interiors



On the northwestern edge of the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem, an outdoors-oriented husband and wife made their dream a reality with the help of Bozeman-based Miller Architects and interior designer Laura Fedro. It was much more than a ski house for this Connecticut family; they were emotionally invested in the project due to a long personal history in the area.

Joe Roodell, project manager for Miller Architects explains, “The wife had been coming to Big Sky from a young age. Her family had been Elkhorn Ranch guests since 1969 [and she had worked there]. 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, working as an outfitter. 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.



out the process. “When they first came to me, they wanted a round-log home,” recalls Miller, “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 gave the home an historic sense with the site and 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 the architect designed a kitchen with open rafters and a dormer above to flood the space with light. “We really had to draw direct light from



LEFT: The kitchen is bathed in natural light, even on a cloudy day. Custom tiles adorn the backsplash while the handbuilt island features a walnut top and the owner’s favorite blue color on its face. **BELOW:** A Corbin bronze chandelier centers the dining area, while a Ted Waddell painting hangs on the hand-finished plaster wall.



“They’re looking toward Ramshorn Peak and the Gallatin Range. They’re not focused on Lone Peak, like many others in the Big Sky area. 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 to observe elk and other wildlife. They’ve been coming to Montana for years and years and wanted to be focused on places that were meaningful to them.”

The design process involved its own sense of discovery. Site visits to other Miller homes were key, explains Roodell. “It’s always helpful in getting a feel for what the clients are responding to volumetrically.” By the end of the process they had decided on a 6,000-square-foot three-bedroom house with a guest barn. “The guest barn gives them the opportunity for other people to visit on their own without having to open up the main house,” Candace Miller, principal architect, explains.

Stylistically, their vision evolved through-

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





CLOCKWISE FROM 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. • A live-edged rustic headboard — made by Brandner Design from an old-growth walnut tree from New York's Central Park — stands out against light walls and linens in the master bedroom. • Exposed beams, full length windows and easy access to a deck transform this bedroom into a cabin-like aerie that makes the most of indoor-outdoor living.



“What’s great about this design is that it lends itself to that sense of discovery.” — JOE ROODELL, PROJECT MANAGER, MILLER ARCHITECTS

dormers above because of the surrounding roofs extending over the screened porch on the north and east sides,” Miller explains.

Interior designer Laura Fedro says that with this engaged and thoughtful 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 recreate a turn-of-the-century cabin, but she wanted the comfort, the 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. “They wanted to be able to walk up to the main entry and

A back porch makes the most of indoor outdoor living in the best rustic tradition.



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see into the space that then looks out to the landscape,” says Miller. “It gives a sense of transcending space.”

The structure features a generous but not over-scaled living room, dining area and kitchen; a serene master bedroom; a six-bed bunkroom designed around a 1940s

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

Cowboy High Style dresser; a cozy sitting room tucked behind the living room fireplace; and a killer mudroom with plenty of room for skis, snow-

shoes and fishing gear. Ample outdoor spaces include a screened porch with dining table and fireplace, 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 result is a “generational home,” according to designer Laura Fedro. “The intention was for the house to be used and loved. We chose good pieces, but nothing you can’t put your feet on. 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 space 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.”

EDITOR’S NOTE: *The Big EZ lodge is an excerpt from the forthcoming book, American Rustic to be published by Gibbs-Smith later this year.*

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A photograph of a bathroom with a stone wall, a large window, and a freestanding bathtub. The room has a rustic feel with wooden beams and a stone wall.

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ARCHITECTURE
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Jonathan Foote, AIA
On Site Management
Elizabeth Robb Interior Design

Just out the back door, seating around the fire pit looks back toward the house made of reclaimed barnwood, stacked Harlowton stone and metal. A small guest house creates a compound on the property, inspired by a traditional homestead configuration.



The kitchen window frames a view of the Shields Valley and the Crazy Mountains like a landscape painting. Interior designer Elizabeth Robb cultivated small pops of color to accent an otherwise simple palette of materials, as in the ceramic tile for the kitchen backsplash.

WHEN IT COMES TO ARCHITECTURAL design, Jonathan Foote is fond of saying, "Walk softly on the land." It's a philosophy he integrated into a gem of a house in Montana's Shields Valley, where the setting took priority over size. At just 2,400 square feet, plus a garage and guesthouse, the retreat is small compared to so many other dwellings in the region.

"Without trying to be critical of anyone else," said the homeowner, "My husband and I didn't want to build a big monument to ourselves."

The couple wanted a home that would allow them to fish and spend time with family, friends and their beloved dogs. It would be a summer place, where more of the day was spent outdoors than in. They wanted a home that was comfortable, but not consuming.



ABOVE: In the main living area a painting by Matt Flint hangs over the mantel and a vaulted ceiling lends an expansive air to the space. Low maintenance concrete floors span the entire house. The windows flanking the Harlowton stone fireplace look to the Shields River and the view that inspired the building site from architect Jonathan Foote's first visit. **LEFT:** Adding a touch of elegance with upholstered dining chairs and a French antique chandelier, the dining area is defined by a cozy lower ceiling, area rug and drapes.





“I sat on the site and listened to how the harmony of sounds came together on the landscape — the river, the wind in the trees — I told the owners that we could create a beautiful home here,” said Foote.

To do that, the architect turned to Todd Smith, principal of On Site Management and Elizabeth Robb Interior Design, both based in Bozeman. The team met with the couple to craft a plan to build a unique custom home with an uncomplicated palette of stone, reclaimed wood and concrete on a limited budget.

Both Foote and OSM have built more dramatic structures in their tenure. The design-build team has



In the master bedroom a dramatic bison photograph by Nancy Etheridge printed on canvas makes a statement in a simple space. The colorful bench is from Round Top Antiques Fair in Texas.

