

STORY **IRENE RAWLINGS**   PHOTOS **AUDREY HALL**  
ARCHITECTURAL DESIGN **JLF ARCHITECTS**   INTERIOR DESIGN **WRJ DESIGN**  
CONSTRUCTION **DOVETAIL CONSTRUCTION**

"We looked at ski-in, ski-out but fell in love with a more private property," says homeowner Kathy Happ. JLF Architects designed a ranch-style home that follows the contours of the hillside.

# NATURE INSPIRED

*A couple from the Midwest builds a rustic-chic family retreat tucked into a forest in Big Sky, Montana*



Some couples are so attuned that they can complete each other's sentences. Scott and Kathy Happ have that unique connection. Here's an example: The Wisconsin-based couple "discovered" Montana when they were first married and fell in love with the area. After two decades of Montana vacations, they were ready to build a legacy home where their extended family could gather. They found a secluded 45-acre property on a wooded hillside in Big Sky and started planning. Kathy was perusing architects' websites and found the perfect home on the JLF Architects site. When she showed it to Scott, he was surprised but not shocked. "Hold that thought, I'll be right back," he said—and, after rummaging through some boxes, he returned with a dog-eared copy of a magazine. "I could hardly believe it," says Kathy. "He digs out a magazine he's saved and shows me the same house—the exact same house."

The home they admired had hand-hewn timbers, reclaimed oak flooring, stacked Montana moss rock and plaster walls. It was one of the older designs by Bozeman-based JLF Architects. Partner and owner John Lauman recalls that the Happs arrived for their initial meeting with an old copy of *Mountain Living* in hand. They also brought a photo of a weathered Midwestern barn, an inspiration from Kathy's equestrian background (teaching, training, animal rescue and rehab). "They knew what they wanted, which gave us a clear context for the home's design," Lauman says.

When Lauman first walked the homesite, he saw enormous potential, but the site was so overgrown "you couldn't see more than 15 feet in any direction." To create a building pad, brush was removed and trees were thinned, but the forest edge on the downhill side was retained so the home could be "close to the trees and as close to nature as you can possibly get."

A bigger challenge was the natural slope of the land. "There is close to a 100-foot drop in the building envelope," Lauman says. This feature dictated much of the design of the 8,000-square-foot, five-bedroom, six-bath home, which is a series of connected structures that follow the contours of the hillside and are oriented to views of Big Sky and Wilson Peak.

Before building could begin, however, the site had to be stabilized. "Big Sky is close to Yellowstone National Park, an active seismic zone," notes Tim Rote, principal at Dovetail Construction. To resolve this challenge, nearly 250 helical piers were installed to create a deep foundation that would keep the home from moving. The piers are, essentially, very long steel screws that anchor the home's foundation to the earth.



Comfortable seating encourages conversation and board games. Purposely, there is no TV in the great room. The kitchen, dining room and living room form one big, casual space for the family to gather. "Mountain living is casual living," says Rush Jenkins of WRJ Design, who designed the interior spaces to suit the owners' relaxed lifestyle.



“ONCE WE HAD A MOOSE AT OUR KITCHEN WINDOW, JUST STARING IN AT US.”

— HOMEOWNER KATHY HAPP

Oak cabinets, natural stone countertops and reclaimed wood floors contribute to the kitchen's warm, gracious informality. Its location—adjacent to the great room and outdoor living space—makes it central for family dinners and entertaining.

## A WARM AND WELCOMING HOME

*Rush Jenkins, WRJ Design co-founder, shares design ideas that will bring warmth and a sense of peace and serenity to your home.*

**BEING SURROUNDED BY OBJECTS THAT HAVE SPECIAL MEANING** like family heirlooms, favorite collections and art are always welcoming and create warmth. **ENGAGING THE SENSE OF TOUCH** with natural textures like mohair, suede, cashmere, wool and sheepskin adds comfort and warmth, especially in snowy mountain climates. **COLOR, TOO, IS VERY IMPORTANT** Jenkins and his team draw color palettes from the surrounding landscape, creating a feeling of calm and connection to the natural world. **ONE-OF-A-KIND ARTISANAL PIECES** crafted by local artists and created from regional materials connect the home to the landscape and community and contribute a deep sense of place. **A LESS-IS-MORE DESIGN APPROACH** creates a serene home, where the overall feel is a carefully curated, beautiful simplicity that allows meaningful details to stand out—perhaps gorgeous, thoughtful leather drawer pulls on a chest, or handblown glass on a light fixture. **FINALLY, STRIVE FOR A CONNECTION TO NATURE** When the lines, colors and textures of the interiors harmonize with the natural world, which in the mountains can be dramatic peaks, tranquil ponds or wooded enclaves, that connection to nature always brings a sense of calm.

TOP: In the powder room, hanging lanterns reflect the home's mountain-inspired decor. “We found a big hunk of stone and carved it out to make a modern-day sink,” says WRJ’s Rush Jenkins. BOTTOM: Jenkins and his team draw upon the colors in the landscape. The colors of the rug, drapes and chairs reflect the view outside.







A freestanding tub (with gleaming metal bathtub filler) takes center stage in the primary bathroom. Full-length sheers soften the space, give a sense of privacy and frame the view. The walls are white-washed barnwood.



The interiors are comprised of both grand spaces and intimate seating areas (“niches”). The niche off the primary bedroom suite, for example, is a cozy retreat with a fireplace, just big enough for two sink-into chairs. “The home is tucked away in the woods and feels very private and remote,” says Rush Jenkins, co-founder of WRJ Design, based in Jackson, Wyoming. Per the Happs’ request, he designed family- (and dog-) friendly interiors that were both rustic and refined, and embraced the exterior colors and textures but felt snug and warm inside. “When you come in, the home envelops you,” he says.

One of the homeowners’ favorite spots is the stand-alone screened porch, which references the 19th-century fire-lookout towers that dotted the mountain ranges of the American West. “With the fireplace going, we can sit out there in nearly all seasons,” says Kathy. She and Scott also enjoy their home’s connection to wildlife. A herd of elk regularly camps in the forested area of their property. “Once we had a moose at our kitchen window, just staring in at us,” Kathy recalls.

“We went into the building process with a mixture of excitement and high expectations,” says Scott with a smile. “Everyone delivered.” ○

TOP: Each cozy bedroom has good lighting and a sink-into chair.  
 BOTTOM: The study that opens onto a deck, has a more rugged look. “You feel free to put your feet up on the hearth,” says WRJ’s Jenkins.

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