

THE ARCHITECTURAL PHILOSOPHY OF RMT: CREATING A MOOD

To better understand the process that comes into play in the design of a beautiful home, Vail Valley Magazine's Style discussed the architectural philosophy of RMT Architects with principal Jeff Terrell, one of the firm's three founding partners. Following is a blend of their views on architecture and a sampling of RMT's recently completed homes.

Being the sculptor of a significant space incorporates the creator's attention to multiple details. One is the interplay of unique forms on a particular site. The client's tastes and functional requirements are elemental. The internal logic of the building is key.

There is a negative and a positive interface to be considered when shaping a structure that will become a home. The design of exteriors and interiors results in spaces where people will live their lives within the artful and practical configuration.

"Architecture is the focused effort to sculpt hard materials into places where people spend their lives. To conceive of the design process as the fabrication of some blueprints is completely wrong," says architect Jeffrey Terrell, one of three founding partners of Robertson Miller Terrell Architects. The partnership was conceived in 1996 when the three joined forces to form a client-focused architectural enterprise.

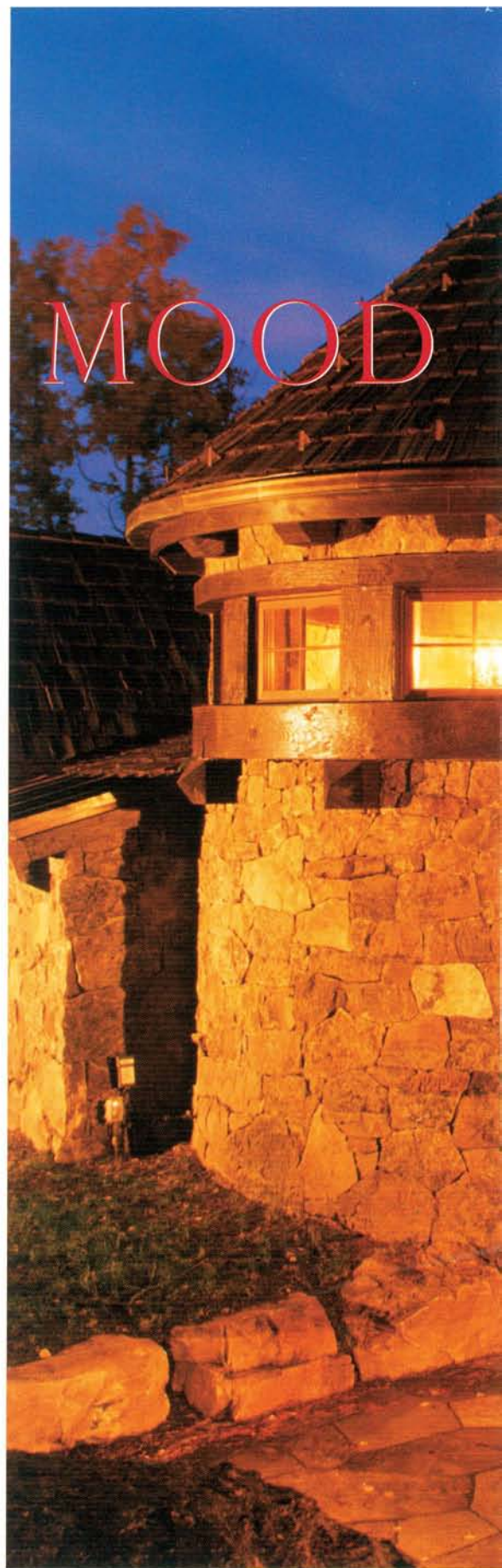
Principal Harvey Robertson typically runs the firm's projects of large scope, such as mixed-use condominiums and ski lodges. Paul Miller and Jeff Terrell focus on high-end homes and resort design work.

