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Perspective: R. Brownell McGrew [1916 – 1994]

Architecture in the West: Alpine Elegance in Big Sky, Montana



alpine elegance

Drawn to world-class skiing, a Texas family builds a mountain modern château in Big Sky, Montana



When a Texas family stumbled upon a slopeside lot at the Yellowstone Club, a private residential club and ski area in Big Sky, Montana, they knew it was a keeper. Ideally situated for the ultimate ski-in-ski-out experience, it was the husband's dream to have a modern ski getaway to serve as a home base for family gatherings. The fact that they could be together, yet away from the crowds, meant that family time was even more impactful. But it was the mountainous backdrop that sealed the deal. "The breathtaking alpine setting and the raw beauty of this area of the world really made it stand out," the homeowner recalls. "And the access to world-class skiing without crowds or lift lines."

*Written by Corinne Gaffner Garcia
Photographed by Whitney Kamman*

ARCHITECTURE & INTERIORS | Stuart Silk Architects
CONSTRUCTION | Charter Construction

From top: A corner bay window in the master bathroom looks out to the Yellowstone Club ski area, and the mountain peaks beyond. The home's exterior includes weathered steel panels and board-formed concrete. The concrete was custom mixed to pick up the color of the indigenous soil. | A covered walkway, supported by concrete and steel columns, protects visitors from the elements as they approach the house.



When they decided to build, they called on Seattle-based architect Stuart Silk. Silk first met the family when he designed a remodel of their grand, historic, 10,000-plus-square-foot poured concrete home (built in 1910, it was one of the earliest uses of poured concrete on the West Coast) in Capitol Hill, a prominent Seattle neighborhood. Delighted with the results, they asked him to design their Montana ski home from scratch, challenging him to create something extraordinary in a mountain-modern style.

"We knew a few things going into it," Silk says. "We knew it was not going to be log, because [the homeowners] had an aversion to timber construction. We knew it would have a lot of glass, and we knew that they were interested in exploring the use of concrete. And, lastly, it was crucial to them that the house did not have an immense footprint."

One of the first major considerations for Silk was to site the home at the perfect elevation for primo access to skiing. Once that was determined, the design team gathered the program requirements, learning how many bedrooms and bathrooms were desired along with other amenities, such as the wine



room, bunk room, and ski room. "Then we figured out where it all needed to go, and we started working on concept sketches," Silk says.

The builders, Charter Construction, are also from Seattle and had worked with the homeowners and Silk on the past renovation. Their crew stayed in the area for the duration of the 3-year build-out. "Charter did an extraordinary job of delivering a near-flawless home in a challenging environment," the homeowner says.

The end result is an efficient, contemporary structure composed of concrete, steel, and glass in both the interiors and exteriors. "We wanted them to live with the architecture, not for it to just be a cladding on the outside, but to blend with the interiors," Silk says. "And because they didn't want a large-scale footprint, we had to maximize every square inch and couldn't have wasted space. There are virtually no hallways."

The structure is defined by two dominant slab-formed concrete walls. One runs the length of the house, from north to south, with two openings: one to a coat closet and powder room, and the other to the kitchen and dining room. Because the homeowners desired privacy from the north, Silk created a thick trapezoidal concrete wall, running east to west, that



From top: A heated plunge pool looks out to the mountain views. Stuart Silk Interiors designed the poured-concrete outdoor furniture. | The home sits near a Yellowstone Club ski trail, allowing for ski-in-ski-out convenience for the homeowners and their guests.

alpine elegance

funnels into a long window. This creates a barrier to the living spaces, yet is still visible as the house is approached.

"With the ruggedness of the setting, we felt that board-formed concrete would connect better with the site," Silk

says. "And we were very careful to not use standard grey concrete. We studied color additives to create a warm tone that grew, to a large extent, out of the existing terra of the site."

When it came to the interior design, Julianne Shaw, senior interior designer for Stuart Silk Architects, worked closely with the homeowners to select stand-out pieces and design many of the others, ultimately creating customized, uncluttered spaces with a modern flair. "It was a long process to select minimal pieces," Shaw says. "Selecting the coffee table in the great room, for instance — a brass and wood design from Portugal — took nine months, which really speaks to who they are and their taste."

Additional interior details and furnishings were created to complement the home's aesthetics. Shaw designed a headboard in the master bedroom that's integrated into the wood slats in the ceiling. And in the living room, the firm designed a wood and burnished nickel dining room table and floating consoles with textured cast-glass tops that allow light to filter





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through. The firm also designed the concrete furniture for the outdoor living spaces, and other pieces. Shaw chose premium Calacatta marble for the vanity, tub, and hearth in the master bedroom, and white granite in the kitchen. A friend of the homeowners, glass artist Scott Chico Raskey was hired to create the light fixtures throughout the house. "He would bring shapes and forms to the meeting, and it was kind of a collaborative effort," Shaw says. And Brandner Design, based in Bozeman, created a number of custom elements, including the wine room shelving, the massive steel railing, all of the steel panels for the interiors, a powder room sink, and the inset art niches in the living room, among others things.

Completed in 2018, the family's ski getaway has already seen frequent use. "During the winter months, we'll use it for skiing and family holidays; it creates an inviting refuge after a day of skiing," the homeowner says. "But we also use it frequently in the summer, because the Yellowstone Club has an incredible golf course, and there are so many trails for hiking and biking."

The home itself is a work of art that ended up being a rewarding challenge for all involved. "We love the warm interior palette of wood, board-formed concrete, stone, and steel, and the way it merges with the rugged site and seems to grow from it," the homeowner says.

"The owner wanted us to exercise our design muscles as best we could," Silk adds. "So we introduced some new design elements, and that really made the project unique." ■

Clockwise from top left: Floor-to-ceiling windows provide panoramic views of the dramatic alpine landscape. A leather sectional from Minotti is set near a Poliform Snake chair in the great room. Minotti lounge chairs, covered in calfskin with ponyskin and velvet from Inform Interiors, are positioned to take in the views. The Christian Liaigre daybed is from Susan Mills Showroom in Seattle; the silk area rugs are from Stacy Logan in Seattle; and the Brabbu Sequia Centre Table, made from aged brass and walnut root, is from Demorais International in Virginia. | A burnished, 2-inch-thick steel railing is supported by brackets that were cast in place in the concrete stairs. | The light-filled master bathroom features a marble sink and tub. The tub spout and shower fixture are from Boffi, accompanied by a Kohler Tea-for-Two bathtub. The rain showerheads are from Dornbracht. | The dining room and kitchen look through a 20-inch-thick board-formed concrete wall to the living room. The wood and burnished-nickel dining table was designed by Stuart Silk Interiors and fabricated by Meyer Wells and Stephan Hurt in Seattle. The chandelier, made of solid glass teardrops and gold leaf filament, was designed by Scott Chico Raskey specifically for the homeowners. The Christian Liaigre leather dining chairs and barstools are from Susan Mills Showroom, and the white pearl quartzite countertop from Pental Surfaces in Seattle was fabricated by Earth Elements in Bozeman, Montana. | The dramatic front door was designed especially for this home. At 11 feet tall, it was fabricated in textured stainless steel and punctuated by an orthogonal array of glass lenses; the door handle is made of a folded ribbon of steel.

