

Alpine Retreat

NESTLED BETWEEN THE MADISON MOUNTAIN RANGE AND SPANISH PEAKS, THIS PRIVATE SKI RETREAT HONORS MONTANA'S NATURAL ENVIRONMENT AND STORIED PAST.



By Allyn Hulteng
Photography by Roger Wade

AFTER LAYING DOWN A DUSTING OF SNOW, ROILING clouds retreat behind Lone Peak. In their wake, morning light splinters through the towering pines, casting shadows across the freshly fallen mantle. “We are so intrigued by Montana,” says Barry Milner, looking appreciatively at the wintry scene. “When we decided to build our dream mountain home, we knew this was where it was going to be.”

Native Texans, Barry and Celia Milner first journeyed northwest nearly 30 years ago. “One of my professors [at the University of Houston] had a photograph of Big Mountain and Whitefish Lake hanging in his office,” Barry recalls. “I remember thinking, This place is so beautiful; I have to go there.” Captivated by the alpine image, Barry had to experience Montana for himself. He finally made the trip with his wife in 1984. “We loved it so much, we’ve come back at least once or twice every year since.”

Over time, the couple explored every nook and cranny of the region, reveling in its natural beauty, immersing themselves in its unique history, and ultimately deciding it was the perfect place for building a family retreat. But eager to settle in Montana, the Milners opted to buy an already developed property in 2005 and put aside their plans to build.

Then in 2007, everything changed. “I was in Big Sky, skiing, when I got very sick,” Celia says. Just days later she received grim news while back home in Houston. “I had cancer.”

Her diagnosis catapulted the couple into action to design the home of their dreams. “We had always wanted a place for our family here in Montana, and after Celia got sick we moved quickly to do just that,” says

Barry and Celia Milner’s custom home at Moonlight Basin, a prime ski destination in Big Sky, Montana, exemplifies the couple’s love of the region and serves as a retreat for them to enjoy with family and friends.





Barry. Within a month, the couple had closed on a property at Moonlight Basin in Big Sky. “Celia and I had watched the area when it was first being developed and were intrigued by the conservation-mindedness of the original partners,” he recalls.

At the top of the Milners’ priority list was having an inviting place for their whole family to enjoy, but second in importance was for their home to reflect their love of the land. “We had spent years gathering ideas and inspiration from all over Montana, and we were determined to incorporate them into our retreat,” Celia says. So the couple looked to those who know the region best, hiring local Locati Architects & Interiors out of Bozeman to design their property and Blue Ribbon Builders out of Big Sky to oversee the construction.

Placing the project on a fast track for completion didn’t mean shortchanging their plans. “Celia threw the architects a curve ball,” says Barry. “She wanted to be adventurous and challenged them to break the mountain home mold.” Lead architect Greg Dennee proved he was up to the challenge. “Greg listened,” Barry says. “He listened, and then came back with new drawings. He didn’t try to talk us into something we didn’t want. Greg was golden to work with.” For his wife, working side-by-side with Dennee on the design was a welcome breath of fresh air. “After spending more than 30 years in an office environment, I was able to unleash all my pent-up creativity,” she says.

That creativity is evident in every aspect of the home, inside

and out, including the unique structural design. Built on a gently sloping hillside, the residence appears to rise organically from the earth. The exterior’s massive logs and locally quarried rock provide a stunning contrast to the huge walls of windows. “The views are staggering,” Barry notes. “In the front we have a perfectly framed view of Lone Peak, and along the back, a full panorama of the Spanish Peaks.”

Indoors, Celia wanted the main gathering areas to reflect the grandeur of the mountains while still feeling inviting and cozy. Stepping inside the great room, one is drawn to the opposite wall of windows looking out to the alpine peaks. Aside from the breathtaking view, a massive natural stone fireplace serves as a dramatic focal point in the room, which is otherwise decorated with Western art and a large antler chandelier to give it a sense of rustic elegance. Heavy wood timbers arch across the high ceiling, bringing a sense of scale to the large, open space, and overstuffed furnishings offer plenty of room for all to comfortably gather around the fire.

CLOCKWISE (from top left): The great room boasts a grand stone fireplace, a high ceiling scaled by arching wood timbers, and a wall of windows with unobstructed views of the surrounding mountains. “We frequently entertain...and do all of our own cooking,” Celia says, explaining why a spacious kitchen was an essential part of the home’s design. In a nod to Butte’s mining legacy, copper inlays decorate the formal dining room table, which Celia designed herself and had crafted by a local artisan.





TOP: One of the home's many guest rooms, the Meriwether Room was designed to resemble an Old West bordello with reproduction furniture and antique accent décor. **BOTTOM:** A covey was built off the master suite for a soaking tub, providing a 180-degree panorama of the landscape. "We call this our million-dollar view," says Celia. **OPPOSITE PAGE:** "The adults love it just as much as the kids do," Barry says of the reproduction Pullman sleeping car, featuring antique train wheels and authentic railroad tracks.

But across from the great room, the kitchen—featuring dual islands and an unobstructed view of Lone Peak—is the true heart of the home. "We frequently entertain large groups of people and do all of our own cooking, so having ample work space was essential," Celia says. Boasting equally exquisite views of the Spanish Peaks to the north, the formal dining room sits adjacent, opening to the main living area and furnished with the same rustic refinement. Its large wooden table and custom chairs were designed by Celia herself and crafted by a local artisan. "The table has copper inlays hammered in," she says. "As you look around, you'll see that there are a lot of copper accents throughout the house. It was our tribute to Butte's mining legacy."

In a nod to the railroad that transported miners and ore, a re-creation of an old Pullman sleeping car is tucked in a niche of the hallway, doubling as a daybed where one can lounge after a home-cooked meal. "The railroad is a big part of Montana history, and we wanted to incorporate that into our home," Barry says. The Pullman sleeper is equipped with antique train wheels that sit on authentic train tracks decorated with railroad rock cover and spikes. "The adults love it just as much as the kids do," he says with a grin.

Barry and Celia's passion for the region is even more apparent in the home's private living quarters. "Every guest suite has a private bath, and each suite features unique Montana-themed



décor," Celia says. "We wanted it to be like a really cool hotel where every room has a different feel." Inspired by the couple's many stays at local historic hotels, the Meriwether Room was fashioned to resemble an Old West bordello. Ruby-colored walls and reproduction furniture set the stage. Small details, like antique perfume bottles, hairbrushes, and corsets add an air of

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authenticity. "The bathroom even has a claw-foot slipper tub and 19th-century-inspired black-and-white checkered tile," says Celia.

The couple's own private quarters provide the ultimate retreat. A favorite spot for relaxing after a long day on the slopes, the large soaking tub off the master bathroom juts outward from the wall in a small covey, providing a 180-degree panorama of the landscape. "We call this our million-dollar view," Celia says. "It's simply stunning."

From its stone exterior to the master suite, the Milner residence remains true to the couple's vision for an authentically Montana haven where family and friends can congregate in every season. In the winter, guests can ski in and ski out, and in warmer months, Moonlight Basin offers hiking, fly-fishing, and a host of other outdoor activities. "We also have a spa, a theater, a hot tub, and sauna — there's really no reason to leave," Celia says. "In fact, we plan to continue enjoying our life in Montana for a long time to come."

Resources

Locati Architects & Interiors

Bozeman, Montana
406.587.1139, www.locatiarchitects.com

Blue Ribbon Builders

Big Sky, Montana
406.995.4579, www.blueribbonbuilders.com

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