As a result, it sits unobtrusively in a field next to the river, with a scale so appropriate to its surroundings, that the home seems ageless.

engineered homes that required structural reinforcement on the side of a mountain above 8,000 feet. They’ve helicoptered building supplies to remote locations and hauled handpicked stones into the backcountry. They claim mountain mansions and intricate historic restorations in their portfolios, but in this case the greatest challenge was to achieve beauty without the frills.

“The owners wanted materials that were honest and resilient,” said Todd Smith.

This meant weaving elements of Harlowton stone, red reclaimed barnwood, hand-hewn timber accents and a concrete floor under the span of a standing seam metal roof.

Inside, the priority was to allow the landscape to remain the focal point.

“The simplicity of the house makes it seem attainable and comfortable,” noted interior designer, Elizabeth



“[The husband] was thinking about place. [The wife] was thinking about the house,” recalled Foote with a smile, “She said, ‘We want it to be perfect.’”

Although Jon Foote’s name is synonymous with the movement that turned rustic, reclaimed and repurposed materials into an architectural style of the American West 40 years ago, the Texas couple came upon the architect’s work by accident. They’d been visiting Montana for 20 years and were nonchalantly looking for fly fishing property in the southwestern part of the state when one real estate listing touted riverfront cabins designed by Jonathan Foote. Intrigued, the couple contacted the architect and arranged to meet at a restaurant in Livingston. They hit it off and quickly found 30 acres on the Shields River where they envisioned a simple getaway.

“We asked for the house to be very simple, very low maintenance and not too big,” said the wife.

Visiting the site with the owners, Foote brought along a chair, which he moved from one place to another until he found the sweet spot where the home would be oriented. It faced the long meander of the river and the Crazy Mountains in the distance, a focal point that today is the view from the main living area in the house.

ABOVE: Maximizing comfort in a minimal space, the guest house is furnished with cozy seating. **RIGHT:** A sliding barn door echoes the agricultural roots of the Shields Valley in the entryway. The rustic antique bench and hooks were purchased by the owner at Round Top Antiques Fair in Texas.



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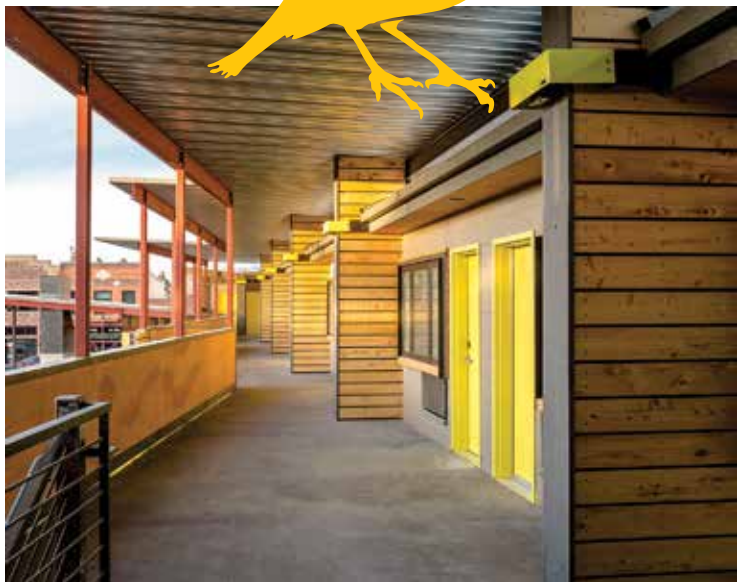
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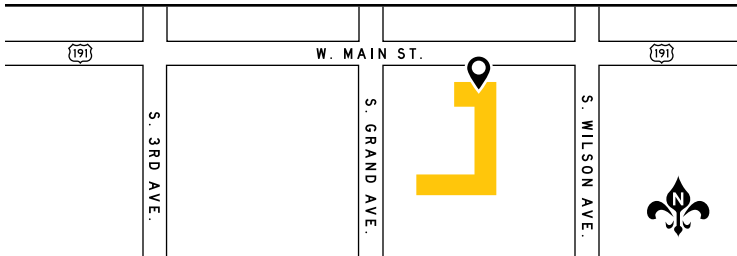
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Robb. “We chose furniture and finishes that would honor the simplicity.”

Since the house features a contemporary, open floor plan, Robb worked with the owners to choose area rugs to delineate living areas. They incorporated vintage and antique elements acquired from the wife’s travels in India and shopping trips at the notable Round Top Antiques Fair in Texas. Color pops from beautiful textiles in the drapes and accents throughout the home, but by design there aren’t any ruffles or fringe.

“Simple is the key word,” maintained the wife, “It’s a small house that has a really big feeling to it because it’s not too heavy, not too dark or cramped. Because of the vault of the ceiling and the windows that draw your eyes



to the view, we don’t need a lot of things on the walls, we just look out the windows.”

In the hands of an interior designer with an eye for simplicity, the experienced craftsmanship of OSM and the integrity of a conscientious architect, this home is exactly what the owners imagined.

LEFT: Extending the living space to the patio adds a sense of connection to the outdoor areas, where the Shields River is just steps from the house.
OPPOSITE: Clean lines in the rustic motif keep the small home feeling open and breezy. Area rugs add accents of color on the poured concrete floor throughout the house.



What the home lacks in grandeur it makes up for in character. Foote attributes this to the trust shared by the owners and the design-build team. As a result, it sits unobtrusively in a field next to the river, with a scale so appropriate to its surroundings, that the home seems ageless. The

green bottomland rolls out around the house, three mountain ranges encompass it and the river rambles passed in perfect balance.

“This house, to me, is not just about a building,” said Foote reflectively, “this house is about an idea of how to live.”



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