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# The House That Jack Built

Start with an appreciation for Greene and Greene, stir in some unique timber framing and some recycled wood and stone, and you have a masterpiece.



BY KAREN DOSS BOWMAN  
PHOTOS BY ROGER WADE  
STYLING BY DEBRA GRAHL



Timber framer Mark Miller says the vertical siding, metal slip sheet eaves, and shed-style dormers give the home an "old mining building" look. The sage green stain, dark foundation, and natural-colored trim blend in with the home's natural surroundings on land that once was used as pasture for a 140-acre ranch.







Large, uncovered windows in the living room offer a breathtaking view of Mount Sopris. The divider bookshelf in the foreground, separating the living room and kitchen, features a granite remnant provided by the Albrights' neighbor, Mark Kroeger of Creative Tile and Marble.

also found a perfect spot to install a granite slab he found on another project. Although there's a mixture of countertop materials, he says, everything flows together nicely to create an attractive finished product. "These are cool little elements that were just going to be thrown away, and I was thinking that someday we're going to build a house, and I might be able to incorporate something like that," Jack says, estimating that his recycled treasures cut about \$5,000 from the final building costs.

As a young couple in their mid-thirties with small children, Jack and Dena say they weren't in a position financially to finish everything in the house at once. The 1,800-square-foot basement is unfinished, but it includes space for a future bedroom for one of the boys. For now, the 300-square-foot playroom upstairs doubles as a bedroom for one child, which he willingly shares with his brothers. "There are plans for the house to grow with us a little bit," Jack says. "It was all designed into the original concept, and we backed it off into some phasing-in elements to bring the construction costs down to something we can afford."

The Albrights take loving pride in the house that Jack poured his heart and soul into designing for two years. Many friends and family members have asked Jack if he's surprised at how the house turned out, but he thinks that question may be misguided. "I think when you have such a personal investment in the house, through the conception of the design, the actual design, and the construction of it, I would be disappointed if I was surprised," he says. "So the answer is no, I'm not surprised at how it turned out. I'm very pleased with how it turned out." 🍷

**DESIGNER/BUILDER:** Jack Albright, homeowner;  
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restaurant business, and Jack worked as a sous chef while he was a student at Kansas State University, so they wanted stainless steel cooking and preparation surfaces. The centerpiece of the kitchen is an island that includes burners surrounded by butcherblock countertops, making it easy to move food from the preparation surface into the frying pan. It also allows the Albrights to entertain guests—and supervise three little boys—while cooking.

When it came to decorating the finished home, knick-knacks were a no-no. Dena wanted to keep things simple because of the couple's children. That's one reason she likes a timber frame home: "It's beautiful in itself." They decided against window coverings for the rooms on the main floor, choosing instead to make the gable-side view of Mount Sopris the living room's centerpiece. By combining durable, easy-to-clean denim slipcovers on the couches with sentimental family heirlooms, they created a rustic, country/Western look in their home. Above the fireplace, Jack and Dena have displayed a saddle blanket that belonged to Jack's grandfather, who was a professional rodeo cowboy, and an old wooden sled that Dena's mother used as a child. But Jack, an avid hunter, quips, "That place is really waiting for my trophy elk."

One of the challenges the Albrights faced was keeping the timber framing elements, which can be very expensive, within their

budget. Mark was able to find a cost-effective wood that would render the desired results. "They wanted a good wood that wouldn't have a lot of shrinkage and still would look good and perform well," Mark recalls. "Jack needed to come up with an economical way to pull off the look he wanted and still have optimum structural performance." In the end, they selected two types of wood: alder for the floor, cabinets, and doors and fir for the beams and trim work.

The hybrid approach of the part timber frame, part conventional construction contributed to making the building project more cost effective and giving the home a unique look. "Jack used the timber framing components in the areas where he got the most bang for the buck," Mark says. "He didn't use it throughout the whole house ... there were components here and there to carry the theme throughout the house."

Jack's professional work takes him to numerous high-end residential construction sites, and over the years—even before he began designing his home—he has collected various pieces that were being discarded. At one remodel site, he salvaged a sandstone countertop and hearth, both of which were incorporated into his new home's architecture. Some of the wood used in the construction of the staircase was recycled out of a remodeling project he worked on, and he



**RIGHT:** The upstairs view of the entrance shows the fine detailing of the pegged loft railing. The family can enjoy a close-up view of the parallel chord trusses from this vantage point.

