

COLORADO HOMES & LIFESTYLES®

Colorado Home Design Trends, Decoded

Prominent local architects reveal which national trends apply to Colorado, and why

By Cathy Rosset



Design by HMM Architecture + Interiors [Photo by David Lauer]

With its diverse landscapes, incredible views, and infinite adventures, it's no wonder so many people call Colorado home. Resort towns like Aspen and Vail offer chic, high-end luxury with a side of rustic, mountain living. Cities like Denver and Boulder are filled to the brim with lively art scenes and happenings, without sacrificing that idyllic Rocky Mountain backdrop we hold so dear.

Because of this allure, Colorado has seen its share of cutting-edge residential architecture in the past few years, from multi-generational abodes and forever homes to ski chalets and summer vacation retreats. This begs the question: What architecture and home design trends are taking center stage?

We consulted the 2017 AIA National Home Design Trends Survey—as well as four prominent local architects—to interpret the trajectory of Colorado design. While some national design trends ring true to what professionals are seeing on the frontline, other findings just simply don't apply. After all, Colorado is a pioneer state, whose exploratory spirit can sometimes buck the current.

Here the experts weigh in on which trends are—and are not—prominent in Colorado, and why.

Contemporary home style



Design by HMH Architecture + Interiors [Photo by David Lauer]

According to the report, contemporary home style remains popular nationwide, and Colorado is no exception—even in towns like Telluride and Crested Butte, known for their historic Victorian homes and log cabins.

What started as a simplification of lifestyle has now morphed into a full-fledged trend, says Harvey Hine, AIA, principal of HMM Architecture + Interiors in Boulder. "While not everyone understands the concepts behind modern design, many still want the style. It's gained a lot of momentum."

Other Colorado architects agree. "Contemporary style represents advances in technology," says Charles Cunniffe, FAIA, founder of Charles Cunniffe Architects in Aspen. He attributes the style's popularity to the advent of new innovations in materials, improvements in technology and fenestration [window] systems, and ever-increasing requirements for energy performance. "That, combined with greater views and access to the outdoors, has pushed that envelope in terms of the indoor-outdoor connection."



Design by Charles Cunniffe Architects [Photo by Steve Munding]

However, materials and our love for the outdoors aren't the only impetus behind Coloradans' contemporary leanings. While many states, particularly on the east coast, are seeing more conservative, traditional and transitional design, Cunniffe says Colorado tends to be on par with California and Montana in terms of innovative contemporary architecture. "There's just a greater sense of adventure in Colorado."

For a while, though, our adventurous spirit might have caused the pendulum to swing a little too far to the sterile side of contemporary design, according to Steev Wilson, NCARB, LEED, AP, AIA, founding partner of Forum Phi Architecture located in Aspen and Basalt.

“Things felt a little too industrial,” Wilson says. “We saw a lot of concrete that was white-on-white with hard metal accents and mill-finished steels. It takes a great picture, but it’s not a great place to live.”

Thankfully, Wilson adds, many people are looking for a more cozy and inviting take on contemporary style. “While I think the forms, lines and gestures of contemporary architecture will remain, things are headed toward a warmer, more organic material palette. I also think we’re going to start seeing more Colorado materials used in a contemporary way—and I like that direction.”



Design by Rowland+Broughton Architecture [Photo by Brent Moss]

Integrating warmth into contemporary design is the crux of the whole style, says John Rowland, AIA, principal of Rowland+Broughton Architecture in Aspen and Denver. “At the start of the movement,” he says, “contemporary style was all about mystery, and while it’s now become mainstream, the approach is still about revealing the unknown.”

Color has been replaced by texture, Rowland notes. “With that, you’ll see façade patterns, vertical and horizontal screening, and a juxtaposition of warm woods with metals and concrete. It’s an amalgamation of materials that weren’t typically seen together—and now it’s become mainstream.”

Outdoor living spaces



Design by Forum Phi Architecture [Photo by David Marlow]

While the national report suggests that front and side porches have decreased in popularity, Colorado architects aren't so sure—not because front and side porches are particularly trending, but because there seems to be a greater emphasis on outdoor living spaces in general.

