

SHIFTING GEARS

ON THE SHORES OF PAYETTE LAKE,
A CONTEMPORARY HOME GROWS
OUT OF ITS ROCKY SURROUNDINGS.

WRITTEN BY MINDY PANTIEL / PHOTOGRAPHY BY LAURA HULL

INTERIOR DESIGN / CORINNE BROWN, BROWN DESIGN GROUP
ARCHITECTURE / HEATHER SUSEMIHL AND
ANDY LAIDLAW, MCCALL DESIGN & PLANNING, INC.
HOME BUILDER / STEVE LACEY, STEVE LACEY CONSTRUCTION
LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE / GUSTI LAIDLAW AND
JAMIE LAIDLAW, LAIDLAW LANDSCAPE COMPANY

At the entry to a McCall, Idaho, house designed by architects Heather Susemihl and her since-retired partner Andy Laidlaw, landscape designers Gusti Laidlaw and Jamie Laidlaw introduced narrow rows of cut basalt that lead to the front door fabricated by White Bird Woods. LBL sconces illuminate the space at night.



Be it classic contemporary or country French, creating a home that inspires familiarity is like being cloaked in an adult version of a security blanket. For a California couple with several traditional residences under their belts, all signs suggested their Idaho vacation retreat would follow a similar script. “They were firmly rooted in particular details, patterns and colors,” says California-based interior designer Corinne Brown, a veteran of other projects with the clients. “Plaids, reds, greens, blues, antiques and distressed furniture made them feel comfortable.” But the rugged site on the shores of Payette Lake, defined by massive outcroppings of batholith granite, had other plans. Crafting a layout on the rock domes required contours stepping down to the lake, and what started out as a contemporary form with a traditional touch slowly morphed into something else. “At the owners’ request, I tried traditional gables and curved forms,” says architect Heather Susemihl, who began the design process with

her since-retired partner Andy Laidlaw. “Nothing felt quite right until we put that flat roof on the building.” The edgy roof form paved the way for other modern-leaning elements, such as exposed I-beams and smooth concrete board-form walls to contrast with the surrounding stone. Months turned into years as every aspect of the project was considered and reviewed by the owners. “It required,” says Brown, “considerable psychic energy on their part to feel secure about decisions relating to modern architecture with which they had no familiarity.” Over time, the couple became devoted to the vision of a strong horizontal structure that fully embraced the craggy locale, going so far as to request exposed granite on the interiors. But, as builder Steve Lacey attests, integrating the structure into the bedrock—and the rock blasting and cutting required—proved tricky. “The granite is very unpredictable, so every measure was taken to prevent it from cracking and breaking outside the building envelope. The building-stone interface was vitally important, so it

Builder Steve Lacey oversaw the construction of the home, primarily composed of rock, teak and board-form concrete, which integrates into its natural environment.



Interior designer Corinne Brown selected a pair of Stefan Heiliger chairs and Thayer Coggin sofas to establish a contemporary tone in the living room. Accent pieces include the coffee table by Holly Hunt, the oak rectangular side table by Harbinger, the lamp by Mimi London, and the round table by Robert James Collection. The grouping is arranged atop a carpet from Amara Rugs in Torrance, California. A slab from Russell-Zuhl Petrified Wood in Holyoke, Massachusetts, hangs on a wall; the piano is a Steinway.

A Barbara Barry rug defines a sitting area on the lower level. Pieces with a midcentury vibe—a Thayer Coggin sofa in chenille by Perennials and an Eames chair from Design Within Reach—are joined by a coffee table resembling a gear from Ralph Pucci in Los Angeles and an Arteriors side table. The ceiling mount fixture is from Hubbardton Forge; the floor lamp is from Scott + Cooner in Dallas.





was imperative that we not disturb any rock outside the envelope,” says Lacey. “We used a combination of expanding grout, dynamite diamond wire sawing and jackhammering to remove pieces within the envelope,” he says. It took months for the crew to take down the rock one part at a time.

Other materials also celebrated the site’s rugged surroundings. Similar to the wood siding that dominates the exterior, the front door is fashioned from teak. At the entryway, a staircase with open oak treads touches a large boulder, one of many instances of the stone entering the home. However, there were initial doubts about the board-form concrete wall that flows inside. “The whole team was there as the owners considered covering it, hiding it and softening it,” recalls Brown. “Finally, it was agreed that changing it would have diluted the design, and the overall vision won out.”

