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CORRECTION Products included in Designer's Eye, (page 36, December) can be purchased through Martha O'Hara Interiors, 8353 Excelsior Blvd., Hopkins, 952-908-3150, www.oharainteriors.com.

The photos of the redesigned kitchen in "Sleek Outlook" (page 87) and "Made to Order" (page 95) were shot by John Abernathy.



IN THE *Mood*

Escape midwinter by visiting
Minnesotans at home—
and away.

Tom and Mary Grudnowski's 12,000-square-foot contemporary mountain home in Avon, Colorado, offers 360-degree views of the famed Bachelor Gulch, Gore Range, Game Creek Bowl, and Red and White Mountain.

A MINNESOTA COUPLE REDEFINES MOUNTAIN STYLE

BY COLBY JOHNSON ❄️ PHOTOS BY JASON DEWEY

pea k contentment



THIS PAGE Minneapolis interior designer Billy Beson designed the curved dining room table to mimic the arc of the home's exterior. Built of natural burled elm, wenge, and ebony by California furniture fabricator, Martin Pierce, the table's inlaid branch design seems to grow toward the exterior light. OPPOSITE PAGE Positioned on the east side of the house to welcome the morning sun, the kitchen features eight different finishes, custom cabinetry, a flamed-copper hood, and a stone pizza oven.

WHEN TOM AND MARY GRUDNOWSKI started thinking about a second home, the question of where it should be was a no-brainer. "We thought, Let's not go to Florida and sit on some beach, let's go to a very active community where we can ski, hike, golf...you name it," says Tom, who retired as CEO of Fair Isaac Corporation one year ago. Colorado met their criteria; more specifically, Bachelor Gulch, an uber-exclusive gated community near Vail that has 107 lots (one of which belongs to their new neighbor, Kelsey Grammer).

Selecting the where may have been easy, but deciding what, exactly, to build was much more challenging. "We knew we wanted something very unique and that we wanted to bring the outdoors in," says Mary. "We didn't want the mountain home with the dark lower level and the plaid everywhere."

The home also had to be large enough to accommodate frequent visits from Tom and Mary's four adult children, and flexible enough to grow as the family does. Above all, the couple had one unbreakable rule: No dead animal heads or antler chandeliers.

"Just because you move to the mountains doesn't mean you're a mountain man," says Minneapolis interior designer Billy Beson, who was the first person the Grudnowskis enlisted to help them create their dream vaca-

tion home. Beson first worked with the family 15 years ago when they moved into their contemporary home on Lake Minnetonka. "For their second home, I got to work with a different side of them; their goals were different," says Beson, who defines the Colorado home's aesthetic as Woodlin chic. "They come here to ski and celebrate family, and the home needed to facilitate those desires. Every room is designed with conversation and livability in mind."

Beson worked in tandem with Colorado-based VAg, Inc., Architects & Planners, George Shaeffer Construction Company, and Sonemac Landscape Architecture to make the Grudnowskis' vision reality. "Tom and Mary were fun clients to work with," says VAg, Inc.'s cofounder and principal Anne Gunion. "Their expectations were





THIS PAGE Nestled behind the moat and heated waterfall is a hidden wine cellar that holds hundreds of wine bottles and a tasting area. ABOVE The great room features a daybed made from willow and birch bark, a custom designed Swedish-weave rug, a custom-built coffee table made from hundreds of Aspen trunks, and a stained glass chandelier that bounces light off the ceiling. OPPOSITE PAGE The real show stopper is the custom-built onyx bar in the lower-level entertainment room. "It's an engineering feat," Beson says of the bar, which is backlit and accented with copper, walnut, hand-tooled black leather, and nailhead trim. It's supported by a Lucite frame, which makes the translucent stone appear to float.



high, and they had priorities and ideas, but they weren't rigid about how to get there."

VAg's first step was deciding how to site the house on its 2.9-acre lot, a prime location on one of the mountain ridges that is visible for miles. "We positioned the home so that it curves around on the lot, creating arcs of walls and windows to capture all the views," Gunion says of the 12,000-square-foot home, which was completed last June.