Cunniffe says that many Colorado building restrictions aim to preserve historical home design elements, including front porches, in towns like Aspen and Telluride. Rowland echoes this sentiment: "It's part of the code in Aspen to have some kind of one-story element that indicates the front door."

Hine adds that front porches are almost a requisite in Boulder, and the function goes beyond just enjoying the fresh air; porches protect you from the sun, snow and rain, creating an intermediary spot to transition from the outdoors to the indoors.

Overall, all four architects agree: People are immensely interested in an indoor-outdoor connection.



Design by Rowland+Broughton Architecture [Photo by Brent Moss]

"In the mountains, there's a bigger sense of freedom from norms," Cunniffe says. "We have the luxury of more open spaces and open thinking here, and that transfers to people's lifestyles and homes. Even if you have a tight lot, there's a desire for covered porches and outdoor rooms."

"While I don't know if there's been a decrease in a desire for front and side porches," Hine says, "people certainly want more indoor-outdoor connection. There's a very large demand for big windows, sliding glass doors, and folding doors."

"The last thing a party host wants is a quintessential Colorado rainstorm to come and ruin a great afternoon or early evening get-together," Rowland says, recounting his clients' desires for rear entertainment spaces that serve as extensions of living rooms and great rooms.

Perhaps there's a greater interest in privacy, Wilson speculates. "People don't drop by their friends' houses unannounced as often as they used to; now they call or text." Focus has shifted slightly from areas where homeowners can sit and greet passersby to outdoor living spaces with a more family-style approach. "What used to be an emphasis on public space has now transferred to the importance of a private sanctuary," he concludes.

Small/single-story homes



Design by Rowland+Broughton Architecture [Photo by Brent Moss]

Smaller and single-story homes have dipped slightly in popularity on the national scale, but when it comes to square footage in Colorado, there seems to be a stronger interest in quality over quantity.

Hine, for one, has seen little interest in homes over 5,000 square feet. "The recession was recent enough that it's still in people's memories. Most of our clients are asking for houses in the 3,000-square-foot range," he says, "which is relatively smaller than even a few years ago. Fifteen years ago I did a house that was 28,000 square feet!"



Design by Charles Cunniffe Architects [Photo by Mark Boisclair]

What's even more popular in the Centennial State is single-story living. "Not many lots [in established communities] are large enough to have all rooms on one floor," Cunniffe says, noting that 'single-story' applies more to the location of the master bedroom; the kitchen, dining room, and master suite are all on the main level, and then secondary rooms can be found above or below. This enables homeowners to age in place without having to address (or redesign due to) major mobility issues.

With its lure of adventure and beauty, Colorado is attracting more and more people looking to build legacy homes. "People want to build a home where multiple generations can live for a lifetime," Cunniffe says, "and they want the home to be inclusive of the amenities that their future offspring will want."

Durable and low-maintenance exteriors



Design by Forum Phi Architecture [Photo by Brent Moss]

When asked why durability and low-maintenance is a popular choice for home exteriors, Wilson's answer is twofold. Fundamentally, materials with long life cycles reduce long-term costs, but even more important to homeowners is eco-friendliness. "Sustainability is only increasing in its value right now," he says.

Another factor comes into play: time. "Time is the rarest commodity right now," Hine adds. Rowland agrees, noting that people seem to value their free time in a different manner than before. "Instead of maintaining their homes on the weekend," Rowland says, "they want to be spending their free time in a more leisurely way, whether it's at the house or out in the mountains."



Design by HMM Architecture + Interiors [Photo by Andrew Pogue]

Not only are durable, low-maintenance materials more popular, so are simpler and fewer exterior materials. "A contemporary home implies more glass," says Cunniffe, and more glass means fewer materials overall.

"Simplicity and thoughtfulness are part of the contemporary aesthetic," Wilson says. "Whereas before complexity for complexity's sake used to be the mark of affluence, now we're seeing a much more restrained, careful and more coherent architecture."

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