

Waterfront Idyll

Bold color coupled with a strong sense of place yields a flip-the-script lakeside getaway in Montana.

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Architecture: Larry Pearson, Pearson Design Group Interior Design: Peter Dunham, Peter Dunham & Associates
Home Builder: Kelcey Bingham, Bear Mountain Builders, Inc. Landscape Architecture: Kurt Vomfell, Terra Designworks LLC

T

he words, “I want to have a little fun with this house,” are music to a designer’s ears. And that’s exactly what Peter Dunham’s client said upon hiring him to craft the interiors of the Whitefish, Montana, vacation home she

shares with her husband. To Dunham, “fun” meant playing to the expansive lake views from the residence’s hillside location. It also meant going a bit wild, blending elements from the 1950s, ’60s and ’70s, and layering with art and handmade pieces. “I’ve never done this particular look for another client in this environment and context,” he says. “It’s very much tailored to their style and the locale.”

The clients emphasized the importance of respecting the surrounding environment. To speak to the local vernacular, Dunham recommended residential designer Larry Pearson. He was familiar with Pearson’s work and confident that he could create the contemporary but relaxed vibe the couple was looking for yet stay true to the setting. “We love regional materials,” notes Pearson, who worked with general contractor Kelcey Bingham to incorporate recycled timber and Montana moss rock. “The exterior color scheme and materials blend into the setting,” adds Bingham. A sense of place was top of mind for landscape architect Kurt Vomfell as well. “The goal was to reflect the character of Montana,” says Vomfell. He points to the native and near-native plantings he used that “feel like they were found in a meadow here.”

While the team wanted the residence to fit in, they also wanted it to be aesthetically interesting. So, Pearson flipped the script on a classic lake house. A guest house was erected at the top of the hill, with the main house set below. The entry from the motor court leads to a foyer from which a stone staircase descends into the social spaces at lake level. “This is a home that touches the water,” Pearson says. “So, you’re engaging with the lake.”

A contemporary style was important, but, Pearson asserts, an ultra-sleek modern home was never his goal. It was important, he says, “that you can take your shoes off, walk down to the

beach, jump in a boat and come back in soaking wet.” Adds Dunham: “It was much more about organic modernism. Larry was very invested in how his design was working between these materials. You’ve got really beautiful stonework, woodwork, hand-troweled plasterwork and iron elements that he brought in.”

Since the clients didn’t want what Dunham calls “a serious, monochromatic house,” he incorporated color but carefully considered its usage. “The outside view is stunning with the shades of blue and gray-blue. When the lake goes bright, it’s green,” he says. “You’ve got the green of the trees and the colors of the mountains. So those are what you want to celebrate.” The designer worked in verdant tones through furnishings such as teal pendants in the kitchen, a sea-green sofa in the foyer and light green swivel chairs in the living room. Varying shades of sand that nod to the beach set the backdrop.

When Dunham did choose to use other colors—mixing in burnt-orange and saffron-yellow dining chairs among the blue and green ones; designing a sectional upholstered in a pumpkin-colored chenille for the sitting room—he kept them muted rather than bright and intended for them to support the vibrant art. “A lot of the art is quite fresh,” Dunham says. “You didn’t want to put up works that felt sludgy.”

To this end, he hung a vintage tapestry prominently in the dining room. Its black background and bold colors contribute an eye-catching graphic quality and a bit of drama, while the textile itself mutes noise and adds softness against the stone walls and steel-framed windows. The result: A room where dinners last for hours, thanks also to the generously scaled chairs covered in a stain-proof leather that is “semi-indestructible,” says Dunham.

This isn’t the only room for gatherings. The entire house is designed for groups. There’s the cozy nook in the living area warmed by a fireplace—the perfect spot for card games—the inviting orange sectional and the many seating areas out on the deck. Which is precisely the point, Dunham muses. “I look back, and I see the picture over the lake or the chairs around the fire pit and think, ‘that’s somewhere I’d like to be.’” ■



“The entry is all about the mix of materials,” says designer Peter Dunham of this Montana vacation home. “It’s a yin and yang.” The granite table with chipped edges—a nod to the stone walls—is by Peter Dunham & Associates, as are the rest of the custom pieces in the residence. Its monumental presence balances the bespoke sofa in a lush Brunschwig & Fils mohair, a classic Noguchi paper pendant and the Robert Natkin painting.

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To keep the vibe informal and fun, Dunham incorporated occasional bursts of color, such as the custom sectional covered in a vivid AST Fabrics performance chenille in the sitting room. Both the bespoke coffee table sporting a vintage cowhide patchwork and a Hans J. Wegner rocking chair suggest a rustic feel.



Right: "It was important for us to connect the house visually to the surroundings," says residential designer Larry Pearson. Accenting the stair hall, which looks onto the lake, are a custom console with a live-edge walnut top and branch legs and a Bocci light fixture.

Opposite: Artworks by Erin Morrison provide a graphic counterpoint to the dining area's custom chairs covered in a rainbow's worth of Keleen Leathers hides. Above the bespoke walnut table hangs a custom five-drop Apparatus chandelier. Underfoot is a Marc Phillips rug.





A generous fireplace separates the main living area from a casual dining spot furnished with a round table and armchairs by Pacific Green, the latter upholstered in a Perennials linen. Shining from above is a 1950s steel-frame chandelier found at auction. Throughout, the white oak flooring is by Burchette & Burchette Hardwood Floors.



Above: "In the guest house, I again used a strong mountain narrative," notes Dunham. He topped a 1960s pine table from the French Alps with a vintage lamp from Big Daddy's in Los Angeles. The mirror is from his Hollywood at Home line.

Left: The designer placed the bespoke bed dressed in Deborah Sharpe linens in the center of the main bedroom. A custom hanging chair holds court in one corner, while a 1950s Kurt Østervig leather armchair offers another place to relax in the other. The artworks are by Sonia Delaunay.



A generous terrace serves up spaces for eating, lounging and taking in the views and the grounds by landscape architect Kurt Vomfell. Arrayed around the dining area's custom table are teak Peter Dunham Home chairs. Flanking the fire feature are Peter Dunham Home rockers.