

From the Inside Out

ARCHITECT VAN BRYAN BRINGS
PHILOSOPHY TO LIFE IN HIS
FAMILY'S BOZEMAN HOME



WRITTEN BY CARTER G. WALKER
PHOTOGRAPHY BY GORDON GREGORY





Opening page: The lap pool and patio are a natural extension of both the main residence and the casita-inspired guest quarters, all of which reflect the family's love of being outdoors. **Clockwise from right:** The three gables of the main residence allow for lofty space — and 14-foot ceilings even upstairs — in the master suite, the children's rooms, and a bonus room. The contemporary flat roof links the three; and the casita was designed to seamlessly blend with the existing form. The exterior shingles and geometrical siding serve to emphasize the graceful forms even more with strong vertical and horizontal lines • A cozy bedroom loft in the guest quarters provides privacy for visitors, while the openness of the downstairs affords ideal gathering space in the bar/kitchenette, game room and covered patio • Expansive glass doors open to ease and enhance the circulation between the inside and outside living spaces. Infra-red lights installed in the ceiling keep the patio warm well into the cold season, and a fireplace creates wonderful ambience.



Set in the Headlands, at the mouth of Bridger Canyon, architect Van Bryan's home makes an effortless transition from the urban grid of downtown Bozeman to a more pastoral setting. The timeless gabled form, exterior woodwork and shingles allow the house to blend with its surroundings. But the flat roof that links the gables, the expansive walls of glass that face the hills and the myriad skylights — all atypical of classic Montana style — give the structure a decidedly contemporary look.

In his living room, with the verdant Story Hills cascading into the room like sunlight, Bryan talks about his philosophy with unassuming ease, interrupting himself to introduce Scout, the family's 12-year-old golden retriever who could be easily confused for Bryan's shadow. Every home, every structure should enrich the human spirit, he says, in a voice barely louder than a whisper. With wood and glass, graceful lines and a daring imagination, Bryan created his own home as the structural embodiment of that personal tenet.

"This house was something of a testing ground," explains Bryan, the founding principal of Studio Architects and the architect behind dozens of the region's most



EVERY CORNER OF THE HOME OPENS ITSELF TO THE OUTDOORS: WALLS OF FLOOR-TO-CEILING WINDOWS BRING THE FURROWED STORY HILLS INSIDE, SKYLIGHTS REVEAL CLOUDS AND STARS, AND CLERESTORY WINDOWS PERFECTLY FRAME THE BRIDGERS.

inspired homes. "I played with and implemented some different ideas," he says.

Four years after completion, the home has more than lived up to Bryan's expectations. "I'm really pleased with the way we've lived into it," he says. Bryan's wife Wallis, who designed the elegant interiors and rich color palate, agrees with Van's estimation. "Though some of the architectural elements were, on paper, difficult to see, I had complete trust that it would be nothing short of spectacular. And it is. It's an artistic home but it is also one amazingly comfortable home," she says.

In fact, the home is sublimely comfortable, open and inviting in a way that nearly defies explanation. The heart of the home — the living room, dining room and kitchen — is

open, airy and simultaneously cozy. The clean lines of the epicurean kitchen balance plush furnishings in the living room. The kitchen's granite countertops, stainless steel and vibrant green walls counter the dark wood, deep green and purple of the dining room.

"Some nights the four of us will sit down to dinner and find ourselves still at the table two hours later," explains Bryan with obvious sentiment. The younger of the couple's two children will start college this fall. "That is a wonderful byproduct of the comfort of this house that I never anticipated."

In keeping with the openness and lack of pretense that the couple envisioned, Bryan designed a glass entryway so that guests can almost look through the house as they approach. That transparency continues throughout the home in both the

Left: The family's living room is enfolded by windows that bring the outside in. Black-stained concrete floors are thermally advantageous and offer a striking contrast to the floating tamarindo floors in the adjacent kitchen and dining room. The concrete bench in front of the fireplace has special meaning: Bryan and his son poured it together.



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small details — like sandblasted glass doors — and the larger ones. Every corner of the home opens itself to the outdoors: walls of floor-to-ceiling windows bring the furrowed Story Hills inside, skylights reveal clouds and stars, and clerestory windows perfectly frame the Bridgers.

Ten years ago, when the house was little more than late night conversations between husband and wife, and a sketch on an airplane cocktail napkin, Bryan knew it would have to be built in a setting that lent itself to the concept of indoor-outdoor living. When he worked with another architect and builder to master-plan the 32-home Headlands development, Bryan realized almost immediately that it would provide an ideal setting.

