

# ARCHITECTURAL DIGEST

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**COVER:** The dining area of a residence in Big Sur, California. Architecture by Mickey Muennig. Interior design by Craig Wright. Photography by Mary E. Nichols. See page 190. **ABOVE RIGHT:** A house near Sun Valley, Idaho, designed by architect Mark Mack. Interior design by Holly Hulburd. Photography by Alan Weintraub. See page 158.

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*Interior Design by Holly Hulburd/Text by Diana Ketcham  
Photography by Alan Weintraub*

In the late 1970s Mark Mack cut an unforgettable figure on the San Francisco architecture scene. He was the young Austrian with the comic-opera accent and the slantwise bangs who wore short pants whatever the weather. Mack and his partner, Andrew Batey, seemed to be everywhere at once, starting a magazine, shooting off manifestos. Their target was the decorative historicism of their postmodern generation: While other young architects dusted off the classical orders for California wine barons, Mack gave them concrete block and bold geometries and lectures on the primitive barn. Those contentious years left a legacy, a series of concrete-and-metal houses built in the Napa and Sonoma valleys.

The American country house remained a Mack preoccupation, even as he moved to Los Angeles and on to an increasingly international solo practice. He has done distinctive ranch houses, vineyard houses and beach houses in California and Texas, and a recent desert house in Reno, Nevada (see *Architectural Digest*, December 1995). A mountain house was a logical next step. "I always wanted to work out my ideas for a ski house," says Mack, a skier from early childhood. The commission to design a residence in Ketchum, Idaho, near Sun Valley, gave him the opportunity to try his



Architect Mark Mack designed what he describes as an "outwardly subdued, modern vernacular" house for downtown Ketchum, Idaho. TOP: Mack's rendering of the front elevation shows the angularity of the metal roof, which he "folded like a paper hat."

The same materials—concrete and wood—and colors appear throughout. ABOVE: At the entrance, the roof dips to become the kind of thin overhang familiar to Mack from his native Austria. OPPOSITE: The entrance hall descends to the living room. Richard Mulligan garden stool.

hand at yet another domestic building type.

Mack's design ignores the recent fashions in western resort architecture. Contemporary mountain houses tend to be grand in scale and historical in spirit, faced in logs, stone or adobe; walk-in fireplaces of indigenous rock proliferate. Such latter-day lodges dominate the spectacular canyons outside of Ketchum, a testimony to 1980s affluence and the long reach of postmodern taste. "All those log cabins," says the Viennese-trained Mack, "so heavy. And those imposing adobes."

What he has built instead is an artful adaptation of the mining shed, a vertical house with a hipped roof and board-and-batten siding. Both spare and whimsical, it has a stylistic pedigree that goes back to the early modernism of architect Adolf Loos, not the Rocky Mountain hunting lodge. Moreover, the house sits in the middle of town rather than on the river or in one of the canyons. It makes no statement in the open landscape: From a distance it is nearly invisible, hidden by trees.

This sounds like Mack playing out his old role of renegade, but he claims otherwise. "The design was a response to the site," he explains, "as well as to the sensibility of the owners. It says something that they are the sort of people who could appreciate a downtown loca-





For the open-plan living room, interior designer Holly Hulburd devised a "winter" seating area, whose Donghia armchairs are covered in Boussas de France fabric. The stained plywood paneling, painted plaster wall and concrete floor are a Mack composition of palette and planes. Soraya Rugs antique kilim.

tion. They didn't want a country club setting. They didn't want to be in an area with nothing but big houses."

His clients, native New Yorkers who live in San Francisco, had been coming to Sun Valley for twenty years. With their children grown, they wanted a retreat for their own pursuits, which

include hiking and skiing. They also had the city dwellers' fondness for browsing in bookstores and shopping on foot. Walking in town one day, they noticed a woodland garden that was for sale; it adjoined one of the oldest houses, a log cottage built in 1910. Both garden and house belonged to Clara Spiegel, a

Sun Valley grande dame who was a founder of the library and a member of Ernest Hemingway's set.

