



## A NATURAL STATE

An extensive redesign combines expert craftsmanship with elevated simplicity to let this Aspen home live more comfortably in its outdoor setting. After all, it's not every home that has a butte for a back yard.

WORDS: Kris Scott  
IMAGES: Draper White



There are countless Colorado homes that intentionally foster a connection between the indoors and outdoors. The state is, after all, known for its breathtaking landscapes, its residents known for their love of the outdoors. With many of these houses, however — whether due to site selection, zoning restrictions or the architect in charge — that connection can be seen and appreciated, but still feel somewhat removed.

That is definitely not the case with the Red Butte home in Aspen. From almost any room in the house, the trees seem like neighbors waving at you in the wind, the wild grasses and shrubs, just feet from a sliding glass door, an extension of the home's luxurious material palette. The nearby rock formations — including the butte for which the home is named — a part of the architecture.

Which is exactly what architects Todd Kennedy, AIA, and John Cottle, FAIA, of CCY Architects wanted it to

feel like. Though the house looks like a new build, it was actually a remodel, albeit a very extensive one. Zoning regulations dictated that the new house exist in the same footprint as the previous structure. This restriction initially felt like a constraint, but Kennedy and Cottle note that it ended up being their greatest opportunity because of how ensconced in the natural surroundings the original site was.

CCY's clients are a gregarious couple from Houston — Cottle calls them "maybe the nicest people in the world" — with a love of hosting family and friends for games, meals and sharing bottles from their extensive wine collection with guests. They selected the site in large part because of its proximity to Red Butte — the husband grew up with a geologist father and has always been fascinated by geology. The wife loves the nearby wildlife. They both love that the lot feels pastoral yet maintains a connection to its surrounding neighborhood. Before the remodel began, they lived in the existing house for a year.





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The star design features of the living room are its intimate connection to the outdoors and the "bookmatched" steel panels that clad the fireplace. "It's a remarkably simple solution that's about the beauty of the steel and not a whole lot else," says CCY architect Todd Kennedy.

When they did finally meet with CCY, it was because the firm has extensive experience with Aspen's building codes and permitting process, but also because the clients were struck with how the projects in CCY's portfolio "fit into the environment." Clients and architects met for a three-day intensive design charrette, conducted at the house pre-remodel, often on an outdoor deck. Discussions were had, countless sketches penciled out, and everyone repeatedly walked the home's existing footprint trying to gauge the best design approach. The homeowners, of course, brought their own list of needs to the table, which included plenty of space to entertain and spend time outdoors. "The clients always wanted a house that was about people first — something that was sophisticated but informal," Cottle says. The couple notes that they also requested that the final design be comfortable, have modernist appeal and a low-maintenance material palette.

During the charrette process, Cottle says, "we started to think of the house as a series of vignettes, especially in terms of its exterior and its mapping, and how those vignettes could grab the different pieces of nature and still screen the neighbors." It was during this process that the constraints started to reveal themselves as more of an opportunity, he adds. "To me the main story of the house, or a big part of it, is: Where was the design here?"



**TOP:** The plantation grown teak deck, which wraps around three sides of the house, was one of the original home's existing features, though it has been extensively remodeled. "It really helps blur the line between indoor and outdoor living space," says CCY's John Cottle. "and you really grab this red butte, which was so important to the clients." **ABOVE:** The space, which you can also glimpse in the background of the top photo, serves as part-pantry, part-bar when the clients entertain.

What should it be about? And we evolved to a place where we thought the architecture should get out of the way and let nature and the surroundings talk."

To accomplish that they removed solid walls, allowing natural features to act as exterior walls and privacy screens. Expansive windows let evergreens and an aspen grove to the south, and the sharply rising butte to the north, become spatial definitions for living areas.