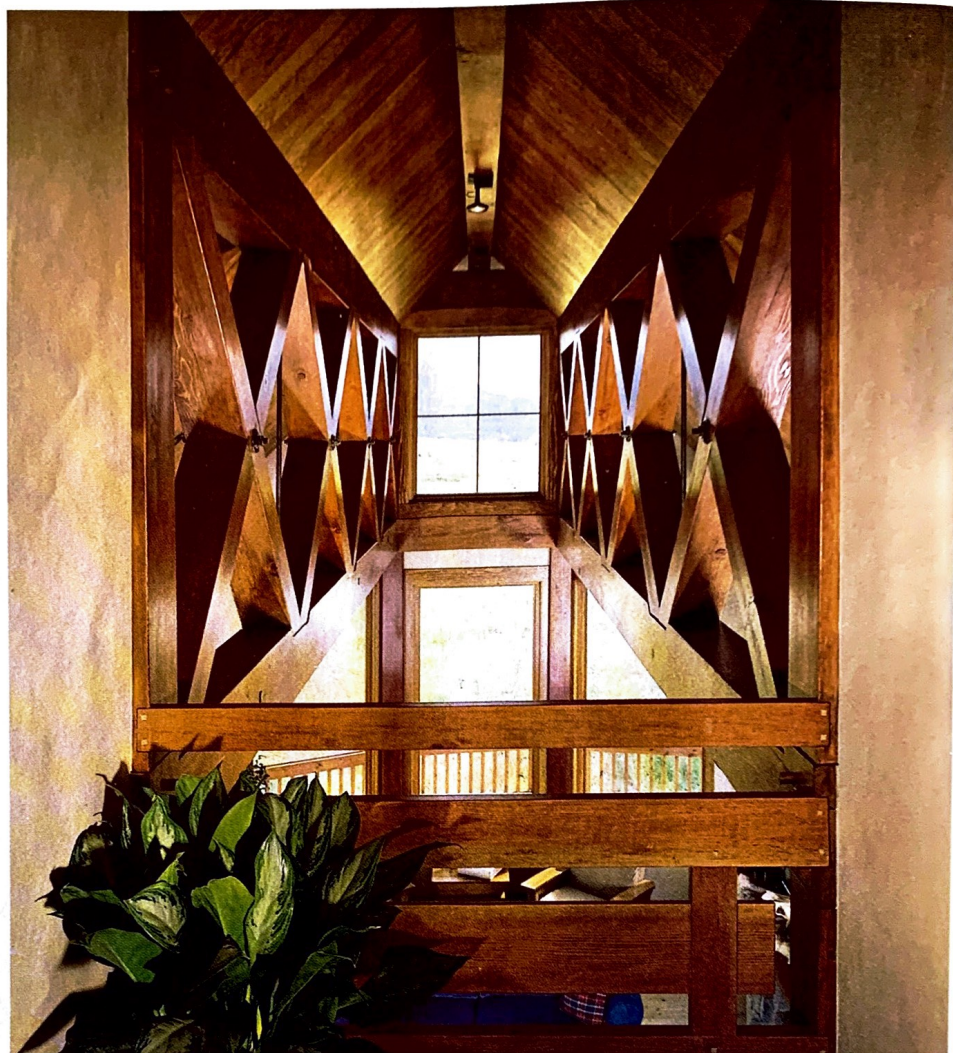
**OPPOSITE:** The living room is the focal point of the house with the parallel chord trusses above and the stone fireplace, which shows corrugated steel extending from the outside of the piece and through the roof. The room is decorated with family heirlooms and little-boy-friendly denim, giving the home a rustic, country/Western look.

When Jack Albright set out to fulfill his lifelong dream of designing and building his own home, he wanted to combine a variety of styles, ranging from traditional and rustic to more contemporary and conventional. Melding together design elements inspired by his architectural heroes, Charles and Henry Greene, with some unusual timber framing components, he came up with a style he calls simply “mountain craftsman.” The result is an unusual and stunning masterpiece.

“One of the concepts in the design of the house was to make it a statement in and of itself without any furniture in it,” says Jack, who oversaw the home’s construction. “You walk into the house and go, ‘Wow, look at this’—even when it’s empty.”

