

Seeking SANCTUARY

A gracious Aspen retreat tucked into a private hillside enclave fosters connection, calm and comfort for a multigenerational family.

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Architecture and Interior Design: Charles Cunniffe, Erica Delak and Courtney Nystrom, Charles Cunniffe Architects
Home Builder: Steve Hansen, Hansen Construction Landscape Architecture: Jason Jaynes, DHM Design

The goal was to create a residence where everyone could be together at the same time,” says architect Charles Cunniffe of his clients’ newly built Aspen vacation home. “Everyone,” in the case of this large family, meant a group of two dozen. The owners and their close-knit clan, ranging from older adults to young children, had outgrown their former retreat in the area (also the work of Cunniffe and his firm). Luckily, an idyllic—albeit challenging—site revealed itself and inspired an innovative architectural response.

Limitations often foster ingenuity, and the hillside lot necessitated some out-of-the-box thinking. “It was considered so uniquely difficult that no one wanted to build on it,” quips Cunniffe, explaining that a restricted construction zone runs through the property, divvying up the area where a home could feasibly rest. The views of Aspen Mountain, however, were breathtaking and its 5 acres promised privacy (“as if it’s within its own mini valley,” notes the architect). “My client told us, ‘Give me one of your great houses,’” Cunniffe recalls. He and his team were happy to comply.

To thwart the topography, Cunniffe proposed a residence with two wings—one containing the primary living areas and owners’ suite, the other mainly dedicated to guest rooms—connected by a glass bridge that gracefully floats across the restricted land, now reimagined as a Zen garden. The plan, developed in close collaboration with the wife, celebrates the scenery as much as it achieves the family’s goals. “I wanted an open, flowing layout with lots of windows, because there are few things more beautiful than the majesty of these mountains,” the wife muses. Her wishes were honored: Airy interconnected gathering spaces face south, with stunning views of the Rockies captured through walls of glass, and in addition to the primary suite, eight guest rooms ensure that the family can comfortably overnight en masse. There’s also a detached guest cabin for lengthier stays.

The home also includes a fascinating surprise. With the push of a button, a hydraulic system retracts part of the terrace to reveal an inviting pool and spa—and cleverly, the pool’s depth can be adjusted from wading level to 5-foot-deep. This allows it to accommodate the needs of different age groups or be closed off entirely as the owners desire, while also helping the

water features retain heat. “It’s nothing short of spectacular,” enthuses the wife, acknowledging the skill of general contractor Steve Hansen during the dwelling’s three years of construction. “He built us a home that is truly a wonder.”

Alongside Cunniffe, the homeowners worked closely with project manager Erica Delak and interior designer Courtney Nystrom. “Imagining spaces to accommodate 24 people might sound daunting, but this house lives intimately,” says Delak, pointing out the use of natural materials like sandstone and hemlock that aid the relaxed ambience. “Our clients wanted serene, understated rooms of tonal colors that would accent the landscape—because you’re constantly looking out, not in.” The pared-back palette also highlights the owners’ extensive art collection, which ranges from vintage travel posters to Andy Warhol screenprints.

“Every space was designed to be participatory,” Delak goes on to say. The glass-walled main wing flows much like a great room, with the living area flanked by two linear fireplaces—architectural stunners rendered in glass and steel that extend up to the lofty ceiling and act as dividers between a dining and game room. The dining room seats all 24 family members; in the adjacent kitchen, a large banquette, counter seating and a sectional from the connected family room offer multiple gathering places. And the wife, a skilled glass artist, added a personal spin by designing and blowing the dining room’s chandelier and several lamps and sconces in the bedrooms, as well as the home’s collection of drinkware.

At the far end of the main wing lies the owners’ suite, “imagined as a bright, private retreat,” Delak continues, with dual bathrooms and closets as well as an office space. The guest wing’s bedrooms echo the main wing’s restfulness, offset by a playful bunk room for the family’s younger members that features forest-themed wallpaper and is adjacent to a lounge leading to the lawn. There, landscape architect Jason Jaynes’ plant palette embraces seasonal color shifts, while meandering walkways offer a meditative experience across the acreage.

“This is a complicated program on a very complicated site,” concludes Cunniffe, “but the house is discrete and discerning.” And its fuss-free spaces make for relaxed gatherings year-round, to the delight of the owners. “Gathering our entire family here together in any season is a little slice of heaven,” reflects the wife. ■



Glass passageways, including this hall leading to the husband’s office and the primary suite, were designed to offer unimpeded views even from the home’s transitional spaces. Hand-selected fractured granite boulders act as sculptural elements.

Previous page: An expansive wall of sliding doors and clerestory windows lines the great room, dining area and game room, all of which open to an extended pool terrace. The primary retreat, with a private patio, lies at the far end.

Two steel-and-glass fireplaces with Taj Mahal quartzite surrounds frame the great room. Atop an Isberian rug, club chairs, sofas and an accent chair and ottoman—all A.Rudin—gather around Holly Hunt tables. A custom Hubbardton Forge Griffin Starburst pendant crowns the space.





Oak and Opal Marquette quartz feature on the Bulthaup kitchen's island, complete with Holly Hunt stools and a Studio Van den Akker chandelier. A bespoke banquette and table incorporate Joss & Main chairs and a Shades of Light pendant. The sectional is A.Rudin.

Quintus club chairs and an ottoman covered in Pollack fabric compose a quiet seating area within the owners' bedroom. Holly Hunt linens and Cathers Home pillows line an A.Rudin bed. The circular chandelier is James Allan and the rug is Fabrica.





A Serena & Lily dome-shaped pendant overlooks the bunk room, with custom white oak queen beds on the bottom and twins atop. Metallic-accented Woods & Pears wallpaper by Cole & Son adds a whimsical note.

Teak furnishings from Summit were selected for the terrace. A section of the tiled deck surface is adroitly engineered to convert to an adjustable pool-and-spa—a custom feature designed with Twinscape.