The home boasts six unique bedroom suites, each with a private bath and patio; a nautical-themed "bunk room" on the mid-level for future grandchildren; a ski room; nine fireplaces; and ample communal living space both indoors and out. Inspired by the views, VAg created a layout that follows the progression of the sun—the kitchen sits on the east side of the lot, absorbing the early morning rays. As the day progresses, the sunlight travels through the wall of windows into the communal spaces of the dining and great rooms, and then sets on the owners' suite, which anchors the west side of the home.

"We used traditional fire watch tower-like structures to anchor each side of the home," says VAg, Inc.'s senior project manager Christy D'Agostino. "We didn't want a big, monolithic two-story mass. We really considered views, light, proportion, and flow."

The team's next challenge was meeting Mary's requirement to get light into the lower level from both sides of the home. The solution was an unprecedented one: a massive water feature that spans the length of the home's backside, and includes

a moat and a heated waterfall that cascades over a wall of meticulously placed glacier granite slabs. "It's perfect," Mary says of the lower level, which also features copper, barrel-vaulted ceilings with indirect lighting throughout, and a large entertainment space with a custom-built onyx bar and a home theater. "All the windows are placed in funky spots to accentuate the water feature and the views. There's nowhere in the home you can stand without seeing out at least one window. I love it."

When you have a moat, you need bridges—three to be exact—that fan out from the massive stone driveway and lead to three floor-to-ceiling glass entryways. Stepping through the main entry, visitors are greeted by a "big bang view" through the expansive windows of the great room. "We focused on creating a front-to-back transparency throughout the home to open it up to more light and give it an airy feel," D'Agostino says.

The design team took cues from the beautiful landscape—heavy timbers and Colorado moss stone, plus a mix of textures and colors that mimic the mountains' lush foliage in the summer. Copper, bronze, walnut, and sandstone are the stars of the interior. "The house became its own animal once we got into it because it was so unique and detail-oriented. You couldn't drop the ball anywhere because it would have been obvious,"

D'Agostino says, adding that there were 60 to 70 workers onsite each work day during the three-year project. (Tom and Mary watched the progress via webcams they hung throughout the lot.)

The home also makes the most of its enviable location with expansive exterior living spaces—a dining room, a BBQ pit, plenty of tiered decks and patios, and a near Olympic-size hot tub. "We wanted a home where we could literally ski in and ski out," says Tom, pointing to the lower-level ski room, which features glass on three sides, a massive stone fireplace, and benches with boot dryers underneath. After skiing, the family can also slip into the nearby steam room or cool down in the neighboring exercise room, also encased by windows—the perfect mix of activity and relaxation.

For Tom and Mary, their home away from home is exactly what they dreamed of and more. "When I'm in Minnesota I feel like I should be working, but when I'm here I can just relax," says Tom, as he sits in a rocking chair in front of the ski room's fireplace. "Here, I'm mellow—drinking wine, skiing every day, not returning emails. It's fantastic." **MH**

COLBY JOHNSON IS THE MANAGING EDITOR OF MIDWEST HOME. FOR MORE INFORMATION ON FEATURED PRODUCTS AND SUPPLIERS, SEE PAGE 114.



OPPOSITE PAGE After a long day of skiing, Tom and Mary relax in the ski room with Pete, their border collie. The room gets warmth and character from the massive stone fireplace of local river rock, walls of reclaimed barn wood, and the rocking chairs made in Wisconsin of bent willow. THIS PAGE, ABOVE The main attraction of the owners' suite is the cathedral ceiling of golden-toned wood planks and dark-stained wood beams. The furnishings and striped silk carpet, made in Nepal, incorporate various shades of green inspired by the Colorado landscape. LEFT While shopping for glacier granite stone for the water feature walls, Mary found one huge piece of stone that she decided to transform into a powder room vanity. To hang it, the team reinforced the wall with heavy steel brackets.