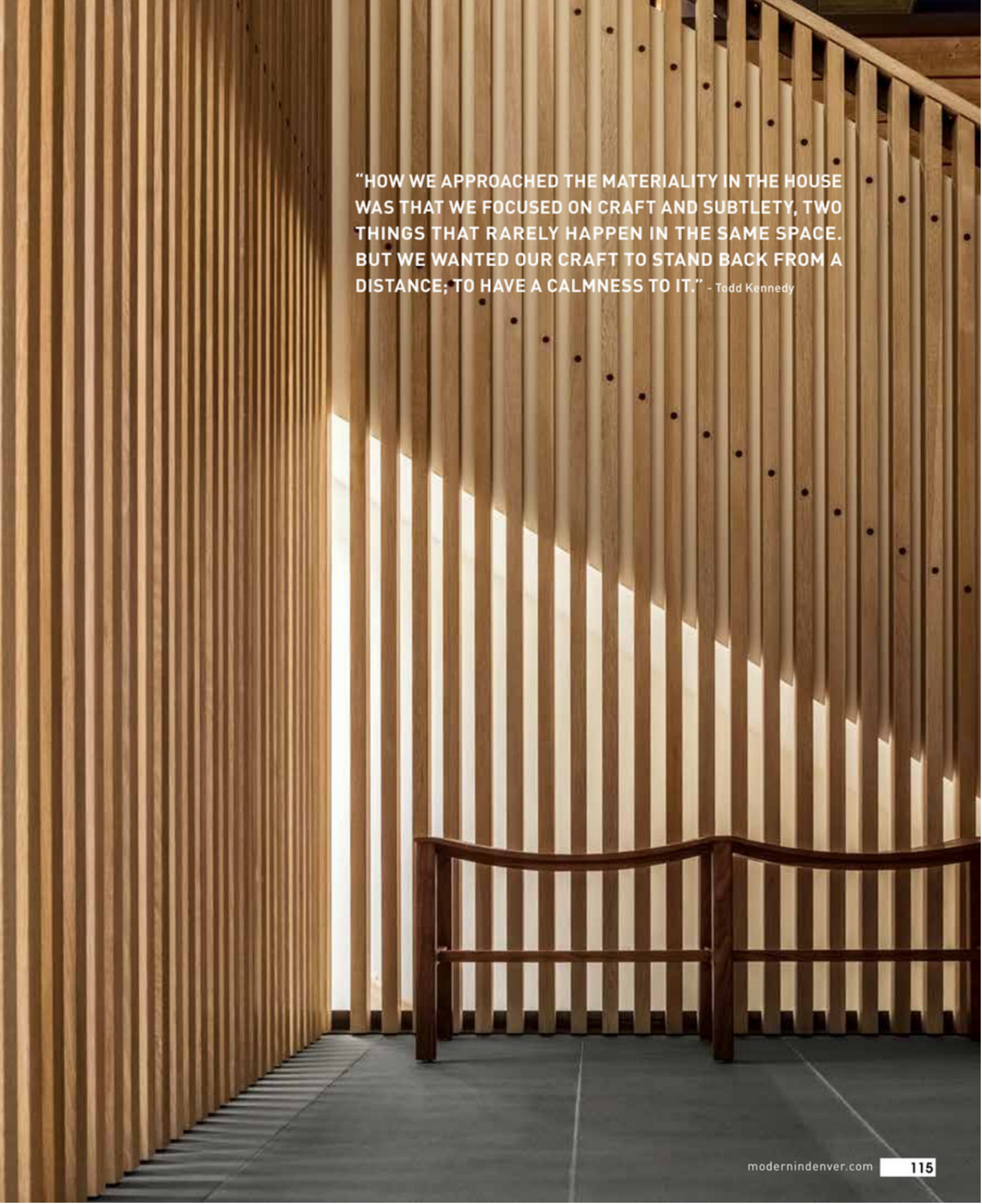
The home's connection to nature isn't solely based on how up close and personal that nature is — it also has a lot to do with the vernacular of CCY's design. Kennedy notes that they "decided fairly early on that the project should be done in a really simple, spare language — that we would be able to grab nature more effectively if the project got simpler and simpler and simpler. If the architecture got out of the way, in a sense, then it could have a more successful connection to the site."

