

PERSPECTIVE PERSONIFIED

A contemporary home tucked up against Aspen's Shadow Mountain unfolds to the views, thanks to a vertical configuration, unusual aperture windows, a giant skylight, and an expansive rooftop deck.

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ANY PHOTOGRAPHER WILL TELL YOU: IT'S ALL ABOUT PERSPECTIVE.

That is particularly true when the views are elusive. After all, it's easy to capture views from a house perched high up a mountainside, with the unobstructed world unfolding below. It's much more of a puzzle to create, and even enhance, the views when a house is sitting on a tight, semi-urban lot.

That was the challenge for the architectural team at Aspen's Rowland + Broughton when it came to designing this 4,672-square-foot home, which sits at the base of that town's iconic Shadow Mountain.

The location was ideal for the homeowners, empty nesters who have two grown daughters and a main house in Denver's Cherry Creek North. Though the lot was easily walk-able, sitting next to the Rio Grande path with downtown Aspen only 10 minutes away by foot, it was neither busy nor heavily trafficked. "They loved the location next to Shadow Mountain, with its beautiful forest," says Sarah Broughton, principal on the project. "They wanted to feel like they were in that forest as much as possible."

But the location also had its challenges, in part because there was already a foundation in the ground, which limited the design options. "We knew we needed the architects to be really creative and come up with new ways to look at the lot, because we didn't have ultimate freedom," says the homeowner. "We also needed them to be able to pack a lot into a small space because we couldn't go any deeper than the foundation, and there are height restrictions in Aspen."





“This lot is atypical,” adds Broughton. “It fronts an alley and a pedestrian path. It was a constrained lot, being so close to downtown, and it was challenging to conform to Aspen’s stringent residential design standards in a really innovative way that spoke to the lot. But, through the use of apertures and architectural form, we were able to really open up the architecture to the views in multiple directions.”

One key to the design: the home’s “upside down” configuration, with the social spaces on the upper floor. “Often on these urban lots where the views are spectacular, we want to put the public areas on the upper level so the views can be realized,” says Broughton. “This is not a large house, but it lives large because the architecture unfolds to the views. We were able to achieve that by really understanding the site, understanding the views and the distance, and editing the architecture to a point where it speaks to that goal.”

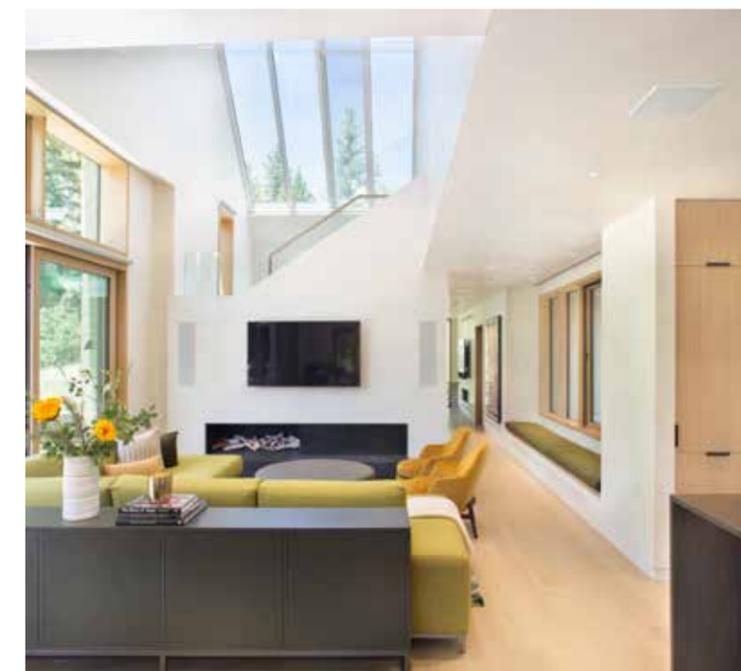
The builder, Kevin O’Donnell of Beck Building Co., who had worked with the homeowners before, building their Denver home, says, “Rowland + Broughton had so many limitations. There wasn’t a blank canvas where they could sit down with the clients, get their wish list, and create a space from scratch. What they did masterfully is create these spaces the clients wanted in a really beautiful way, each one incredibly unique. They nailed it.”



The house sits on an unusual, somewhat constrained lot in west Aspen, right up against Shadow Mountain. Without a lot of natural outdoor space (the front lawn, within the fence, is tight), the architects worked hard to make sure the house really unfolded to the views. Thanks to the skylight, which protrudes above the house’s silhouette, the overall shape of the house mimics the mountain behind.



Thanks to an enormous opening, folding doors, and a large patio, the living room (seen from three angles here) feels as if it sits right amid the forested slope of Shadow Mountain. The husband picked the green-yellow fabric for the large sectional, saying, “What about this?” And Broughton replied: “Let’s go for it! Why not?”



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The main entrance is on the home’s street level, which includes a master bedroom suite, powder room, mudroom, and garage. Go down one flight to the below-grade bottom floor, which includes a bedroom and a bunkroom, each with its own bath, as well as a gym, TV room, laundry room, wine closet. Go up a flight of stairs from the front door to the home’s upper level, where you’ll find the living room and dining room (off of which sits a generous patio), kitchen, and den, as well as a guest bedroom and bath. “We’ve never been ones who wanted grand master bedrooms; we were more interested in maximizing the common space,” says the homeowner. “That floor is very open and livable and has this indoor-outdoor feel.”