"This space folds so easily into its natural surroundings. It feels remarkably private and yet, we're just three minutes from downtown — five and a half if the train is running," he says.

To create an interesting dichotomy throughout the home, Bryan combined contemporary form with softer, natural materials. A dramatic slate floor in the entryway contrasts the rich tamarindo floors in the sitting room, dining room and kitchen.

A step, running nearly the length of the house makes the wood floor float and subtly separates it from the living room's heat-absorbing black-stained concrete floor. Overhead, rough-sawn timbers hint at the canopy of a forest, again linking the living space back to the world just outside.

"I was fascinated by how Van could make the inside and outside meld," says Wallis. "It's seamless."

In keeping with the family's love for indoor-outdoor living, Bryan recently completed a significant addition that included a 2,000-square-foot casita-inspired guest quarters that is a natural extension of the expansive outdoor living space. The family also added a hybrid pool: a full size recreation pool with a lap machine.

The space created by the relationship between the main house and the casita is ideal for entertaining. The casita's covered patio includes a dining area, fireplace, infrared ceiling lamps for heat and even an outdoor shower, tucked behind the rock fireplace.

Asked about the inspiration for the addition, Bryan explains that he and Wallis started small with the existing

house, within their budget, and wanted to add space for family and friends when it became possible.

A ground-level living area with ample built-ins is perfect for guests staying in the upstairs loft, and doubles as a game room for the family. A shuffleboard table, inspired by one from the Pastime Bar in Wallis' hometown of Fort Benton, Mont., is a family favorite. Downstairs, Bryan is working on what he calls an indulgence. The handsome, rustic alder paneled room — complete with a wine cellar, Spanish cedar humidifier, and separate positive air pressure ventilation system — will no doubt lend itself to friendly cigar smoke-infused gatherings and late nights.

Bryan is clearly delighted with the addition, most of which was built by employees of the couple's development company, BlackLeaf Group, which specializes in affordable condominiums. "I think when the kids leave, Wallis and I will close down the main house and just move over here," he muses, opening what appears to be a sliding glass wall linking the guest quarters to the covered patio.

In addition to the stylistic blending of the structures and their setting, Bryan employed creative engineering to maximize the indoor-outdoor relationship. A modified steel moment frame enabled Bryan to create the south-facing wall of windows in the main house's living room. Just beyond the glass, a 4-foot overhang acts as a solar response, protecting the interior from the summer sun but allowing the winter sun to shine directly in, warming the space. By using stressed skin panels — foam surrounded by plywood — even the framing is thermally advantageous.

"This house definitely pushes the inside-outside relationship to the extreme for a northern climate," explains Bryan. "But there are ways to be stylistically and climatically appropriate, even in Montana, without being static."

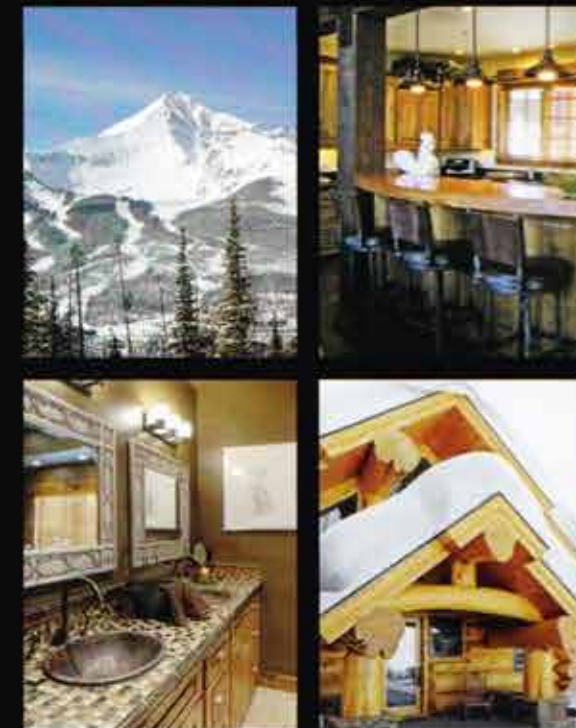
With a career that spans nearly 20 years and an impressively diverse portfolio, Bryan's home is a beautiful expression of his work. By handcrafting form, light, scale and proportion, he managed to create a space that perfectly suits and truly reflects his family and his philosophy.

"In designing and building this house, I was trying to do something that is a living example of what I believe," Bryan said.

By all accounts, he succeeded brilliantly. ■

Carter G. Walker is the managing editor of *Western Art & Architecture*.

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