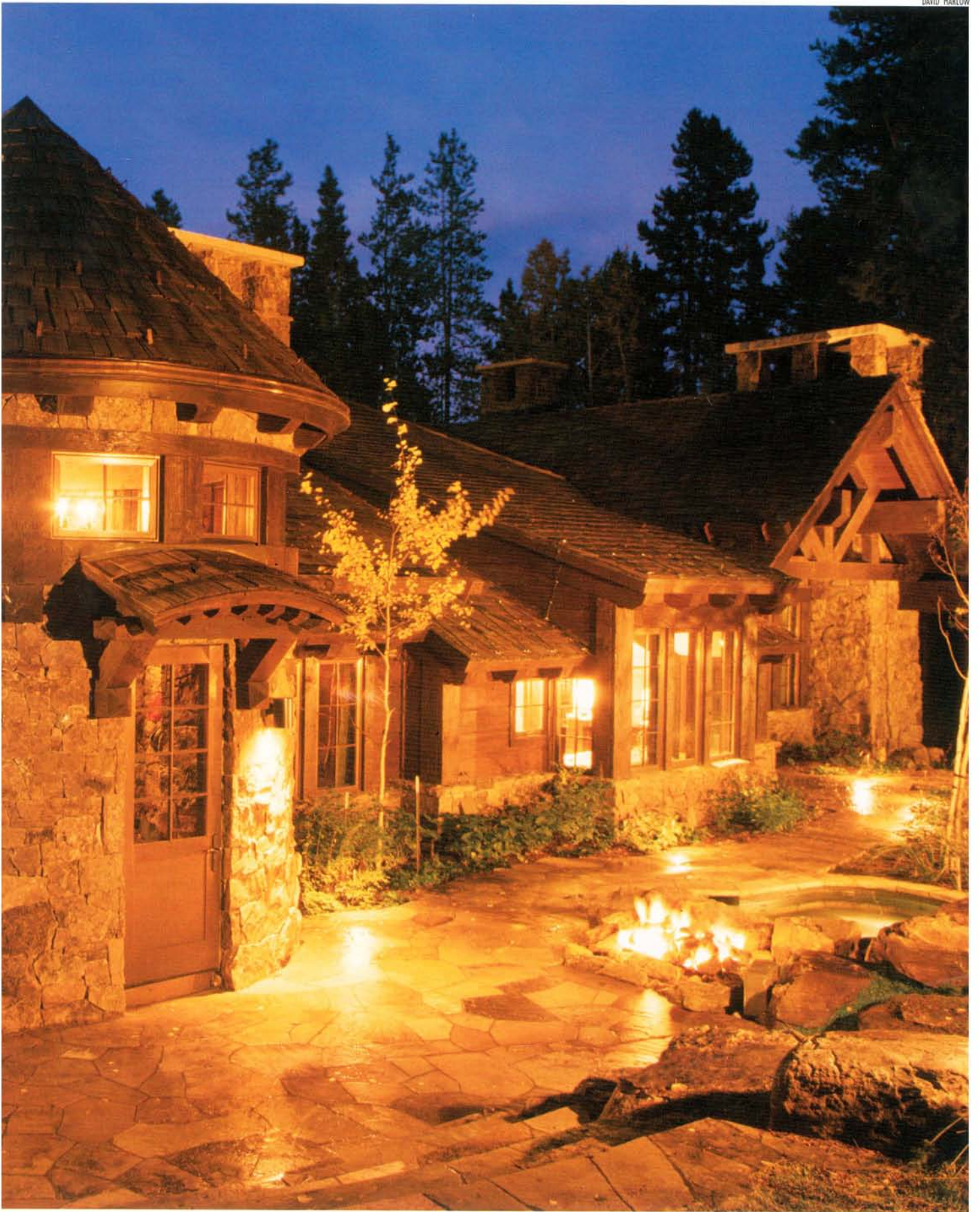
Besides its Rocky Mountain influence, the scope of the company extends to Maine, Georgia, California, Indiana, Utah, Texas, Connecticut and New York as well as New Zealand and England. RMT Architects has offices in Avon, Colorado, and Kansas City, Kansas.

