



Barn Raising: Couple's area home a tribute to both heritage and landscape

by Anna Bjorklund

Catching the late evening light, the western wheatgrass sways with a gentle breeze. A pair of mule deer ears periscope up over the top of the grass. The doe raises her head, on alert for a moment before she grows uneasy and bounds through the golden field.

The house just beyond this field shares its space with a wealth of wildlife and, just as its owners hoped, the structure blends in beautifully with the surrounding agrarian landscape.

Kevin Miller and Jackie LeClair set out to create a primary residence based on a barn-style layout, and then they planted it along the divide between the Madison and Gallatin Rivers. The entire living space and bedrooms in the 5,600 square foot home are actually all on the second floor, with the lower level dedicated wholly to garage, oversized shop space and a spacious mudroom to accommodate their love of numerous outdoor sports.

“We wanted a house where when you were inside, you’d still feel like you were outside,” LeClair said. Indeed, brushed fir flooring and soft hues on interior walls create a warm glow playing off the generous views in every room. “All the fields around here are that golden harvest color,” Miller added.

They began their design plans in 2002 having drawn some ideas while on a ski trip in Jackson Hole. “The next day, Kevin called and brought the napkin sketch by,” shared architect Mark Weirich. “I had been involved in some other projects where there was living space above a barn area, but never as a full-time residence.”

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Throughout the home, finishing touches and interior elements carry specific memories and historic connection. Every main beam came from LeClair’s grandparents’ ranch in the Beartooth Range. The fifth generation Montanan explained how they harvested standing dead timber to acquire the beams. In a guest room, she pointed out an heirloom cedar chest. “My grandfather built it for my grandmother in the 1920’s,” she said.

On a more whimsical note, a chicken coop fan was installed as a ceiling fan in the main entertaining area. In the entry, above the great granite step, hangs a home-built chandelier fixture. Its frame was crafted from an antique hand-forged ore bucket frame. Within it, a hand-punched tin lamp-shade holds an egg incubator light fixture.

Playful elements are balanced by a gentle elegance. Radiant heat throughout both levels ensures a cozy space to come home to after a long day on the slopes. In the master bath,

a hammered copper basin sink complements the travertine stone in the steam shower. “You could do yoga in here,” LeClair said smiling.

During the entire process, the kitchen presented one of the most challenging design obstacles. “Jackie and I went around and around with the kitchen, with maximizing the views,” said Weirich. As construction proceeded, the windows got bigger. The operative question was, “What happens to cabinet space?”

“That’s how we came up with the double bar to create storage,” said LeClair. “We went out with the kitchen instead of up.” The final compromise turned out beautifully with an L-shaped bar framing a traditional island. It is indeed rare to find a kitchen this full of natural light. They also found that the bar is such a pleasant conversational space, guests often forego the dining area to eat at the bar instead.

That sense of comfort and ease, is exactly what they were going for. “If you walk in with muddy shoes, it’s okay; nothing’s going to get hurt.” LeClair said. No one needs to ask permission to bring their dog and if a youngster spills a drink, it’s not a crisis. “It’s built to live in, not to just look at; we wanted it to be a house where people could relax.”

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