Topping it all off is a 622-square-foot rooftop deck, with a hot tub and fire bowl for chilly nights. “The rooftop deck was really, really important to us,” says the homeowner. “We love outdoor space, and the lot had little usable outdoor space. But being on the deck, you literally feel like you’re in a treehouse. It’s very, very special.”

And no matter where you turn, there are views—unusual for such an urban lot. “To the north, you look at Red Mountain,” says Broughton. “To the east, from the roof, you look at Independence Pass. And from the living room, with that awesome, beautiful aperture and terrace, you look at Shadow Mountain,” a steep, craggy west Aspen landmark that can be seen from everywhere in town.

THIS HOUSE'S NONTRADITIONAL FORM REALLY SPEAKS TO THE CONTEXT, WITH SHADOW MOUNTAIN RIGHT THERE. THE SHAPE OF SHADOW MOUNTAIN IS THE SHAPE OF THE HOUSE. THE TRIANGLE SHAPE THAT COMES UP TO CREATE THE SKYLIGHT IS THE SHAPE OF SHADOW MOUNTAIN. IT'S ABSTRACTED." - Sarah Broughton

To play up the views, Rowland+Broughton included in the design an enormous, 10'-3 1/2" x 12' skylight that sits over the central stairway. "It was the largest skylight we'd ever done up to that point," says Broughton. "It offers views mainly of the sky and the trees." They also added lift and slide doors in the living room, "so the whole wall opens up." But perhaps the most interesting design elements included are those aperture-style windows. "On four windows, we angled the sides of these apertures, to create a lens to the pointed views," says Broughton. "It's like creating an aperture on a camera where you're focusing on the subject. Instead of having a normal window, we extended the walls of the house out and tapered them back to emphasize the focus of the view."

"The little details like the aperture effect are really what make a project

sing," says O'Donnell. "Even though there wasn't a big canvas on this house, it has pop where it needs to have pop."

A perfect example: The team chose an interior color scheme to match the natural world outside. "We got pretty excited about the colors," says Broughton. "The homeowners love color, so we said, 'Well, let's not just put color in the house. Let's have a scheme to our color. So we did a graduation of color throughout the floors: The basement is purples and reds, which you can see in the bunk room. The main floor is blues, which you can see in the master bedroom and the powder room. And the upper level is all greens, to go with the forest. We had never done this before; it was a fun way to focus the color."

"The homeowners were really great to work with. One of my favorite

memories of the project was when we were picking fabric. You see that couch upstairs that's almost a neon green-yellow, with the dark green ottoman and that multicolored rug? The husband picked that fabric for the couch. He said, 'What about this?' and I said, 'Let's go for it! Why not?'"

The bright colors sit against a neutral palette, with white oak floors and white oak millwork. In the kitchen, there is a beautiful black metal hood, a black island and black stools, "so even the furniture dissolves into the island," Broughton says. "I'm really in love with that white marble with the green and black veining along the perimeter."

Another example: the stair design. "It was really important," says Broughton, because we wanted to be able to get as much light through the house as possible. We came up



The unusual aperture-style windows, like the one below on the guest bedroom, play up the views. "It's like creating an aperture on a camera where you're focusing on the subject," says architect Broughton. "We extended the walls of the house out and tapered them back to emphasize the focus of the view."



The architects used glass on the central stairway to play up the sense of lightness throughout the house. On the bottom floor, the workout room is surrounded by elegant smoked glass, to privatize that space but still allow someone working out inside to still feel connected.



"The rooftop deck was really important to us," says the homeowner of this 622-square-foot space, which includes a hot tub and fire bowl. "We love outdoor space. Being on the deck, you literally feel like you're in a treehouse."

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with the idea of having it sit right underneath the skylight, go over the fireplace and on up to the rooftop. It was a super big challenge getting the fireplace flue underneath the stair and out—it took some clever space planning, just utilizing every square inch."

Viewed from the outside, the exterior of the home makes it feel like part of the mountain behind. "It's always important to us to be



contextual," says Broughton. "People will tell us, 'You guys have a really good sensibility of site and context.' This house's nontraditional form really speaks to the context, with Shadow Mountain right there. The shape of Shadow Mountain is the shape of the house. The triangle shape that comes up to create the skylight is the shape of Shadow Mountain. It's abstracted."

To further root the house into its surroundings, Rowland + Broughton clad the main level in a stucco to create a subdued, monolithic base, with a more expressive champagne-color seam metal siding on the upper volume. "We had never used it before, but we thought it would be warmer and would be complementary to the surrounding forest," says Broughton. "We told

the clients we thought it would be gorgeous, and they said, 'Let's go for it.' " One end is covered with barnwood, "as if you were peeling back the champagne metal."

"We were just pushing the architecture and innovating, doing things we hadn't done before," says Broughton. The results were worth it. "We love the form of this house. The shape. We love the photos at dusk with the berm in front, taken from the old Midland Trail right next to the house, with that beautiful grass and the berm. It's cool. Every house presents opportunities, and every client presents even more opportunities. We love to create something unique for each client and each property." ■

PROJECT CREDITS

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