Terrell sees design as an opportunity to predict the future. "An architect sees things long before they happen. After meeting with the client, I really just dream with my hands," Terrell puts pen to paper and sketches, "The irregularity of your hand may suggest something that your conscious brain hasn't thought of. It is important to use your hand because it creates a separate dynamic. The hand suggests things you may not have considered in a solely mental or technological process. Designing originally by hand adds a certain humanity to the final design. There is nothing formulaic about what we do. Each design is unique to the personalities of our clients."

RMT designs in three dimensions rather than in floor plan view. "After all, people do not live in a two-dimensional world. They live in a world of texture, light, space, and human interaction," Terrell says.

The partners believe there is an order to the creative design process. Terrell explains how they use this order to compose the finished work, "The architect models, tests, then pushes and pulls the design elements, if you will. It is important to step back and critique. Then one must morph the design into something that is greater than its components."







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Like a conductor orchestrating a musical composition, Terrell believes that with architecture there is “no distinction between landscaping, exteriors, interiors and lighting.” They come together to form the whole, the integrated and desired piece.

Taking the comparison a step further, he states: “Architecture is frozen music. It draws in the viewer and evokes feelings.” Creating this mood is what RMT Architects strive for as they use “bricks and sticks” to create living spaces and mood for their clients.

“We add value and beauty to an industry that all too often ends up creating nothing more than buildings. The detail and thought we bring to the table is what we provide our clients,” says Terrell.

Asked to create buildings on a wide variety of landscapes, RMT's goal is that on completion it has a sense of belonging to the land. An important contributing factor to the building's shape is that it seems to emerge from the land.

Be it an extremely steep piece of land or spacious flat terrain, RMT uses all design elements to come to a solution. The firm's body of work expresses an integration of design with landscape and focuses on the importance of light in balance with other design details.

