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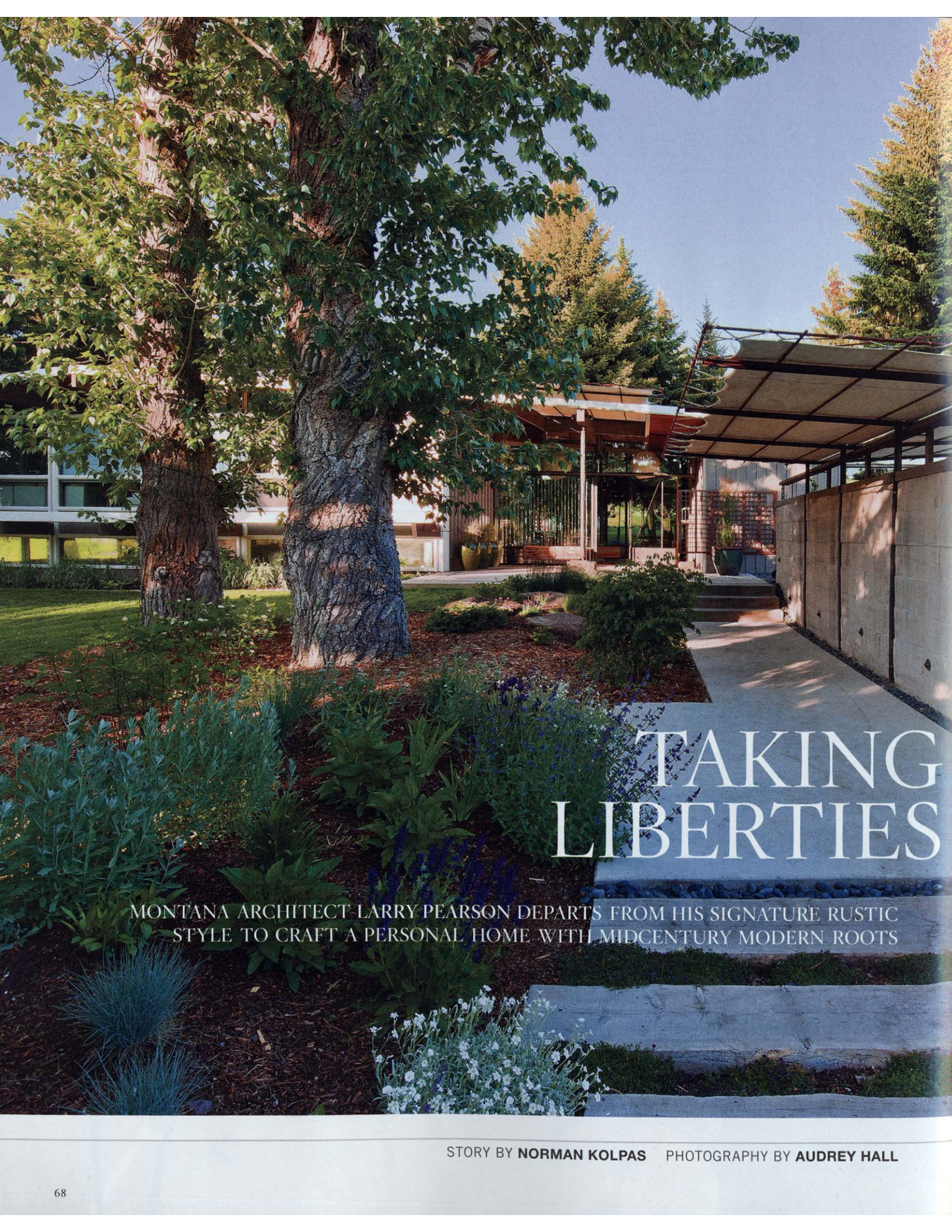


DESIGNERS'
OWN
HOMES

HOW THEY LIVE,
WHAT THEY LOVE
(AND WHY IT'S
NOT WHAT
YOU'D EXPECT)

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TAKING LIBERTIES

MONTANA ARCHITECT LARRY PEARSON DEPARTS FROM HIS SIGNATURE RUSTIC
STYLE TO CRAFT A PERSONAL HOME WITH MIDCENTURY MODERN ROOTS

STORY BY **NORMAN KOLPAS** PHOTOGRAPHY BY **AUDREY HALL**



Architect Larry Pearson stands on the cool poured-concrete floor that flows from his living room through a 9-foot-wide pivoting glass door to one of the patios surrounding the house. His office design staff helped him buy the Midcentury Modern side table on eBay. **FACING PAGE:** A 24-foot-long, 6-foot-tall, form-poured concrete wall separates the entry walkway from a patio on the home's west-facing side. Stretched-canvas awnings on a steel frame extend overhead.



Eagle sandstone, a local rock, was hauled in as the hearth for a welded-steel fireplace Pearson designed. Two armchairs by Brazilian designer Sérgio Rodrigues and a Bertoia wing chair surround a coffee table made from a slab of koa wood Pearson found in Hawaii, with steel-hoop legs made by an area blacksmith. FACING PAGE: Wife Jennifer relaxes with Maisey the dog beside a wet bar converted from a Midcentury Modern sideboard.