Although the town's commercial center was only three blocks away, inside the garden all was magical. The immediate surroundings disappeared, replaced by the sight of Bald Mountain floating



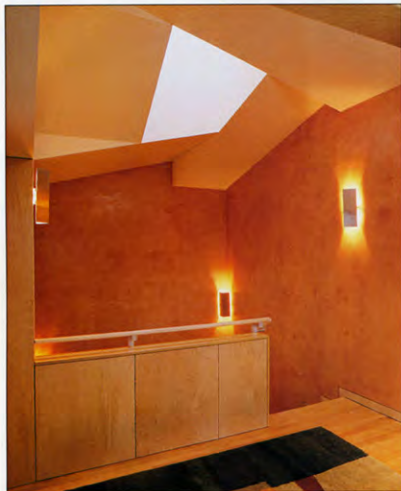
over treetops. The couple were drawn to the lush piece of land and wondered what could be built there.

Mark Mack had done a renovation of their San Francisco house ten years earlier. "It had been so exciting working with him," the husband recalls, "so we invited him to visit us in Sun Valley and



ABOVE: Mack designed a built-in serving counter and a dining table of rotating fir supports stained the colors of the house. Hulburd selected the furnishings, including a pair of beaded pendants, for their "sculptural and graphic interest."

"I appreciate strong architecture when I find it," says Hulburd, "so I treat it with respect." LEFT: Scandinavian classics—Aalto chairs in the dining area and at the island. Jacobsen at the kitchen table—complete Mack's vibrant hues. Donald Sultan's 1991 *Morning Glories* is the house's sole large-scale artwork.



LEFT: Above the stairwell, the nexus of the floor plan, "the rotation of the ceiling around the skylight reflects the different angles of the house," Mack notes. Sconces bring out the textural character of the plaster walls.



look at the property." Mack came and also fell in love with Clara Spiegel's garden.

"This spot has so many things that you don't often find," the architect says. "It has history, through Clara, who is a real town heroine. It has mature trees—fir, aspen, spruce and cottonwood—and there are incredible paths and boulders. The garden she'd made was very precious. She served tea and had literary gatherings there."

The couple acquired the garden, and Mack and project architect Robert Flock agreed to change it as little as possible. "We felt that our first obligation was to this special place," Mack says, though its preservation presented the architect with constraints that he had not had elsewhere, namely in California. There, he has most often built on open sites exposed to bright sun, where he has had room to break up the floor plans and spread out the houses horizontally.

In Idaho, he worked under quite different circumstances, on an enclosed, fully landscaped site with shade and filtered light. His solution was a compact structure of three interlocking squares encompassing two stories and 3,500 square feet. Two wings extend between the trees, to-

ward the mountains, and the third fronts the street. Although Mack considered a ceremonial entrance on the garden side, "coming in from below would have cost too many trees," he says. "So the house turns a plain face toward the street. That's all right with me."

There was also the matter of vistas. "Everybody in Sun Valley wants a view of Baldy," Mack observes. "But my clients and I believed it was more important for the house to feel rooted in the garden." The building appears to grow out of a base of richly colored local stone, the same used in the garden paths. A stone platform rises a few steps from the garden to become a broad terrace, level with the living room. Reinforcing the impression of stone flowing into the house, the concrete floors of the living room are stained earth tones.

Perhaps the most impressive feature of the house is the awareness of the landscape one has from both the public and private areas. It is oriented to views in two directions, toward the mountains—Baldy is visible from the second story—and down the valley.

The house's garden façade  
*continued on page 236*

LEFT: Diagonal windows in the master bedroom frame views of Bald Mountain. The bed and cabinets are by Mack; Hulburd added compatible pieces, including a side table she designed. The chaise features a Donghia chenille.

OPPOSITE: Corner glazing allows for uninterrupted views to the south and west. The stone terrace extends outward from the living room, creating a platform for the building so that the slope of the existing garden is preserved.