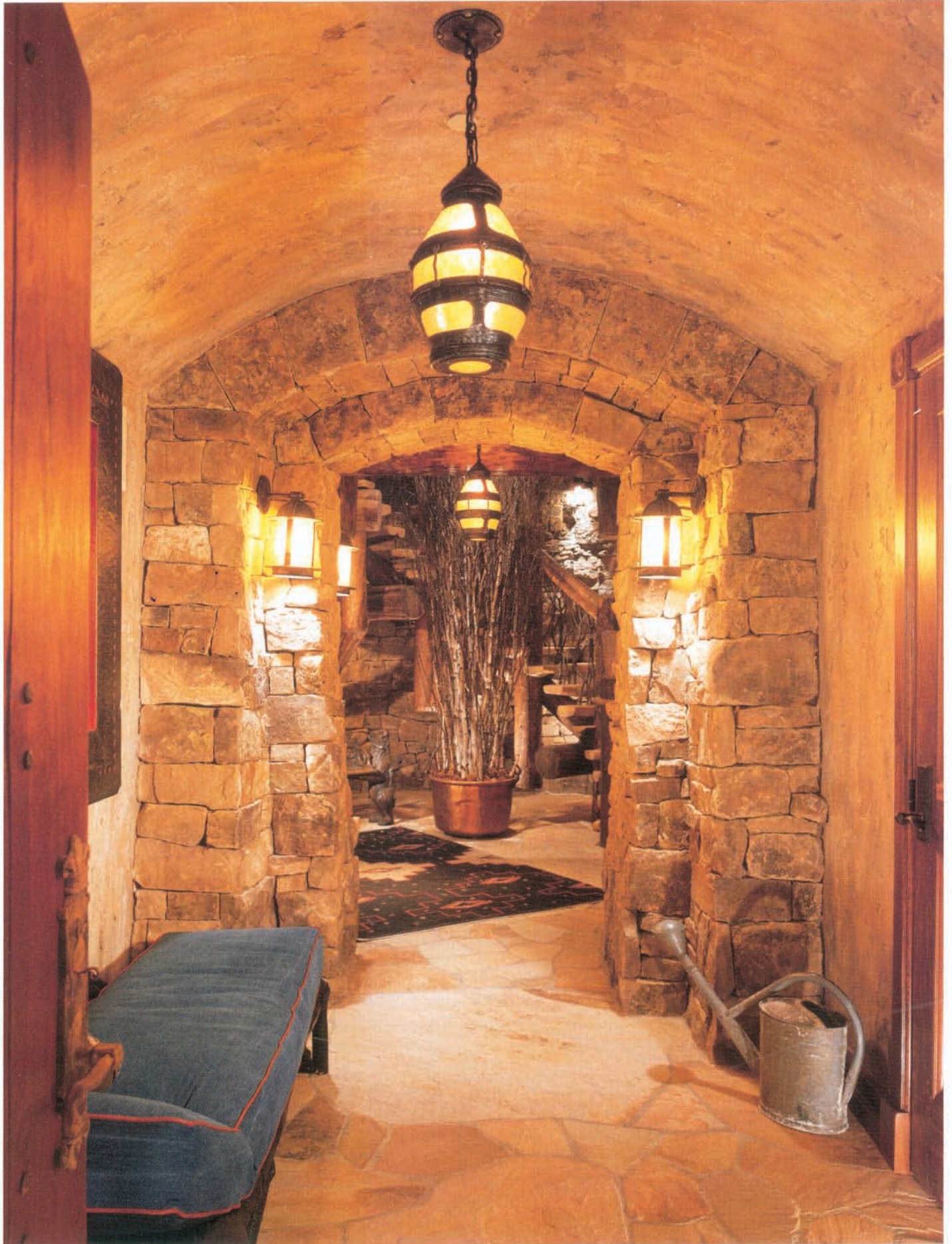
CLASSIC AMERICAN SKI LODGE

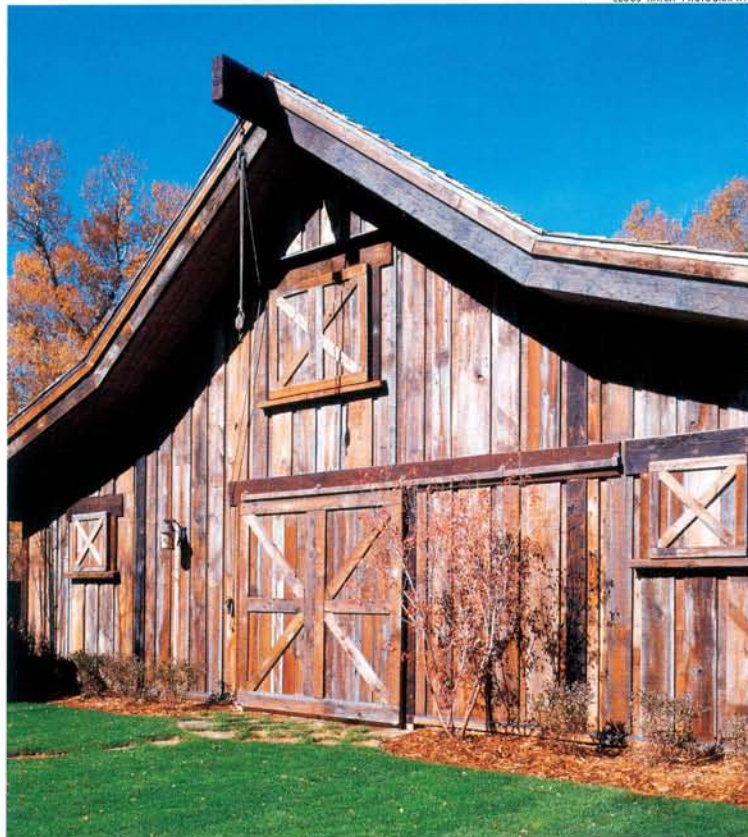
On the steepest piece of land they have ever designed, RMT's task was to sculpt a classic American ski lodge for its European owner. After researching the great lodges of the American West, they designed a home replete with details that include a dark lacquered finish to the log surfaces. “This re-creates the feeling to the touch of generations past — of age and permanence that our client adored,” says Robertson.

