



Residence 3, Exterior: Observation deck with spiral stair access and outdoor fireplace.

FORGING A NEW FRONTIER

Stephen Dynia's architectural philosophy favors context and light over Western fantasy

Jackson Hole's pioneer past lures retirees and second homeowners with a dream of log cabin living. However, you won't catch architect Stephen Dynia fulfilling anyone's historicist fantasy. Many property owners strew the area surrounding the Teton range with log cabin mansions; parts of downtown Jackson, with its wooden walkways and Wild West saloons, approximate a Disneyland frontier town. Some architectural interpretations of the area mask the relationship to the current time, Dynia said. "I feel that architecture should relate to the context and time, a moment of history, and it need not be disrespectful to the history of a place," said Dynia, who has been based in Jackson since 1993. "Architecture has a responsibility to have a relationship to that time and not mask that relationship in historical clothing."

Dynia's philosophy is more progressive. He seeks to understand the context of a place and so design buildings that suit, and celebrate, the landscape. At Stephen Dynia Architects, his 12-year-old practice, "We've sort of had a mission to explore architecture that has to do with space and form and texture and light," said Dynia, 50. "The context is the landscape. All our work tries to blur the relationship of inside and outside." Glass houses, for example, work well in the Teton Valley for the access they give to the beauty of the outdoors.

The play of light and the area's agricultural style influence much of



Commercial Building: Light filters through the wood slatted sun shading and mechanical equipment screen.

BELOW

Residence 2, Exterior: The view approaching the house shows attitude of transparency in landscape. The master bedroom wing roof rises to the east. and the entry feature with sky viewing room above has the roof rising toward the mountain view to the west. Materials: zinc roof, cedar siding, stone.

RIGHT

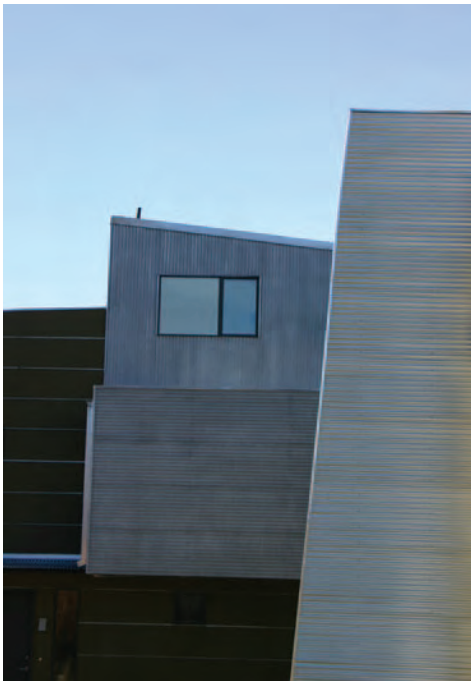
Residence 2, Interior: The detail window system includes sliding glass doors that retract from every corner.



Dynia's work. The building he designed for his own office incorporates two stair towers with slatted walls that filter light in the same manner as a crumbling barn. Another commercial building currently under construction across the road from his practice bears a sun screen that pulls away from the main body of the building. The "diaphanous, gauzy" screen, as Dynia describes it, runs around the roof's edge to provide shade for the large windows beneath, but also to encourage light to dance through its slits.



Residence 3, Exterior: Entrance with copper shingles, rusted steel roof, stone wall and wood siding.



LEFT TO RIGHT
810 Housing: The color was chosen for compatibility with the landscape.

810 Housing: The controversial metal siding.

RIGHT TOP

Residence 1, Exterior: Entry. Roof rises to the south with clerestory windows. Concrete wall extends beyond kitchen to the living/dining room. Materials: concrete, rusted steel, cedar siding

RIGHT BOTTOM

Residence 1, Interior: The open ceiling in the kitchen extends beyond kitchen to the living/dining room. Sliding glass walls provide access and views.

Dynia’s commercial and residential designs are characterized by clean lines and a geometric symmetry with the landscape, yet some have met with controversy. A residential complex completed in August 2005, known as 810 West, garnered criticism for being un-Western. Some complained the corrugated metal siding glared too brightly; the siding was subsequently oxidized to dull the reflection. The building also bears yellow and brown touches some disliked.

However, Dynia said the complex comprises the colors of the landscape, and that the building’s shape and materials contain references to the area’s ranching and agricultural heritage. Twenty-two of the apartments are deed restricted and 14 were sold at their market value. Buyers snapped up the units.

“All the deck space has really great views and sun,” Dynia said. “They have way more glass than other affordable housing. Usually affordable housing is just a conventional building with windows.”

Dynia also felt enthused about the project for its social values. As mixed income housing, it serves Jackson’s working population, but the deed restricted and free market units still share many of the same attrib-





Residence Interior view: The timber truss permits uninterrupted glass wall and sun shading.

utes, “so there’s not a ghetto side and a wealthy side,” he said.

Along with other area architects, Dynia has offered design advice pro bono on projects that affect the community at large, such as Jackson’s Albertsons supermarket. He didn’t want the structure to blight the surroundings as “just a big box at the back of a parking lot,” he said. “I can’t live in a place and not get involved in it.”

The social element of the Center for the Arts’ new Performing Arts Pavilion also forms part of that ongoing project’s appeal. Dynia has designed a 500-seat theater for the Pavilion that inverts the usual orchestra-to-balcony ratio, with 200 seats in the former and 300 in the latter. The reversal will enable actors to feel as if they are performing to a full house during the off-season, when smaller audiences visit the theater.

“It’s incredibly exciting to be able to form a space in a facility that’s about education and entertainment and cultural exchange,” he said. “It’s more meaningful. They’re the things that bring people together.”

After obtaining his degree in architecture from the Rhode Island School of Design, Dynia spent years working for corporate architecture firm Skidmore, Owings and Merrill in New York City. The company was like “the IBM of architecture,” he said. Now, he feels gratified to steer his own ship in Jackson’s small, rural – and feisty – community.

“I have a very healthy appreciation of the resource, the environment, here,” Dynia said. “And there’s something I like about a little controversy.” ■

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