“I’m ‘rustic Larry,’” says Larry Pearson with a laugh.

He’s summing up, with good-humored gratitude, the style he has come to be known for as an architect in Big Sky country. Since 1997, his Bozeman-based firm, Pearson Design Group, has forged a widely respected reputation for homes that harmonize classic lodge design—massive wood beams, stone floors, wood paneling, soaring ceilings—with its clients’ contemporary lifestyle needs.

So it may come as a surprise to see the place Pearson himself calls home. Positioned among more than four gently sloping acres on the outskirts of town, his house unfolds across some 3,500 square feet. Its spacious interiors feel remarkably open and airy, thanks to walls of glass that welcome views of what the architect calls his “little oasis of mature pines and cottonwoods” and, beyond, panoramas protected by thousands of acres of adjacent conservation and U.S. Forest Service lands.

Ask the articulate Pearson to label his home’s style and he’s briefly stymied before settling on “regional modern.” He explains, “It started as a 1,200-square-foot Midcentury Modern home built in 1960 by the then-dean of architecture at Montana State University. I grew up in California in a contemporary house like this. So I decided to embrace both its past and my past while interacting with the Montana landscape.”

After buying the house in 2001, Pearson first simply updated the original structure, stripping away dated shag carpeting and refinishing >>




Pearson built a simple plank table suspended by steel columns for a patio on the home's tree-sheltered eastern side; he found the inexpensive wire-mesh chairs on sale years ago. RIGHT: Surrounded by stump seating, another rustic table stretches through the trees along the property's far perimeter.



“This is the relationship I want with Montana: to be amid



the trees and enjoy a spring day watching the animals through the walls of my home.”



“The landscape was my inspiration. I started with this little Midcentury Modern box, and everything else was spontaneous.”





LEFT: Daughter Annie sits on a rock ledge in the entry foyer. Mexican black pebbles form a ruglike design in the concrete floor. The entrance to the old house was near the staircase, which leads down to the bedroom level and up to the kitchen and dining area. Throughout, inexpensive Japanese paper lanterns serve as chandeliers.

AT HOME & PERSONAL

Architect Larry Pearson shares thoughts on what shapes his personal aesthetic.

MOUNTAIN LIVING: What do you wish they had taught you in architecture school?

LARRY PEARSON: What they don't teach is the business of architecture. Schooling, in any field, is just a nudge in the right direction, and it's 10 to 15 years [in the field] before you get your feet under you.

ML: Which three architects inspire you most?

LP: I've developed a reappraisal for Frank Lloyd Wright. I just love the way his Taliesin West in Scottsdale sets into the landscape, and its transitions between covered and open spaces. In Carmel Highlands, California, there's the D.L. James House built in 1918 by Greene and Greene, sitting on fantastic rocky bluffs with rockwork buttresses. It's one of the greatest houses I've ever seen. Among modern architects, I like the work of Rick Joy out of Arizona, who is without question a powerful force in the design world.

ML: What books are on your coffee table right now?

LP: A year or two ago I picked up a copy of *Be Here Now* by Ram Dass. I remembered it from my college days at UC Santa Cruz in the late 1980s. It gave life advice on how to be a better hippie, and today it's a good reminder that you can be happy with nothing. And there's *Travel Italia*, with prints of travel lithographs from the 1920s, '30s and '40s. I've always loved the handwork and saturated colors of those early posters.

ML: What would you be doing if you weren't an architect?

LP: My joke is that I'd like to be a bush pilot up in Alaska. It calls for the same set of skills: You need to be able to visualize things in space.



Muted natural materials compose the kitchen: black-walnut and bamboo cabinets, black patinated steel backsplash, dark granite counters, and a black-walnut floor. FACING PAGE: In the casual dining area, banquette seating and a Danish-modern chair surround a simple black-walnut-and-steel table designed by Pearson.




walls and floors. Then, in 2006, after he married his wife Jennifer and the new couple combined their families, he began a major expansion. “We had a real family and I was in a position to create a true home for us,” he says.

The expansion, which took two and a half years to complete, didn’t follow the same well-organized, precisely drafted approach Pearson normally takes with his clients. “I had very few drawings,” he explains. “Everything was spontaneous, absolutely organic. Every day I came home from the office, met with my contractor and said, ‘This is how we should handle this wall’ or, ‘This is how we should pour the concrete.’ I could never subject my clients to that, but for me, it was absolutely liberating.”

The results foster an equally liberating, ease-filled lifestyle. The original structure’s updated one and a half stories are the core of the new house. To it, Pearson gradually

added “a series of linked glass rooms in non-geometric alignments, like facets extending off of the old elements.” He extended the rooflines, too, pitching them upward to capture views both near and far. Plainspoken materials—concrete, steel, glass, wood and local rock—relate as eloquently to the surroundings as those Pearson uses when designing mountain lodges, but with none of their vernacular ornamentation. Midcentury Modern furniture—some collected over the years, some bought specifically for the house on eBay—complement the spare interiors.

Prospective clients shouldn’t take Larry Pearson’s personal choices the wrong way. He still loves the style he’s famous for. But with this house, says Pearson, “I was at a point in my career where I was trying to say ‘I’m not just a rustic architect.’ I grew up with modern, and I do modern, too!” ●

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