

In Rural Squirrel, Idaho, a Modern Home

A couple's contemporary retreat on their 290-acre barley farm.

By [Candace Jackson](#)
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Just under 6,000-square-feet, Lauri and Doug Siddoway's home on a 290-acre barley farm in rural Squirrel, Idaho is pictured. Originally, the couple asked for a traditional, Tuscan-style home, but their architect, Mitch Blake of Jackson, Wyo.-based Ward+Blake Architects, thought a modern look would gel better with the property's wide open farmland and mountain views. *TONY DEMIN FOR THE WALL STREET JOURNAL*



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The home is divided into two pavilions, connected by an outdoor walkway under Cortan steel and sod roofs. The Siddoways purchased their 290-acre property from a local farmer in 2000. A few years later, ready to build their home, they contacted Mr. Blake. The house took about 16 months and about \$283 per square foot to build, and was completed in 2009. *TONY DEMIN FOR THE WALL STREET JOURNAL*



When Lauri and Doug Siddoway were planning to build a home on their 290-acre barley farm in rural Squirrel, Idaho, they asked their architect to design them something in a traditional, Tuscan-style akin to their Italian-revival home in Spokane, Wash.

What they got is anything but Tuscan. Or traditional.

Just under 6,000-square-feet, the modern four-bedroom, 3½-bathroom home is divided into two pavilions connected by a covered outdoor walkway under the home’s Corten steel and sod roofs. Outside are weathered-looking cedar beams and steel columns girded by split Engelmann spruce logs.



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The guest wing, about 1,510 square feet, has a small living room with another two-sided fireplace which overlooks the deck. Tony Demin for the Wall Street Journal

Inside, big glass windows reveal jagged mountain peaks and gold-and- green grain fields out back. The floors are concrete; the vaulted ceilings of reclaimed wood have exposed structural beams. Standing on the back patio, Ms. Siddoway, a 60-year-old appellate court judge, said matter-of-factly: “We didn’t envision this.”

The couple’s architect, Mitch Blake of Jackson, Wyo.-based Ward + Blake Architects, said the Tuscan traditional idea “wasn’t gelling” with the property’s wide-open farmland and Western scenery. Luckily, the Siddoways were willing to pivot. “We love it,” said Ms. Siddoway. “Thank goodness he didn’t listen to us.”

In the 3,895-square-foot main wing, there is a living room and dining room, separated by a two-sided stone fireplace. Flanking the fireplace on both sides are counter-weighted metal pulleys that can be used to open its glass doors. A large open kitchen opens onto a den that holds the home's only television. The master suite has big mountain views and leads to an outdoor shower tucked inside a rammed-earth alcove.

A house on a barley farm in Squirrel, Idaho stands apart. With a rammed-earth wall, reclaimed materials and lots of glass, it was inspired by the landscape and farm setting, but is far from traditional. Photo: Tony Demin for The Wall Street Journal.

The guest wing, about 1,510 square feet, has a small living room with another two-sided fireplace, which overlooks the deck. There are also two bedrooms and a "bunk" room with four built-in blonde maple wood single beds alongside the walls with drawers underneath. The couple's three grown sons often stay there when they visit.

One of the home's most striking visual elements is a thick rammed-earth wall that stretches the entire length of the house. It is made of packed layers of soil, cement, water and waste product from gravel and concrete plants. Subtle lines indicate where the mixture has been tamped down.

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Mr. Blake said the earth wall made sense, partly because it offers exceptional seismic stability. The property is roughly 10 miles southwest from Yellowstone National Park, an area that averages about 1,600 earthquakes a year, according to the Yellowstone Park Foundation. Though most of them measure less than 3.0 in magnitude, structures in the area must be built to withstand frequent shakes if they're going to last, said Mr. Blake.

The wall also helps regulate the home's temperature, storing warm or cool energy in its thick core, and the home uses geothermal heating in the winter. Though Idaho can get quite warm on sunny summer days, and the home has vents for air conditioning, the Siddoways said they never installed it.

Squirrel is a remote farming area that is about a 20 to 30-minute drive from a few small towns with grocery stores, churches and some shopping. To get here, the couple either drives about eight hours from their home in Spokane over several mountain passes, which can prove difficult in the winter, or they fly. The nearest airports are about an hour and a half drive from the property, in Idaho Falls and Jackson.



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Doug and Lauri Siddoway with Great Pyrenees Izarra Tony Demin for the Wall Street Journal

The Siddoways said the effort is worth it. They visit about once a month, and sometimes their sons use the place as well. With the nearest neighbor about a mile and a quarter away, just beyond past a patch of cottonwood trees, Mr. Siddoway said they get plenty of peace and quiet. “This is nice because we’ll see maybe two to three cars a day go by,” in addition to a few farm vehicles, he said as Izarra, his Great Pyrenees, napped nearby on the patio.

Mr. Siddoway, a 63-year-old attorney, said he and his wife were drawn to the area both for its beauty and its proximity to relatives. He grew up on a farm in the area and his nephew, who lives nearby, farms their land. During the summer the couple said they fly fish, bike, hike and camp in the area. In the winter, Mr. Siddoway volunteers regularly for the ski patrol at Grand Targhee, about 45 minutes to the southeast.

The Siddoways purchased their 300-acre property from a local farmer in 2000. A few years later, ready to build their home, they contacted Mr. Blake. Mr. Siddoway and Mr. Blake realized they attended the same small-town high school not far from the property, which seemed fortuitous. The house took about 16 months and about \$283 a square foot to build, and was completed in 2009. A 79-acre ranch in nearby Ashton with a three-bedroom home with upscale fixtures is currently on the market for \$1.35 million.

Despite the nods to traditional farmhouse vernacular and the landscape, the house certainly doesn't look like the homes on other farms in the area. The Siddoways said neighbors sometimes jokingly compare their home to a visitor's center. "This is definitely not what they're used to," said Mr. Blake.