

BIG SKY JOURNAL

# HOME

MOUNTAIN LIVING + ARCHITECTURAL DESIGN





ARCHITECTURE  
Black Mountain Architects  
and D. Fowler Designs

CONSTRUCTION  
Peachey Construction

INTERIOR DESIGN  
Danielle Fowler of Boxwoods

The Fowler home's deck has the feel of an outdoor living room, with views of Canyon Ferry Reservoir and the rolling hills beyond for a backdrop.

# homecoming

A HOME NEAR HELENA, MONTANA,  
TAKES ON HISTORY IN A MODERN FORM

Written by Aaron Parrett • Photography by Roger Wade

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IGH IN THE HILLS ABOVE CANYON FERRY RESERVOIR, outside of Helena, Montana, Danielle and Chris Fowler's house represents the spirit of homecoming in more ways than one. Danielle's great-great-grandfather homesteaded along what was then the Missouri River outside of Helena, founding what became known as the Scheewe Ranch. Though the waters of Canyon Ferry covered the original cabin in the 1950s, Danielle spent her summers on the family land, known to locals as Orchard Beach in honor of the apple trees that her great-great-grandfather planted along the shore. "I spent my summers at the orchard," Danielle recalls, "planning my future life living at the lake."

In 2008, she and her husband bought 25 acres just down the road from the back gate of what had once been her family's land. They set a 27-foot travel trailer on a plot to take in the expansive lake views, and the couple lived there seasonally until they broke ground in 2016, building a house that Danielle designed herself.

**BELOW:** Danielle Fowler designed the home using a low profile that hugs the landscape and blends into the natural stone and sparse timber surroundings.



The core of the home is an immense great room, with a 33-foot-wide wall of windows reaching 12 feet high and looking out over the lake and the hills beyond. This room, in fact, is situated exactly where their trailer once sat.

An interior designer by trade, and owner of the Helena-based Boxwoods Fine Homes & Lifestyles, Danielle pursued a career in San Francisco for 20 years, always knowing that she'd eventually make it back to Montana to build her own home, hoping that it would be close to the family ranch. In designing this one, she wanted the 2,700-square-foot home to blend into the rugged terrain that consists of granite boulders and scattered pines, so she came up with an earth-toned structure with sight lines that are reminiscent of a barn. "I wanted the house to feel like an old barn from an earlier



**FROM TOP:** The great room features hand-hewn, reclaimed hardwood timbers that were hand-built into hammer trusses by master craftsman Menno Peachey, of Peachey Construction. • A pair of outdoor decks envelop the central great room, offering views in different directions.



## homecoming

“The roof pitch is not the usual 12-12, but about half as steep,” Peachey explains. “So that posed kind of a challenge. But using that reclaimed lumber — you know someone put a lot of sweat equity into the hand hewing a long time ago. So I feel timber framing it back together using hand tools preserves its original purpose.”

Peachey also custom built the 8-foot-tall walnut doors throughout the house, which all are at least a foot taller than a standard door, adding to the sense of a reconstituted barn. Standing below those historic timbers, before the enormous panorama afforded by the tall windows, one feels as close to the outdoors as possible while standing inside a house. The rough-hewn wood alone reinforces a sense of stepping back in time, but the design they take on especially underscores the aura of an antique abandoned barn — a veritable icon



**LEFT:** A bar nook sits just off the kitchen, which opens to the great room in order to be conducive to entertaining. **BELOW:** The kitchen cabinets are made from quarter-sawn white oak, painted grey with a peppercorn glaze. The back splash is marble with a digitally-printed stone face.

**THE FOWLERS' HOME COMBINES A RUSTIC AESTHETIC WITH A MODERN FUNCTIONALITY. THE RESULT PROVIDES A COMFORT SO OFTEN LACKING IN LARGER, MORE OSTENTATIOUS HOMES.**

time, one that someone found and added onto to make a house,” Danielle explains. “Hence, the timber framing.”

The great room, designed by architect Trevor Pierson, of Black Mountain Architecture in Bozeman, Montana, features massive trusses made of reclaimed hewn timbers. “Those trusses were an interesting challenge,” Pierson says. “They had to span the great room and transition from the vault to the shed roof over those windows. So it starts out as a traditional hammer-beam truss, but breaks off and goes flat over the windows and the kitchen at the other end.”

Pierson had the trusses made by Menno Peachey, a master timber framer and owner of Peachey Construction, who lives across the lake from the Fowlers. He cut and shaped the mortises and tenons by hand, using chisels and Japanese saws. To assist him, Peachey recruited experienced teenagers from an Amish community in Pennsylvania.

**ABOVE:** As the owner of Boxwoods Fine Homes & Lifestyles, based in Helena, Danielle Fowler’s talents are showcased in the master bedroom, which was designed to take advantage of the light, especially the morning sunrise over Canyon Ferry. **RIGHT:** All of the doors in the Fowler home are 8 feet tall, enhancing the sense of spaciousness throughout.



## homecoming



The den is a showcase for Danielle's photographs and Chris's 1920s Victrola hand-cranked phonograph.

of the Western rural landscape. "Menno told us he saw a bullet imbedded in one of the timbers," Chris Fowler says, "but we wouldn't let him point it out to us. Someday we'll glance up and finally see it, but we haven't spotted it yet."

Because of its simple and straightforward floor plan and the fact that the entire building sits at ground level, the Fowlers' home combines a rustic aesthetic with a modern functionality. The result provides a comfort so often lacking in larger, more ostentatious homes. Passing through the foyer puts one immediately into the hearth of the home, the great room and kitchen together composing one holistic living space. There's a sense of feeling oriented, welcomed, and grounded. In spite of its relative newness (the house was finished only two years ago), the home feels lived in and well-loved by its inhabitants.

The Fowler home is a monument to a long-standing dream of Montana living, and to the love and reflection that it took to make building a house feel like coming home. 🏠