

BIG SKY JOURNAL HOME

Mountain Living and Architectural Design



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Above: In winter, Mirror Pond Lodge, nestled in the mountains, provides its residents winter sports and serene beauty from 7,000 feet. **Below:** View of the front entrance with a rustic exterior and custom rock and character wood taken from standing dead lodge pole pines.



Mirror Pond Lodge

A gathering place for friends and family
at Montana's Yellowstone Club

Written by Michele Corriel
Photography by Audrey Hall

Invoking a feeling of safety, of being nurtured and cared for, using a rustic cabin-in-the-woods influence infused with a touch of the Tibetan style mountain retreat. Hand-forged iron and heavy wood doors open to a space that is at once welcoming and tranquil. Impressive but simple, Mirror Pond Lodge stands as an integral part of the dramatic landscape, not separate from the surrounding wilderness but as an extension of it. The finely fit rugged fieldstone, embroidered with lichen, and the hand-hewn recycled logs reflect a sincere sensibility to the striking mountain terrain.



Clockwise from top: The stout log staircase unites the house, with large posts and cut lumber steps • The custom made lantern-like lighting throughout Mirror Pond Lodge establishes a sense of the outdoors, while enjoying the comforts of home • The large living/family area allows conversations to flow from the sitting area to the dining room to the kitchen, with views of Pioneer and Cedar Mountains • With easy access, the wine room opens out to the home theater and entertainment area on the ground floor • State of the art kitchen appliances incorporate the rustic style with a friendly cabin feeling.



Owner Chris Wright says the idea of residing in a Yellowstone Club home is to have a place where friends and family can gather.

"I have an extended family of 18 and my wife has 25, so we need a place that's fun and a place where everybody wants to go and hang out," Wright says. "We've done the Hawaii hotel thing, and that's fine, but we go our separate ways and only get together for meals. This way we can hike, bike, golf, ski, snowboard and in between activities we can just hang around and tease each other about stuff."

Unassuming, the 9,500 square-foot home situated on over

six secluded acres, offers astoundingly perfect views of Cedar Mountain as well as Pioneer Mountain — an almost touchable closeness to the place where the dark pines join the sky. Sitting in the living area, either basking in the warmth of one of four fieldstone fireplaces or perched on the cut-log window ledges with a cup of coffee or a glass of wine, the low-key leave-it-all-behind feeling permeates every corner. The living room branches out from the kitchen, which affords easy access to the dining room and outside patio with a built-in hearth. Inside or out, it's all about taking the time to enjoy the natural surroundings.



Wright and his wife, Liz, grew up in Colorado, climbing and skiing. It was on a trip to Glacier National Park that they both decided Montana was a place they wanted to build a home.

“But at that point we decided that a cabin you have to ski into wasn’t practical with two kids,” Wright says. “When I came up to look at property at the Yellowstone Club, I knew it was what we were looking for — I call it wilderness with infrastructure.”

His two sons, nine and 11, often leave after breakfast to ski for the morning, meeting up with their parents for lunch later on.

“There are not many places where you can do that and know your kids are going to be okay,” Wright says. “It’s

Above: The master suite bedroom overlooks a sweeping view of the sunrise, which can also be observed from the balcony. **Below:** Master bathroom with a luxuriously relaxing bathtub, a walk-in shower and a sauna all done in a country elegance.

“Our office is known for a few different things one of them is to build into the landscape, using natural topography so the house is integrated into the land,” Pearson says.

that kind of atmosphere — where they know everyone and everyone knows them — that keeps us here.”

Because the Wrights love the outdoors and because the Yellowstone Club embodies that feeling, the unfettered design of the bedrooms encourages people to get outside and enjoy all that Big Sky proffers.

“The bedrooms are for sleeping,” Wright says. “But the house is for spending time with the people we love in a gorgeous setting.”

Out back, a pond — which can be used for reflection or for jumping into — creates the ideal spot for a late evening summer barbeque.

Architect Larry Pearson, of Pearson Design Group in Bozeman, agrees that the Mirror Pond Lodge is really a family home.