Meanwhile, landscape designers Gusti Laidlaw and Jamie Laidlaw, a mother-and-son team, weighed in with plans for the site. Jamie Laidlaw points out the Pennsylvania bluestone selected for the walkways and patios proved the perfect complement for the granite, and it matched the colors of the surrounding mosses, lichens and native vegetation as well. The duo also conceived the basalt planks, milled to look like wood, that define the main entry. “The rest of the property is lush with native wildflowers and aspen trees that soften the angular nature of the building, but we wanted a more formal look for the entry to draw your eye to the front door,” Jamie Laidlaw says.

Inside, the task of selecting furnishings proved no less painstaking, as Brown slowly encouraged her clients in the direction of Thayer Coggin sofas and the strong contemporary lines of Stefan Heiliger recliners in the living room (the latter chosen after the clients asked

Hanging pendants by Rocky Mountain Hardware light the bi-level island in the kitchen, which features an upper counter crafted from a single slab of walnut by Don’s Cabinet Shop. The leather counter stools and desk chair in the corner are by Holly Hunt; the Waterstone faucets are from Waterware.



The kitchen’s concrete counters by Cloudhidden Studios meld with the colors in the marble backsplash. Jaymark supplied the Wolf range and stove hood along with the eucalyptus cabinets, which are accented by bronze drawer and cabinet pulls from Rocky Mountain Hardware.

The dining area cantilevers over the bedrock and has glass on two sides, making for spectacular views. Holly Hunt side and armchairs circle a custom Wayne Design Group glass table, while above is a Ralph Pucci glass chandelier. Solis Betancourt sconces with a bronze patina flank the doors, and a wool Tabriz rug from Amara Rugs grounds the space.



to see something more modern). “The furnishings ultimately followed the architecture,” says the designer, whose selection of a thick, bubble-glass dining table had the effect of bringing the lake’s surface floating into the room. Above the table, the light fixture, with sculptural presence reminiscent of I-beams, ties back to the real thing in the living room. Persian rugs, something for which the clients have a particular affinity, brought a level of refinement and ultimately spawned the soft palette selected throughout. “I put together fabrics and color concepts around these rugs and everything came together,” says Brown of the muted blues and greens layered with neutrals that also reflect the natural surroundings.

For Brown, the entire process stands out as a tremendous learning opportunity. “I now have a deeper understanding of what is required to accomplish great things,” the interior designer says. “The main ingredient seems to be a client committed to getting a group of people to invest themselves in a vision and develop a deep commitment to quality.” And, she adds, “It also doesn’t hurt to have a magnificent site.” ■

In the master bedroom, the combination of a low ceiling, expansive windows and a custom platform bed by Don's Cabinet Shop enhances the feeling of intimacy. Dubbed the "tree house," the room's soft colors reflect the outdoors. The hand-knotted area rug is from Amara Rugs.



Below, left: Stones from the property fill a recess beneath the master bathroom vanity, which is inset with integrated concrete sinks and Brizo faucets. Illuminating the scene are sconces by Hubbardton Forge. Underfoot is porcelain flooring by Ann Sacks.

Below, right: Designer Courtney Snyder of McCall Design & Planning, who worked with Susemihl on the home, drew the concept sketch for the children's bunkhouse bathroom to be a whimsical space reminiscent of the natural environment. The Pratt & Larson tiles are from Contempo Tile & Stone.



Opposite: A series of built-in terraces connected by paths carefully nestled into the rocks culminates in a lakeside sitting area. The RH teak chairs and sofa sport Perennials linen; the cushion color was selected to blend with the lake. A square Tuuci umbrella from Blue Sky Outdoor in Menlo Park, California, offers shade.

Below: When it came to siting the house, the team aimed to harmonize it within the natural landscape as much as possible and placed the structure within the existing evergreens and bedrock. Windows were sourced from Agnora and View Point.



“THE COLOR OF THE CUSHIONS
FLOWS WITH THE COLOR OF THE
LAKE, AND THE PATIOS FLOW FROM
THE NATURAL STONE STEP PATHS.”

—CORINNE BROWN