



**OUTDOOR LIVING** Stephen Dynia designed this Jackson, Wyo., home with sliding walls of insulated glass to create continuity between the indoors and outdoors.

## MOUNTAIN MODERNISM

The next wave of ski-town architects are rethinking everything—starting with the front door.

By Kimberly Beekman

**IT'S A SKIER'S ULTIMATE DREAM: A LOG CABIN WITH PITCHED ROOFS, DORMER WINDOWS AND WOOD shingles, nestled in the trees.** But when clients come to architect Peter Gluck with this in mind, they're surprised to find, after answering a few basic questions, that what they really want is a far cry from the archetypal cozy mountain cabin. "Everybody wants lots of light, multifunctional space, interesting shapes and a good view of the mountains," says Gluck, whose New York City-based firm has designed several projects in Aspen, Colo. The dream homes his clients describe are modernist—and they might be changing mountain architecture as we know it.

## INTELLIGENCE



**LIGHT AND LOFT** Open, multifunctional spaces flooded with light are big selling points of modernist design. This downtown Jackson loft, designed by Dynia, consists of one large room divided into a bedroom, living room and kitchen by moveable screens.

The word "modernism" invokes images of glass boxes, minimal furnishings and concrete floors. In other words, houses that belong in progressive cities such as Seattle or San Francisco—certainly not in cowboy towns. But in ski towns such as Aspen and Jackson, Wyo., they're a growing trend. "I think the lodge-looking houses have run their course," says Chris Bendon, planning director for the City of Aspen.

Up until the past five years or so, conventional wisdom dictated that a home be built out of indigenous materials in order to fit into its surroundings. But according to Jackson Hole architect Stephen Dynia, who, partnering with the Town of Jackson, built a controversial

29-unit modernist project downtown, that's changing: A house that's appropriate in its environment is one that responds to that environment, he says. "And the context here is the landscape. How does a house respond to that?" Not, he says, by blocking out views with traditional log walls and small windows. "A house here needs to have great transparency. The only reason you're here is for the outdoors, so the glass box in this environment is very appropriate."

That doesn't mean, however, that authentic old cabins have no aesthetic value. "The space inside is really warm and beautiful," Dynia says, but to recreate them does not make practical sense. First of all, most people aren't

interested in faithfully reproducing the old cabin; they're more inclined to want a compromised version. "When somebody wants a beautiful cabin but they want it to be 10,000 square feet, you get a rambling cacophony of big logs and lots of glass."

The primary reason that building traditional homes should be reconsidered, Dynia argues, is because structures should evolve along with materials and technol-

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ogy. "Traditional" architecture was first designed to be functional and to use available materials wisely. "People made tiny windows because they didn't want to lose heat. They made buildings low so they could lift logs into place without machinery. They used logs because milled timber wasn't available," Dynia says.

In effect, the design of today's traditional home is rooted more in sentimentality than contemporary reality. "The first strategy in making a house traditional is to mimic the way something was built 50 to 100 years ago," Dynia says. "So building a traditional house is an exercise in nostalgia, not in architecture."

Not only is traditional architecture outmoded, Dynia and Gluck argue, but it also fails to serve the functions it was originally designed to perform. Gluck points to the pitched roof, a prerequisite for any traditional mountain home, as an example. Originating in Switzerland, sloped roofs served their purpose extraordinarily well. They comprised two layers—a steep shingled layer on the outside and a second, less-steep layer underneath, which allowed for an insulating airspace between the exterior roof and the heated home below. Consequently, snow didn't melt and would blow off in the wind. Today, architects and builders have stripped the function from the form, building one-layer roofs that resemble their ancestors but don't actually

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work as well. "Without a layer of insulation, sloped roofs build up ice, and you have to have electric wires all over the eaves," Gluck says.

A flat roof, however, solves the problem in the same way the Swiss once did: It uses available materials—concrete, for example—to create a platform that the wind will keep clear of snow. Any snow that remains serves as insulation. This, argues Dynia, is why modernism is the rational choice: Its first tenet is that form follows function. "Modernism is an understanding that architecture is deeper than just what something looks like," says Dynia.

Using today's materials and technolo-

gies isn't only a better choice, it's the responsible thing to do, says Dennis Scholl, a contemporary art collector who owns a modernist home in Aspen (named House of the Month by *Architectural Record* and featured in the November issue of SKI). People need to build more sustainable, energy-efficient structures, he says. And because modernism tends to incorporate sustainability, it's been fueled by a growing interest in green design. Walls of insulated glass, for example, allow sun to heat the home in the winter. An abundance of natural light also cuts down on electricity use. It's easier to control temperature in open spaces, and durable concrete structures don't

require deforestation, says Gluck.

Then there's the floor plan. Modernism allows for more freedom, so architects can build rooms where they make the most sense. "The traditional thing is to have the living and dining room downstairs, and then screen them off from the street," he says. In most homes' upper levels, which boast the best light and views, the bedroom windows are curtained for privacy's sake. But Gluck contends that homes should be laid out entirely differently: "The public spaces should be on the top floor, because then you can open the windows and see out." The bedrooms should be on the street level, where the windows would be covered anyway, he says.

The laundry list continues of bad design choices continues, from small

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windows that make the home dark and cold to the grand front entry, which is often neglected because people enter the home through the garage. Our homes are aesthetic shells that conform to how people think they should appear, Gluck says, and he finds that deeply disturbing. People build a library, for example, because that's what they equate with a "nice" home—not because they love to read. Then they request that the panels of books—books they never touch—open

up to reveal a big-screen TV. Instead of building a TV room to begin with, they wind up with a useless library in which to watch football. It's all fake, Gluck says. "People don't realize how ludicrous it is."

However, when confronted with the idea that their spaces should be more functional, most people have a similar response, says Dynia: They want a mountain home that's cozy, not militaristic, where they can curl up in the library or by the fire with a glass of wine. And they fear that they can't get that feeling in a spare, modernist home.

Dynia respects that concern, and his solution is to build nooks amid the open spaces. In one Jackson home, for example, he tucked a stone alcove with a fireplace and cushioned benches into a glass wall. When you walk from the

free-flowing space into the warm alcove, he says, the juxtaposition enhances the cocoon-like feel. "To have contrast is wonderful," he says.

Though Gluck and Dynia still face opposition to their work, "people are becoming aware of alternatives," Gluck says. "They're starting to look at design as something that influences everything they touch." And with mass-market stores such as Target now selling rugs designed by Isaac Mizrahi and soap containers by Karim Rashid, high design has become accessible and affordable. The Internet has also been integral to the movement. "Designers now have the ability to get their products out there for free," Scholl says. "Society goes through phases of enlightenment, and the past 10 years have been a great renaissance." ◆