

ASPEN

# FLOATING ABOVE IT ALL

An original Starwood home maximizes its setting with a contemporary, airy remodel.

By Naomi Havlen

The original house may not have been ideal, but the parcel of land it sat upon sure was.

At the end of a cul-de-sac in Starwood, Aspen's first—and perhaps most exclusive—gated community, this particular piece of property has many enviable qualities, including privacy and the type of sweeping views of the Elk Mountains that many local homeowners covet. Its idyllic topography features a flat lawn that slopes gently down to a drop-off and extends far enough in one direction to entirely block views of the bustling traffic on Highway 82 and the Aspen Airport Business Center far below. The expansive views that stretch from Mount Sopris in the west to Independence Pass in the east are occasionally interrupted by an airplane popping into view—the only indication that the Aspen Airport lies on the valley floor below.

But the house that stood in this perfect location left something to be desired. One of the smallest homes in Starwood when the community was developed in the late 1960s, it had been added onto piecemeal over the past several decades by different homeowners, resulting in a floor plan with three distinct living spaces and a dark, rustic farmhouse interior.

It required great vision to see the potential this home had to be transformed into a modern mountain getaway that treated the mountain views with the respect they deserve. That potential began to be realized in 2012, when a couple whose primary residence is on the East Coast purchased the house.

"I think they had been looking for a new house, or a lot to build on, when they came across the house in its gorgeous spot, and they got stuck on this lot and its views," says David Johnston, of Aspen-based David Johnston Architects. Brought in to remodel the home in a contemporary style, Johnston and project architect John Hufker knew the change could be dramatic.

They decided to take their cues from the raised bench of land on which the home sits. "It all came down to the views—how can we take a mediocre house and maximize the potential views?" Hufker says.

The architects decided to preserve the home's existing footprint. "The house had good bones, and its orientation on the lot was appropriate," notes Johnston. Moreover, the homeowners wanted to retain the existing 6,440-square-foot size. The house had last been added on to in 1987, before current zoning codes went into effect limiting the size of homes in the area to 5,750 square feet. So a total rebuild would have resulted in less space. Instead, the design team focused on entirely reworking the

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**SCENERY SHOWCASE**  
New floor-to-ceiling windows helped dictate the strong contemporary style of this Starwood home.



PHOTO BY JOHN HUIJER





**ART OF COOKING**  
Simple but strong pieces define the kitchen, like the metal-topped bar, contemporary stools and a reverse-painted glass backsplash behind the stove.

PHOTO BY DAVID GUTTORO



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## DESIGN DETAILS

ARCHITECTURE  
**David Johnston Architects**  
970.925.3444  
djarchitects.com

INTERIOR DESIGN  
**Robyn Scott Interiors**  
970.927.5354  
rsidesigns.com

CONSTRUCTION  
**Kaegebein Fine Homebuilding**  
970.379.6228  
kfhhomebuilding.com

WOODWORK  
**David Rasmussen Design**  
970.963.1653  
davidrasmussendesign.com

METAL WORK  
**Paonia Iron Works**  
970.527.4641  
paoniairon.com



**LIGHT TOUCH**  
Clerestory windows and glass exterior walls make the new raised and flattened roof seem to float above the house.

...CONTINUED house's central portion—which includes the great room, kitchen and dining room—removing some interior walls that had broken up the space and restricted light.

A traditional gabled roof in that section was replaced at its highest point with a modern flat one that slopes gently up to expand the view toward the mountains. "We spent weeks figuring out how we were going to get the structure to appear as light as possible," Hufker says, noting the addition of long, narrow ribbon windows, which horizontally follow the new roof line, above most of the solid walls. The windows make the roof appear to float above the walls, contributing to the home's new light and airy atmosphere.

As merely enlarging the windows wouldn't have adequately captured the sweeping views, the architects removed the exterior rock walls along the south side and replaced them

entirely with glass, embedding it in places directly into the wood floors or drywall ceilings. The resulting floor-to-ceiling windows were a big commitment to a contemporary theme, says Johnston, and in turn influenced the "clean, contemporary and slick" interior choices made in the rest of the design.

Interior designer Robyn Scott, of Robyn Scott Interiors, conceived details from big—much of the furniture in the great room—to small—custom door pulls for the entryway closet. She used texture throughout to warm up the space. Walls have a plaster finish, and a chocolate-brown marble with intricate veins highlights the kitchen counters. Built-in wooden cabinetry that separated the dining and living areas from the kitchen was kept to maintain a sense of spatial flow, though new half-height cabinets replaced the old ones.

The moss-rock fireplace surround was replaced with steel, and large slabs of blue stone were affixed to the wall that bounds the north side of the living area. "The wall is one of the defining elements of the house, but with the [new] concrete floor, at first we worried, 'Is this going to feel like a jail cell?'" Scott says. "So we changed it to have a chiseled finish that really softens the whole wall and makes the room more inviting."

The wall also visually indicates where some of the home's private spaces begin. On the other side, a hallway leads to a stunning glass-walled office and then down a flight of stairs to the completely redone master suite, guest master and fitness room. (A

newly carved-out bunkroom and two other bedrooms are in a separate lower-level wing on the opposite side of the great room.)

Scott found other ways to lighten up the design to match the architecture, such as a large parchment-paper pendant light in the kitchen from local lighting designer Travis Fulton; it emits a gentle glow in a room with plenty of dark, hard surfaces. She and Carbondale-based woodworker David Rasmussen designed a three-part coffee table with faceted wood for the great room—an organic shape that contrasts nicely with the room's angular furnishings. The home's gray palette is offset by pops of color from the homeowners' burgeoning art collection, as well as by accents like mustard-gold chairs in the dining room and rugs and pillows in various shades of green.

Scott also cantilevered the great room's limestone fireplace hearth and recessed the toe kicks under a set of large cabinets so they appear to hang off the walls. One of the homeowners requested a couch facing the mountain view where he could drink coffee in the mornings, so Scott positioned a bright-green sofa from Minotti in just the right spot. She and Rasmussen also designed a coffee table of wood and Plexiglas to go in front of it.

With the views properly framed, the design modernized and the square footage preserved, the home is even better than new. Says Johnston, "Now the [homeowners] have the house of their dreams and couldn't be happier about it." **A**



**REST IN PEACE**  
The headboard wall in the master bedroom, designed by Robyn Scott and built by David Rasmussen, echoes the cantilevered elements of the great room.