As he sketched design ideas, Jack, a structural engineer with S.K. Peightal Engineers, sought advice and input from numerous colleagues and clients from across the country—many of them architects. He incorporated a number of those ideas into the final design. Even family members had ideas, and after reviewing one of his sketches, Jack’s sister-in-law suggested that a pantry was a must-have. “I thought that was a pretty good idea,” Jack says, “so I just started moving things around and put in a walk-in pantry.”

The 5,000-square-foot home, located in Carbondale, Colorado, in the Roaring Fork Valley, is the result of two years of careful architectural planning that began in 2000, when Jack and his wife Dena purchased 4.9 acres of land that had been parceled and developed from a 140-acre ranch. At the time, only a handful of the lots had been sold, so the Albrights were able to secure a reasonable purchase price for the property, which features a breathtaking view of the majestic Mount Sopris, rising 12,900 feet.



The spacious location is also ideal for their three young sons—ages 7, 4, and 2—providing them with a large backyard that allows them “to enjoy being outside and being boys,” says Dena, who is an administrative assistant with Daly Property Services Inc. The family moved into the home in February 2003, just 10 months after breaking ground.

The Albrights selected a sage green stain for the exterior walls to blend in with the surrounding pastureland, Jack says. They used custom-cut, shiplap 2 x 12 cedar on the foundation, giving the house a grounding effect. Additionally, the exterior timber was hand-aged by a neighbor of the Albrights, painter Tim Adams.

Inside, the two-story, three-bedroom home is a combination of timber frame and conventional construction. Jack’s design incorporated some mountain craftsman elements along with Greene and Greene-inspired details. Moving away from the Greene brothers’ famous bungalow style, Jack chose to include steep pitches at the base of the roof, which he says is a customary mountain appli-

cation of roofing. Even his use of timbers and joints rejected traditional styles.

“A lot of what you [usually] see is rough-sawn timbers, really rustic, and I wanted mine to be a little bit more refined than that, but not go over the edge to contemporary,” Jack explains. “So we actually kind of met it halfway in the middle. We took the smooth timbers and the joinery from that Craftsman style and then made it a little more rustic.”

Among Jack’s unique design elements are two parallel chord trusses that run from the entrance through the living room. They consist of steel verticals with timber diagonals, creating a series of X’s that look like a train trestle. Timber framer Mark Miller of Trail Ridge Timber Frames says he had to adapt the traditional joinery to accommodate this element by using metal support rods and bridge washers. The resulting look, he says, resembles old-fashioned, heavy timber bridges.

Mark and his crew faced another challenge in erecting the entrance, which featured curved, barrel-vaulted beams and specially designed joints. “We had to join two timbers









**The curve of the kitchen's bar was designed around a sandstone countertop Jack recycled from one of his engineering jobs. The cabinets are made of knotty alder, while the beams and trim work are fir. The open room with a view into the living room allows Jack and Dena to entertain guests or supervise their three young sons while preparing meals.**

and make a curve on them," he says. "And to join them, we used a scarf that was probably 800 years old and then we also used Greene and Greene metal strapping. The entrance is really striking and really different."

For Jack, the pride of the house is the staircase: "It's the part I struggled with the most." The hand-rail, modeled after a Greene and Greene-style railing he saw in a book, features horizontal rungs, which were built in the nick of time before new building codes would have prohibited them. And he describes the stairs as having the appearance of

stacked boxes, rather than a continuous stringer. The details add to the look: splines in the corner of each tread, and the riser board that meets up with the board that turns a corner. "People kind of scratch their heads and say, 'Well, how did you do that?'" Jack says. "I kind of like that."

Although Dena pretty much gave Jack carte blanche in designing the home, there were a few elements she couldn't live without, such as a pantry, a large laundry room, and plenty of space for hanging clothes. One of the couple's favorite rooms in the house is the kitchen. Both grew up in the





Jack's staircase is the conversation piece of the dining room. Combining a Greene and Greene-style horizontal hand railing with steps resembling stacked boxes he created this one-of-a-kind structure.





Jack's design called for a curved, barrel-vaulted entrance, requiring a little improvising from timber framer Mark Miller. He combined an unusual scarf joint and metal finger straps with through-wedges to tighten the whole assembly. Jack and Dena also proudly display the flag of their alma mater, Kansas State University, as a tribute to the school's role in their success—and to cheer on their beloved Wildcats.

