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# shelter

HOME & LIVING IN THE *western san juans*



Studio in the Clouds  
A Lasting Legacy: Centennial Ranch  
Concrete Comes of Age  
All Fired Up  
Over the Top  
Mountain Modern



A FEELING OF FLOATATION, AT 9,500 FEET

Photo by Whit Richardson



BY HEATHER SACKETT

# MOUNTAIN MODERN >>>



Throughout Mountain Village's coming of age in the 1990s, its signature design was nearly homogenous: sprawling log homes and European-style ski chalets, with perhaps an antler chandelier or two. Not so anymore.

In recent years, the preferred aesthetic of this ski-and-golf community in the sky has evolved to embrace the clean, crisp lines of modern architecture. According to Telluride Real Estate Corp Vice President and broker Dan Henschel, demand for what he terms "dinosaur" log homes has been declining.

"The buyer is trending toward something cool and hip, which still has a mountain feel," Henschel said. Enter Mountain Modern.

Walk in the front door and instantly you feel as if you're floating through the home, instead of into it.

It is a look the owners of 109 Polecat Lane, Cole and Katie Johnson of Prescott, Ariz. seem to have perfected. Their home features many of the amenities typical of vacation abodes: five bedrooms and bathrooms, a fireplace in nearly every room, a gym, a sunroom, an office and a hot tub. Plus ski lockers, a ski tuning area and a three-car garage. What makes this house unique, however, is the way its structural elements — sloped metal roofs with steel

and timber beams, stone pillars, tie rods, 90-degree angles — are also integral parts of the overall look. The simple yet industrial style even extends to the furniture: tie rods from the ceiling support the bunk beds in the boys' room and the kitchen's shelving. The home embraces the main tenant of modern architecture: form follows function.

As an overall artistic and architectural design statement, "We're saying 'Less is more,'" said Centre Sky Architecture Principal Architect Jamie Daugaard, who the Johnsons chose to design their house. Yet the spartan approach does have its hazards: clients may miss the familiar feel of comfort, even coziness, that makes a home, a home. For example, "Clients sometimes feel as though steel is a cooler material," Daugaard said — and not ev-



(clockwise from left)  
The formal entrance to “mountain modern” masterpiece 109 Polecat Lane; steel walkways, beams and railings connect the outdoors and indoors and are a key design feature of the home.

(below) The elevated, sun-drenched, transparent walkway joins the great room with the sunroom and also allows spring runoff to flow freely beneath it.

Photos by Whit Richardson



everyone is a fan. To counteract the impression of cool (which can be particularly disconcerting in a place like the high alpine, which really does get cold), “We brought in warmer textures, like wood flooring and stone materials, and warmer colors. This enhances the exposure of the steel panels and structure.” While they toned down the “chill” feeling of steel, the home’s designers nevertheless kept the aesthetic clean. Says Daugaard: “We tried to be very simplistic with our palette of materials.”

The Johnsons had admired Daugaard’s work on other Mountain Village homes, and so sought out the architect from Montana-and Colorado-based Centre Sky Architecture. The company’s ethos is to create designs in which both site and architecture become one. Working with the

natural topography is a goal of Daugaard’s, and leveling the landscape is not a technique he very often employs: Terraced homes on steep sites (and the retention



Intricate steel designs add interest and delicacy to a wooden banister.

Photo by Eric Ming

of mature, surrounding trees) are more his style.

“Projects are much more likely to stand the test of time when you work with a site instead of when you overdo it,” he said.

The architect’s fusion between home and landscape is most obvious in 109 Polecat’s three “pods” — or anchors — of living space, connected by walkways. Although the home is nearly 8,000 square feet, the pods break it down into small, warm, sun-drenched spaces. At the same time, your overall impression is one of loft and airiness: Walkways between the spaces create a floating feeling as you cross over. The design works with, not against, the surrounding hillside and the conifers on the .75-acre site.

Daugaard’s pods-and-bridges design is

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The bridge-like, transparent walkway to the master bedroom offers a view below to the living area.

Photo by Eric Ming



also an attempt to anticipate and remedy a potential problem.