Two equal fireplaces on opposite walls of the room frame 24-foot-tall windows that open to the view of the mountain in the distance.

To work, the residence would have to be entered on the very lowest level of the structure. Considering light, interior and exterior space, and function, the design required a 40-foot cut in the hillside. The entrance solution was to create a cozy, mysterious vestibule and place the main staircase in the center of the adjoining space leading up to the great room. A three-story octagonal stair tower brings in an exclamation of light whose origin one cannot see from the entry.

A dense pattern of log work accents the ceiling of the great room and contrasts the quiet, aged finish of the arched plaster ceiling at the residence's front door.





CASTLES IN COLORADO

Responding to a client's desire to blend two entirely different styles and histories of architecture and create a 17th century French castle and ski home in Colorado's deep forest, RMT melded these ideas to result in a distinctive home that used Colorado materials and rustic detailing with European traditions and proportion.

In this 10,000-square-foot Bachelor Gulch home, the architects created a memorable entrance to the home's master wing in the form of an anteroom just past the entry door. The result is the appearance of a main foyer in a medieval home converted into its current use. The space serves as a stunning location for the owners' artwork.

The Old World look is reinforced by access in the form of a dramatic covered wooden bridge that "literally flies through the center of the house." The entrance is unforgettable with moss rock trim, refined art niches, atmospheric lighting, and patterned stone floors. "Hard to believe that the space inside those doors is a square in the floor plans, isn't it?" says partner Paul Miller.

The home's main access is a stone turret with timber detailing, a shingled conical roof, and high windows that filter light down into the space. The mass of the stone exterior "creates a sense of heartiness, which the owner desired considering its location in the harsh extremes of the Rocky Mountain winter," says Terrell.

An organic, free form, in-ground hot tub sits in the hillside next to the turret. Rockwork and native plantings accent the exterior space. Robertson says, "It is pleasing to the eye when we nestle our designs into the land in a harmonious way."

SECLUDED FISHING RETREAT

The beauty of vertical reclaimed spruce siding makes this barn a focal point of another client's secluded river getaway and equestrian ranch. RMT conceived of the three-car garage as an old barn, which is a prominent design feature on the property. A sliding door features exposed traditional hinge mechanisms, a hayloft look and a pulley system.

The structure of the main house incorporates stone and log. The residence has walkout access directly to the river. Its expansive river frontage deck is an outdoor room positioned at water's edge.

"We decided to make the barn a different material to ensure the main house held its rightful place as the most important structure on the property," Terrell says. "The contrast between the two is visually rich."

REDEFINING CONVENTIONAL

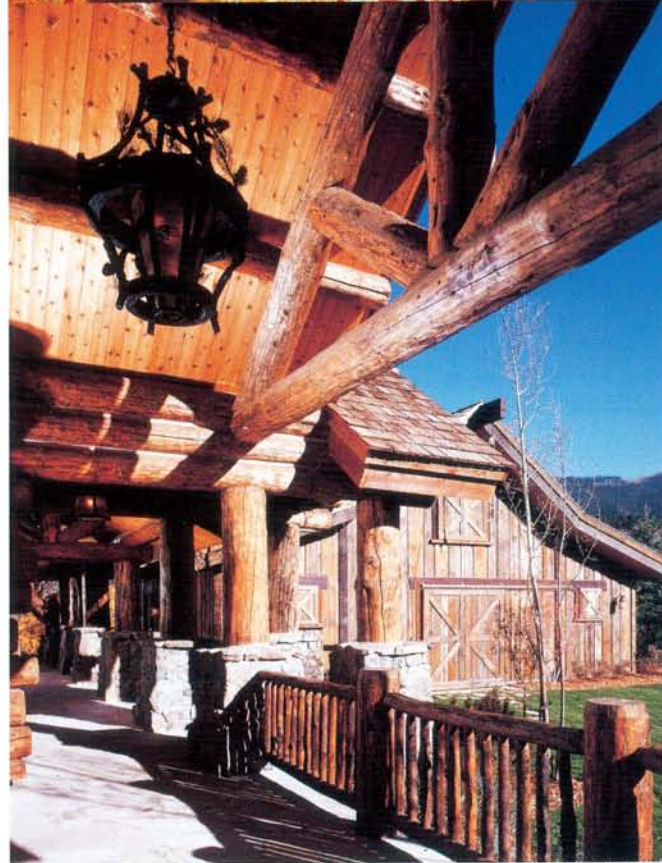
In this cozy home on the slopes of Beaver Creek, the owner wanted a memorable bath experience. The concept of a soothing and relaxing bath inside an eight-ton boulder might have been a stretch of the imagination and of the original request, but it works to the delight of its occupants.

