

RUSTIC MEETS MODERN

A CLASSIC ASPEN MOUNTAIN HOME IS
RENOVATED TO CREATE A MODERN RUSTIC RETREAT.

BY CHRISTY NIELSON

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The designers focused on the landscaping to make the entrance of the stone home feel more defined.



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Aspen is an exceptional mountain community that is situated high in the Rocky Mountains in west-central Colorado. The crown jewel of the Roaring Fork Valley, the vibrant town is surrounded by spectacular mountain ranges and sprawling public lands. It is renowned for its arts and culture scene, rich culinary offerings, and countless outdoor adventures—not to mention being a hot spot for celebrities and the host of the annual Winter X Games.

“Aspen is so magical, and I’m not the only one who would say this,” says Cynthia Wark, who first visited the mountain community on a Colorado road trip she took with a girlfriend. Wark and her husband, Rick, were contemplating a move away from Texas, so she brought back Aspen real estate brochures for them to peruse. “Within a few weeks we bought a house in Aspen,” she remembers. “Not knowing much about it, it’s fair to say that Aspen called us here.”

The Warks purchased a classic Aspen Mountain home on a private golf course located a few miles outside of town that had great bones and terrific views. But the interior needed to be renovated to better suit the couple’s taste and lifestyle.

THIS PAGE: The herringbone backsplash adds a modern touch to the chef’s kitchen that was reconfigured to add improved connectivity to the great room. OPPOSITE PAGE: The design team elegantly incorporated the existing architectural elements—solid wood beams, hardwood floors, stone fireplaces, and wooden-framed windows—into the redesign.





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hey are very cool, modern, stylish and put together, and we needed to create a space that reflected their personality and gave them a place to entertain,” explains interior designer Denise Taylor, M.A. Allied ASID, who worked for Cathers Home Furniture + Interior Design, which was hired to transform the structure into a modern mountain home. Fellow designers Amanda Furlong, ASID NCIDQ, and Geneva “Gigi” Podolak Knox, Allied ASID, were also on the project team. After the Wark’s renovation wrapped up, Taylor would eventually go on to found Aspen Design House, a full-service bespoke interior design company in Aspen.

The goal of the Wark’s project was to work with the existing architecture, including massive fireplaces, hulking beams, and beautiful high-end woodwork, while redefining the spaces in a warm, inviting way. “You don’t always inherit such nice woodwork, and once we took the yellow out of the walls, which we painted a bright white on the entire main level, the wood was really beautiful,” says Taylor.

Paul Cathers, founder of Cathers Home Furniture + Interior Design, notes, “Without looking like we were trying to turn an older home into a contemporary one, we were trying to incorporate the sense of place with the wood and then clean the lines up to make it a more peaceful environment.” He adds, “Cynthia and Rick’s project was fantastic in taking the older architecture and moving it into a warmer, cleaner-lined feel with organic elements that turned the interior into a space that flows with the architecture. The kitchen, in particular, turned out beautifully using the warm gray-brown tones.”

Taylor agrees that the kitchen—which was reconfigured by relocating the island, closing in one of the doorways from the garage, creating a huge pantry, adding luxe appliances, replacing the cabinets, and updating the countertops—was a turning point for the project. “The design behind the kitchen is very rustic-modern,” she describes. “We wanted to make it look like it came with the house, but we needed to do a major overhaul. It was the tipping point for the home’s transformation.”

The cozy family room off the kitchen is the perfect spot for the owners to hang out together when they are alone in the home.



ABOVE: Brightening up the walls in the main level made the architectural features – and the spectacular views—really pop. OPPOSITE PAGE: The massive stone fireplace inspired the color palette for the furnishings in the great room, where the mix of metal and wood side tables adds interest.

Cathers says this project is a good example of elevating existing elements rather than tearing down and starting from scratch. “A lot of times we don’t have to change everything; instead, you can paint the cabinets, change the countertops, and incorporate the architecture into the design with a cleaner palette and pops of color in warm art, rugs, and pillows,” he describes. “When you have a lot of darks and lights and contrasts like the house did before the remodel, it can be overwhelming. You want the space to be the sanctuary where you can have a calm, cool existence. That was our goal, and we nailed it.”

Some of the furnishings—like the huge bison over the great room fireplace and the massive iron bed in the primary bedroom—were pieces that came with the purchase of the home that the designers incorporated. Additional furnishings like mohair chairs, cowhide ottomans, velvet couches with nail head trim, leather wing chairs, wooden and metal tables, and silk throw pillows “for a little glam,” completed the look.

To complement the design, the team resourced amazing artwork from the local galleries—some of it, like a large Gordon Brown painting in the living room, to fit the massive scale of the home. “When you have a house this grand, it needed to feel like Kevin Costner coming home to Yellowstone Ranch,” quips Podolak Knox. “Cynthia and Rick really wanted us to bring in artwork to match the house, so we borrowed pieces to hang on the walls to see what they wanted to move forward with.” She says Keating Fine Art Gallery in nearby Basalt was particularly generous and allowed the team to take a few paintings on approval.

While the upstairs is dramatic and more “mountain-esque”, the walk-out lower level, which was inspired by the iconic Hotel Jerome in Aspen, has a cozier vibe. “When you have a house this big you need a different feel in different spaces,” says Podolak Knox. “It took a little convincing because Cynthia and Rick loved the upstairs so much, but we pushed them to go in a whole different direction downstairs, and it really turned out great.”



THIS PAGE: The main level powder room features denim nail-studded wallpaper, a chunky custom vanity, and beautiful sconces attached to the massive mirror at eye level.

OPPOSITE: The vibe in the walkout basement is completely different from the more formal upstairs and beckons visitors to kick back and relax.ers

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The team added a soffit to the ceiling to create a perimeter of light around the room. The existing bar was repainted a dark gray and the middle cabinets were removed and replaced with a custom mosaic, glass shelves, and lighting. Teardrop-shaped liquid mercury pendants hang like jewelry over the bar, adding a chic flair, and the swivel bar stools invite connection with the rest of the room. Fluffy, faux fur chairs with backs that don't extend all the way to the ground—

creating the illusion that they are floating in the room — are set up in a conversation circle surrounding a sleek leather ottoman. The existing pool table was re-felted in gray to match the new room, and a custom light that imitates icicles hovers above.

Cynthia says the design team did an amazing job. “I didn’t know what I wanted, but I put my trust in the team, and they were lovely to work with. The results far exceeded our expectations.”