“A lot of times in the mountains you get so much snow, you also have a great deal of surface drainage,” he explained. “A house ends up acting almost like a catcher’s mitt. So how do you get the water around or under the house?” The answer is inspired: “The bridges that connect the pods break it up, and give the topography a little ability to work through the architecture.”

Walk in the front door at 109 Polecat Lane, and instantly you feel as if you’re floating through the home, instead of into it. Towering floor-to-ceiling windows greet you as you enter the great room, which offers sweeping views across the Telluride Valley to the San Sophia Ridge. The Johnsons wanted to blend the austere, striking

geography of the outside with the inside of their home. Their goal is accomplished through numerous decks and porches (there’s a door to the outside off of nearly every room), outside seating areas, plenty of big windows and rooms — like the office — nestled in the aspen.

“My office is my personal space, and I think it does the best job of allowing you to share the outdoors,” Cole Johnson said. “You’re among the trees.” Through the use of huge windows, and a minimalist interior — what Johnson calls “transparency” — this design “incorporates the San Juans and all of Mountain Village and Telluride into our home to the fullest extent possible.”

The home manages to combine the feeling of loft even into the bedrooms: A floating staircase with just a center beam

connecting each stair leads the way up to another transparent walkway, a study with a fireplace and the master bedroom (his and hers sinks, vanities and closets branch off each side of the bedroom).

Back down the floating staircase, to the right of the formal entrance, a gourmet kitchen keeps the feel of being outside, with its long dining table, surrounded by windows, offering an al fresco feeling of dining amongst aspen. The home’s design makes it easy not only to admire the outdoors from every angle, but to get out into it: off the kitchen is a ski locker for each family member, and a unique, cantilevered ski tuning room hangs over the main footprint of the house. A three-bay garage is big enough to fit the Johnsons’ bikes, ski and hiking gear.

“We’re very active while we’re in Tellu-



(left) The great room boasts sweeping views of the San Sophia Range from floor-to-ceiling windows, and (below) a transparent walkway connects the kitchen and living area with the sunroom and boys' bunk room.



Photos by Whit Richardson



(above) A cozy study plus fireplace, nestled amongst aspen, and (left) a light-filled breakfast nook.

Photos by Eric Ming

ride,” Johnson said. “We incorporate the outdoors into everything we do, independent of weather conditions.”

And unlike many other luxury homes in the region, the windows of 109 Polecat don’t go dark most of the year. Given their four children, two grandchildren, big extended family and numerous friends and business associates, the home’s bedrooms and bunkrooms are often occupied.

“Both on a personal level and for business, my house gets used throughout the year, not just during the summer and ski season,” Johnson said. “We open our home to everyone. It’s not uncommon to have 40 people staying here.”

Situated between the Telluride Ski Resort’s ski runs Double Cabin and Bridges, the home is as close to ski-in, ski-out as you can get without actually being slope-

side. Dallas Divide Construction built the home over 28 months, completing the project last summer. Johnson got his hands dirty on certain projects like the intricate swirls of metallic epoxy in the cement floor of the rec room. He grew up learning the trades and is now a drywall contractor throughout the southwest, installing drywall in more than 3,000 homes and 8,000 apartments a year. As a homebuilder himself, and President of Paul Johnson Drywall, Inc., it was essential for Johnson that his Mountain Village project have a homey look. Many Mountain Village homes, he said, have what he calls a “massing problem.”

“To me, too many look somewhat commercial,” he said. “It was critically important to me that this was not. I wanted a high-end modern home, but I still

wanted it to look residential. I think Jamie (Daugaard) combines those two ideas better than anybody.”

Although the Johnsons love the mountain getaway they have created at 109 Polecat, they are already moving on to their next project, and have listed it for sale. But the family is by no means through with Mountain Village: they’re already searching for a new lot where they hope to build their next dream home, again designed by Daugaard.

“We’re getting ready to start another one,” Johnson said. “We are still working on selecting a site, but Jamie will draw it. That’s about as far as I know right now. We very much appreciate the entire design-and-build process. It’s something that’s extremely enjoyable, and it’s something we work hard on together.”