That approach in no way meant artless, though — a fact that Cottle says has a lot to do with Kennedy's skill. "Todd is a master at making things that are simple but that also have care and passion and richness." The clients also note this complete dedication to detail when talking about their new home. Its appeal, they say, "is a function of truly of obsessing over every single detail — how something goes around a corner, how a piece of wood terminates at the end of a hall. Everybody involved in this project was meticulous. Everyone obsessed over everything."

"How we approached the materiality in the house was that we focused on craft and subtlety," Kennedy adds, "two things that rarely happen in the same space. But we wanted our craft to stand back from a distance; to have a calmness to it."

To that end they used a "mountain monochromatic" material palette that included reclaimed elm in →116





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different ways to introduce a “subtle shift in texture and character that adds depth and richness that maybe doesn’t exist upon your first impression,” says Kennedy. The rest of the home’s materiality was similarly spare: concrete floors, painted sheetrock, steel and beetle-kill spruce.

The culmination of this equation — simplicity plus an almost obsessive thoughtfulness in the project’s details — is a home that feels serene and comfortable yet reveals itself layer by layer, detail by detail. The more you gaze at its details, the deeper your understanding of the extreme amount of care that went into its seamless-yet-carefully crafted design. The homeowners note that it was a remodel that “turned into an art project.”

Take, for example, what Cottle calls “one of the defining moments of the house:” the stairs. Each vertical wood slat is precisely spaced, each piece of hardware meticulously placed. “Todd spent half a day laying out where the fasteners were going to go on the stairs,” Cottle says. “After that was done, we started thinking, ‘How can this, as an expression of craft, begin to make its way into other



A trio of views revealing how comfortably the master bedroom connects to the site’s largely untamed outdoors. Though this room appears simple and restrained, CCY’s design for this space was meticulous. The roof overhang was specifically sized to allow full views of the nearby Red Butte while lying in bed. They also added a half-wall, visible in the bottom photo, which serves to “edit out quite a few houses in that direction.” The outdoor trellised wall provides privacy for an outdoor shower, and the space is a beautiful example of how serenely the material palette of steel, elm, spruce and concrete blends together.



moments of the house?” And that really occurs in a lot of the millwork details — the bathroom vanity, built-in benches, window seats and shower screens. Those are all a good example of how that detailed expression of craft pulls all the way through the house.”

Another example are the “bookmatched” steel panels that clad the fireplace. “We wanted to focus on how the fireplace could create an art wall in the space,” Kennedy notes. To that end, CCY worked with a Seattle-based fabricator/craftsman who spent days flipping through countless stacks of steel plates to find two with annealing marks — those made when steel is heated and cooled — that “made sense together.”

Kennedy notes that these panels and other materials throughout the house are a reflection of how the firm has evolved in its approach to materiality over the last few years. “We’ve gone back to letting a piece of wood be a piece of wood and embracing this feeling that it doesn’t need to be perfect. It’s about finding beauty in the reality of what a material is,” he says.

In the end, say the homeowners, a “true collaboration” developed between the architects, clients and everyone involved. “That was the beauty of working with CCY. They worked with us on every detail. We all wanted the same thing in the end, and we accomplished it. We would do it all over again.” ■

In yet another example of simplicity adding depth, CCY used an East Coast-based painting subcontractor to apply a finish to the windows of the 7,728-square-foot home. “The finish she used really transformed them,” Kennedy explains. “She used an ebonized finish — they’re not quite stained and not quite painted — that added richness and depth. It definitely helps elevate the window system from standard to something that feels quite a bit more rich.”

### PROJECT CREDITS

ARCHITECTURE + INTERIOR ARCHITECTURE  
**CCY Architects**

BUILDER  
**Sallie Golden Building and Design**  
**Steeplechase Construction**

LANDSCAPE  
**Connect One Design**

INTERIORS  
**Kathleen Pressler**

BATHROOM CABINETS  
**Genesis Hospitality Corporation**

COUNTERTOPS  
**Thassos Marble & Caesarstone**

ENTRY DOORS + FIREPLACE STEEL PANELS  
**Custom steel by Company K (Seattle)**

EXTERIOR SIDING  
**Beetle-kill spruce — Vintage Woods**

PATIO DOORS  
**Wieland, Loewen**



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Charles Eames tinkers with panels on his exuberantly  
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