"The intent here was to blow the idea of the conventional bathroom out of the water, so to speak," says Terrell. "It occurred to us that this massive boulder, which straddles the exterior wall of the home appears to pre-date the existence of the house." Someone might just as well have built his homestead on the rock.

The surface inside was diamond polished to a glass smooth finish. The tub fits two comfortably. The bath is filled with a very efficient reclaimed farm pump. Barn wood faces the nearby shower. Antique glass in the windows assures privacy, and the bathroom becomes a space of unforgettable intimacy and fun.



DAVID MARLOW



CLOOS HATCH PHOTOGRAPHY

THE PLEASURE OF A QUIET READ

A tall library might suit tall tales. Tucked away in a stately home in Strawberry Park above Beaver Creek is a study of interesting proportions. The 13-foot-tall wall of windows in this RMT-designed home library lets in extraordinary morning light to create a warm and inviting workspace.

Leather-wrapped handrails on an interior stairway lead up to a series of bookshelf walls, complete with a sliding ladder for selecting a perfect read. Weathered leather wall panels are set in a wood grid pattern, which rises up the entire height of the room and culminates in a coffered wood ceiling.

It is a private room of marble, wood and leather that creates a mood of quiet contemplation or study.

The philosophy of RMT Architects strongly incorporates the choice of materials and the consideration of light in their architectural work. As designers, they integrate both natural and man-made lighting into the process from the beginning. Light as a language of design is a hallmark to RMT's design efforts. The combination of stone and wood materials for function and to delight is integral to the beauty of the finished product. A few words follow on these subjects...

THE IMPORTANCE OF LIGHT

Light is a hallmark of RMT's approach, and its consideration begins at the conception of a design project. The partners believe that light must factor into the creation of a space from the very beginning. "There is nothing that can ruin architecture faster than a poor, or ignored, lighting design," says Miller. "The way we maximize the lighting design is to think of it initially as an important participant in each space. It is on equal footing with the walls, tiles, furniture, windows, and colors. Too often, it is brought into the equation too late; this is a mistake that we do not want to make."

The presence of light in an RMT-designed home is integral to the whole and creates an exclamation that accents the spaces it illuminates.

THE NATURAL WONDERS OF STONE

Working in different geographic areas keeps RMT alert to design possibilities with natural materials. For example, the rolling silhouettes of a particular landscape might combine with surrounding sandstone strata. The use of a stone that gives a solid, safe, and permanent appearance complements the style and design of their architecture.

Massive stonework provides a grounding effect on a large structure, while stonework elements in archways or around windows can give a more subtle feel. The texture of stone speaks its own language and is an inviting design medium.

In the end, "The choice of stone depends on the emotion we want to create for the client and visitors to the home," says Terrell.

The goal of RMT Architects is to create designs that elicit surprise and evoke emotion. Their collection of work embodies multiple elements and creative effort that make up the language of the 'quintessential home.' First spoken by clients who offer a list of dreams that define what they want, the architects go on to create a home that suits client lifestyle as it is expressed in final form. ❖

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