“To me it’s a home that allows you take in the best of Montana, swimming and water for the summer and skiing

and amazing winter experiences,” he says. “I imagined entertaining friends and family very well in this house because it allows you to move between spaces, between social gathering points. The kitchen is integral to the living room. Cooking pancakes or grilling fish, it’s all part of the living area and all the rooms become one larger experience. A recreational ski home is about extended social adventures.”

Over the generous three-car garage with plenty of room for ski gear, and above the efficiently laid out guesthouse, is a tower with a 360-degree view. Designed to suggest a forest service fire tower, this extraordinary space opens itself up to become a meditative room for yoga or just a place to listen to the waterfall feeding the pond below. Expansive vistas allow a very private place to watch the sharp edges of the first frost, the settled crispness of winter, or a starlit dark sky unzip into a summer velveteen morning.

“Our office is known for a few different things one of



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Using these kinds of materials brings a history to it; a prior use carries along a sort of past life that, like an old friend, adds character and charm to an inanimate object.

them is to build into the landscape, using natural topography so the house is integrated into the land," Pearson says. "In doing that it's the reverse of cutting a pad and building a house. This lays into the landscape. We also have some amazing features. As you come up into the house you look through the breezeway and take in your own pond — one way we try to use the landscape."

The interior perspective also reflects the various aspects of the grounds. Each room feels different. Each window opens out to reveal a new facet of the stunning natural setting.

"This house, to me, illustrates that European, Austrian/Swiss experience, where a house not only needs to look good and meet our aesthetic sensibility but it needs to work in the harsh temperatures," Pearson says. "Even though our homes look authentic and historical, they represent modern comforts. Radiantly heated, super insulated, we've developed a number of assemblies that allow the house to represent

the best of current energy standards. What we want to do is experience the Rocky Mountain West, but we also want to be comfortable in it."

Using materials from regional quarries and sustainable logs in the design, Pearson worked with On Site Management, a construction company renown for its expertise with antique, rustic and reclaimed construction materials. In turn, working with this palette of weathered wood reflects the heart of Montana.

"For this project we used standing dead lodge pole stack clad over a standard stick frame to prevent the problem of shifting that typically happens with this size of house," recalls OSM project manager Todd Smith. "Other elements inside were reclaimed hemlock on the ceilings and walls, along with a lot of "character" wood for the posts and trusses."

Using these kinds of materials brings a history to it; a prior use carries along a sort of past life that, like an old

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friend, adds character and charm to an inanimate object.

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Two stone stanchions, like sentinels, two-stories high and 16-feet wide — one is the massive fireplace chimney and the other is the wall of the high tower — seem to be an anchor, a bastion of historical provenance.

“If a house has a timeline and we evoke the past and simpler times, we look at materials as a way to contribute to that, and good architecture makes it feel authentic,” Pearson says. “But I don’t want to forget about the people who put this together, some of the best crafts people I’ve ever worked with. It’s an honor to be able to create something like this, a legacy.”

The master wing is set a floor above the main level. There, the master bedroom, complete with a wood-burning fireplace and a master deck, tenders an intimate perspective of the landscape. Sunsets over the Pioneer Mountains warm the space with winter alpenglow or summer’s thundered color palette.

The uncut log banisters, with upright posts wider than a man’s hand, carry throughout the house, like a trail, from the ground level home theater and teenager hangout, up to the master wing. But if there’s also an elevator for the heavily laden, hidden behind a wood door that starts near the garage, stopping near the walk-in pantry and continuing on up to the top floor.

“It’s not often a home can also become a piece of art,” Pearson says. “Good architecture is simple and organized in a way that you continue to appreciate it over years. The summer and winter experience is so distinct. To me, it’s about bringing art into the family. The idea is to have different apertures and relationships to the outdoors and what this house tries to do is set up different views depending on where you are. Some are panoramic, and others, like those in the bedrooms, are more internal, more personal and private.”

Mirror Pond Lodge protects in the winter, fosters in the fall, renews in the spring and expands in summer. By definition, it’s a home that helps kindle the relationship to things loved and cherished. **H**

Michele Corriel is Big Sky Journal’s Artist of the West columnist. Her work is as varied as the life she’s led, from the rock/art scene in New York City to Rocky Mountain small town newspapers. The one constant in her work has been to learn from experiences and pass it on, in whatever form it avails itself. She has received a number of awards for her poetry and nonfiction over the last 20 years.

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