



A Jackson Modernist

A METAL-CLAD SPACE IN THE HEART OF WYOMING EXHIBITS STEPHEN DYNIA'S EYE FOR SURPRISING ARCHITECTURAL FORMS AND MATERIALS

ARCHITECT STEPHEN DYNIA IS AN ANOMALY in Jackson, Wyoming. He wears black leather jackets, loves noise and designs buildings with sexy canopy roofs and interiors with metal sliding walls. Building mega-size log houses furnished with oversize lodgepole furniture doesn't suit him, because he believes they are "disingenuous and unimaginative replicas" of indigenous frontier cabins. That is not to say Dynia doesn't belong in that cozy western town, population ten thousand, but the reality of living there shocks even him. "It's an odd life that I've somehow come to occupy," he says. "I can't tell you that I had fantasies about the ranching life or spending my winters skiing. It's weird that I've ended up in a place this small."

Dynia, born in New Haven, Connecticut, and a graduate of the Rhode Island School of Design, lived and worked in New York for the better part of a decade. A senior designer for Skidmore, Owings and Merrill, he helped design skyscrapers, including Bruce Eichner's Times Square office tower. After six years of working in corporate architecture, Dynia needed a change. Coaxed by his friend and colleague, Lisa Carranza, Dynia traveled to Wyoming in the early nineties.

Gradually Jackson Hole and the opportunity to build everything from eight-thousand-square-foot homes to restaurants to inexpensive rentals lured him into setting up an office. Exploring alternative building styles in keeping with the rustic surroundings piqued his curiosity. Again

opposite: A cubelike structure with a rusted-sheet-metal facade and painted doors is the self-designed place that Wyoming architect Stephen Dynia calls home. **above:** Eames chairs and a Modernica sofa are in the dining-and-living area, which has an exposed ceiling and lacquered maple-veneer plywood walls.



above left: Recycled countertops from an old high-school laboratory are featured in the kitchen. Perforated metal screens separate the area from the study.

above right: Adjacent to the study is the dressing area. A stainless-steel washbasin complements painted plywood flooring; a sliding maple panel allows privacy.

opposite: The perforated metal screens continue in the bedroom.

and again, he found that his projects compelled him to connect to the place and its history, but not necessarily in a contextual way. Creating buildings in a place where environment drives the design challenges him more than doing what he calls "architecture with a capital A."

Introducing contemporary ideas to Jackson hasn't always been easy. "Jackson is not a place of great diversity," says Dynia. "My work definitely pushes the envelope. Sometimes I feel like I'm fighting an uphill battle." He often finds himself at town-council meetings, seeking building variances for materials such as rusted metal or for one of his unusually shaped structures.

That was true of his own home, a rusted-sheet-metal structure just shy of a perfect cube. While the site and his needs prompted much of the design, it was the simplicity of a cube and the stacking of living space that kindled his creativity. Sandwiched between a rooftop garden and a garage, his square living area is mostly open, divided in part by a row of metal shelving units covered by sliding screens. The idea, unique in Jackson Hole, was to drive into his garage and then access the living quarters and the garden from internal stairways. To achieve his design, he battled town square-footage rules, conventional secondary-residence regulations and setback standards.

Accustomed to city traffic, Dynia chose a downtown Jackson property with an old house that straddled two lots adjacent to an alley. He built two identical secondary residences, or "cubes," on the alley. He lives in one, and he rents out the other as well as the original house. Surrounded by a hodgepodge of shacks, cabins, trailers and one-story suburban ranch homes, he felt comfortable living in this "quaint, slummy neighborhood" in the shadow of Snow King Mountain. "After being a renter for so many years, I decided it was time to own something," he says. "But



I couldn't imagine myself in a conventional two-bedroom family home. I was attracted to the idea of a cube and the economy of it. I wanted a simple, efficient home—a consolidation of living."

Dynia's dream to have a rooftop garden drove the design. "The beauty of Jackson is not lost on me," says Dynia. So in place of a conventional deck space, Dynia created his garden. The elevated garden allows him to enjoy views of Snow King Mountain while increasing his living area. "The garden feels absolutely private," Dynia says. "It is thrust up into the realm of the mountain, and all the clutter of the dense neighborhood disappears." Furnished with rattan steamer chairs, a fire pit, a refrigerator and a hot tub and enclosed by a border of wild grasses and white cosmos, the garden provides Dynia with a place to read and relax. Sounds of birds, traffic, and Wednesday and Saturday nights at the rodeo satisfy his need for noise.

The outdoor room also makes a stunning environment for entertaining. "I value an active life that's engaged with individuals and community," he says. Creating a place to host cocktail parties for friends, colleagues, visiting artists and local art-association gatherings has provided Dynia with a venue for supporting and staying in touch with the local creative community.

Dynia opted for a simple loft-style living space. He also chose to use inexpensive and recycled materials. The floors are painted plywood; the walls, lacquered maple-veneer plywood. He chose appropriate contemporary furniture and turned an old high-school science-room sink and counter into his kitchen. He also snagged a few metal armatures that once held beakers and transformed them into drink holders and flower vases. Industrial shelving units provide storage and double as a room divider. Perforated metal screens slide back and forth to hide clutter. The ceiling shows off composite bar joists made of engineered lumber and galvanized metal tubing.

The bottom-floor garage was essential, Dynia explains. Not only did he need a place for his car, but he also required more room for storage since he was determined to keep his living space simple and clean. "My garage makes living in a partitioned loft viable simply because of all the storage space," he says. The architect compares this type of arrangement to a Roman palazzo style of living in which the utilities are on the entry level and the living quarters on the second floor.

What does the future hold for Dynia? "I feel like my work is about taking risks, about taking a path that's not heavily trodden," he says. To keep his mind sharp and his creativity charged, he often visits New York and takes trips abroad to see important buildings and to immerse himself in a larger cultural environment. He is even contemplating applying for a scholarship to study abroad. But Jackson seems to have found a place in his heart, and for now he is still passionate about forging a new architectural voice in the West. "I do very clean and modern buildings," Dynia says. "Nobody comes to me for anything other than that. If they do, they get out fast." +

opposite: A horizontal screen protects Dynia's rooftop garden from Wyoming winds. **above:** Guests gather near a fire pit on the rooftop, from which expansive vistas of the Jackson landscape can be enjoyed.