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Living In The Details

BIG SKY, MONTANA, SETS THE STAGE FOR
THIS SCENIC SKI RETREAT.



By Olivia Koernig
Photography by Roger Wade

IT'S BEEN SAID THAT THE LITTLE THINGS matter most—even when considering a cabin standing proudly beneath the grandeur of 10,000-foot craggy mountain peaks in Big Sky, Montana. The details are where builder Peter Lee focused his attention when he set out to build his family's ski retreat in Big Sky, and they are what made the difference in the finished cabin. "I finally feel like I got the details just right," he says. Lee should be expert at the details. His company, Teton Heritage Builders, built the home and has been building custom homes for 12 years in Big Sky and Jackson Hole, Wyoming.

Although the details may not be what stand out most when one enters Lee's 5,600-square-foot cabin, they do play a major supporting role. For instance, an unobstructed view of Wilson Peak from the picture window in the great room took respectful collaboration between Lee and architect Eliot Goss working together to make the uninterrupted view possible. "Visually, buildings really compose much like a painting," Goss says. "Only you're working with a three-dimensional object within a large space rather than with paint on canvas."

The view of the Spanish Peak Range to the north is captured not only in the great room's picture window but also from the bridge walkway in the upper level. "This house has great views," Lee says. "Wilson Peak is perfectly centered in the window."

Lee used full arch barrel trusses in the front entry, in the center of the great room, and over the patio. The curvature of the trusses is

The Lee home in Big Sky, Montana, features picture windows that frame the Spanish Peak Range.

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echoed in the arched windows, allowing the mountain views to take center stage without interruption from classic log trusses. "It's the organization of the windows and the trusses working in tandem to create this great view," Lee says.

Besides welcoming the mountain scape, the trusses themselves are a thing of beauty and are used throughout the home. Hand-hammered strapping on the trusses, reminiscent of late-1800s fasteners, lends a sense of history and craftsmanship. "It gives a feeling of a time before things were machined, when everything was hand-forged," Lee says.

Another elusive detail came together for Lee while building this home. For seven years, Lee had kicked around the idea of creating a Teton Heritage signature feature to use in each of its homes. Finally, he came up with creating an ornamental shield with a mountain scene. A designer at Rocky Mountain Hardware in Hailey, Idaho, brought Lee's vision to reality. The bronze escutcheons feature a silhouette of a mountain range with the rising moon in the background and a river in the foreground. "It's the exact view of the Tetons from a house I built in 1999," Lee says. "It's the company logo and kind of a fun detail."

Although the details are often the glue bonding a project like this one, according to Goss, they wouldn't matter without a solid foundation. Indeed, the details and main structural elements playing off each other in harmony and balance are one reason this home works so well. In the cabin,



OPPOSITE: Twig accents add whimsy to the traditional log spindle railing, which overlooks the great room with its warm red and gold décor. **TOP:** In the kitchen, a large island provides entertaining space, and contrasting stains and rubs give the alder cabinetry a distinctive look. **ABOVE:** The dining room offers a view of the snowy setting outside. Hand-forged rusted iron light fixtures hang above the dining room table.



ABOVE: The sumptuous master bedroom features a patio and gas fireplace for chilly evenings. **OPPOSITE:** The cozy family room is inviting with its dropped ceilings and wrap-around patio. An original Carol Hagan painting hangs above the stone fireplace. The cabin offers ski-in resort access.

strength and whimsy, art and functionality, and remoteness and proximity to the nearby ski slopes mix together in thoughtful compatibility.

"One of the things I focus on a lot is simple proportion," Goss says. "Peter and I both agree that a large building like this needs to be broken up in as many ways as is reasonable to avoid any monolithic appearance." To that end, visually heavier materials, like log and stone, were used on the ground floor. Goss designed the second floor at a scale of about 40 percent of the first floor's space so the home would appear solidly anchored with a large base. The progressively lighter materials of the roofline, like cedar shake shingles, complement the grounded stonework to fashion a home that Goss says just looks right. "There's no rulebook that tells you how to relate proportion," he says. "It's just a matter of training the eye."

Beyond a solid foundation, a collage of natural materials and artisan craftsmanship give the home an organic aesthetic. Outside, classic lodgepole pine, mahogany, and stonework interact. Indoors, hand-hewn logs fit seamlessly with knotty alder trim and cabinetry. Underfoot, skip-sawn knotty white

oak with pillowed edges lines the entire first floor. The fireplaces in the great room and family room are both made of moss rock from a Montana quarry. "The lichen gives it great color and a little more depth," Lee says, which is one of the reasons he selected alder as well: "It's got great rustic character with its knotty inconsistencies and accepts different finishes really well."

The kitchen's counters are two different colors of granite, and the backsplash is tumbled travertine. A view of Beehive Basin out the window behind the kitchen sink makes cleaning up a little less of a chore. A copper and bronze hood makes a bold statement above the island, while canary yellow and sage green chairs pack a lighthearted punch.

While Lee planned to use natural birch bark wallpaper in a powder room, the varying thicknesses of the paper proved unmanageable. Instead of gluing paper, a local painter imitated the bark with a faux-paint finish, rounding out the treatment with real red twig willow edging. "It was an exercise in artistic perseverance," Lee says.

One find is a custom-made drum from Taos Drums Company that doubles as a coffee table in the family room.



While guests pound out their beats, hand-painted bison bound endlessly around the base of the drum. “People just go to town on it,” Lee says.

Another testament to Lee’s playfulness are the twig accents on the traditional log railing on the bridge walkway and what he calls “the Romeo and Juliet balcony” of the upper master bedroom. In fact, the home’s entire focus is on play. Surrounded by the towering Gallatin Mountain Range, it borders a 200-acre 18-hole Tom Weiskopf golf course. Yellowstone Park’s West entrance is only 48 miles away, and proximity to the Missouri, Yellowstone, Madison, and Big Horn rivers provides year-round blue-ribbon fishing. But Lee’s main reason for building in Big Sky had more to do with a white Christmas and family holidays at the cabin than anything else, as the family loves spending the holidays at the home.

Lee built the home in that location with both fun and family in mind. “We’ve got two young kids, and the open design allows them to be in another room while we still have an eye on them,” he says. As for the location, his motivation was a bit more self-indulgent. “It’s part of my master plan,” Lee says. “So I’ll always get to ski, I’m creating two ski buddies.”



Resources

Interior Design: Carole Sisson Designs
(406) 587-2600; www.sissondesigns.com

Builder: Teton Heritage Builders
(406) 522-0808; www.tetonheritagebuilders.com

Lighting:
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(888) 788-2013; www.rockymountainhardware.com

Fire Mountain Forge
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