



Since the Fowlers wanted to capture as much of Montana's Big Sky view as possible while keeping their living space on one level, they opted for a linear design that allows them to enjoy the vistas from the full length of their home. The great room measures 33 feet in length, and each of its main windows is nearly 9 feet high.

opposite Designing the great room's hand-hewn, reclaimed-wood hammerbeam trusses was challenging, as the timbers had to span the room and transition from the vault to the shed roof over the windows. The design starts out as a traditional hammerbeam but then breaks off and goes flat over the windows and kitchen at the other end.

By Stacy Durr Albert | Photography by Roger Wade



A Return to Roots

*A California couple builds their dream home in Montana
right next to land homesteaded by their ancestors.*



Form and function meet in the kitchen, where upscale details harmonize with practicality. A marble slab with a waterfall edge creates a dramatic look for the center island, while a copper stove hood lends a rustic counterpoint. One of the most striking elements in the kitchen is the custom backsplash, which features a photo-transferred pattern on marble. Walnut flooring adds warmth to the room.



After spending a decade gazing out at Montana's Canyon Ferry Lake and the majestic foothills of the Rocky Mountains from the deck of their RV, Chris and Danielle Fowler knew the precise view that they wanted to capture for their mountain-modern dream home.

"Before we built our house, we had an RV sitting where our great room is now for almost 10 years," explains Danielle. "Needless to say, we had a long time to fantasize about our home. When I started drawing the plan, I knew I wanted to

capture the same open feeling I had while sitting on that deck in front of our RV."

Though the couple lived and worked in California at the time, they had vacationed in Montana for many years, and they had a special connection with the Canyon Ferry region. "My family homesteaded an area about a quarter-mile down the road from our current property," shares Danielle, who spent many summers enjoying the land that had been in her family for generations.

While visiting one summer, the couple discovered a for-sale sign on a pristine 25-acre lot nearby, but rather than build a permanent retreat in haste, the

Fowlers parked their RV on the lot and spent years thinking about their dream house. Deciding on the style of home was a gradual and thoughtful process.

"I always wanted a log cabin — my Montana fantasy," says Danielle. "When we started designing our dream home, we quickly decided the idea of a log cabin was great for vacation, but we decided we didn't want to live in one every day. So, we took a closer look at timber frame homes. Loving old wood, we thought this would be the perfect fit."

Once the idea set in, Danielle began to sketch out plans for the home. As an interior designer for 20 years in San

HOME DETAILS

SQUARE FOOTAGE

2,700

BEDROOMS BATHS

2 2.5

DESIGNERS

DANIELLE FOWLER
AND BLACK MOUNTAIN
ARCHITECTURE

TIMBER PROVIDERS/CRAFTERS

PEACHEY CONSTRUCTION
AND MONTANA
RECLAIMED LUMBER

Francisco, and current owner of the Helena-based Boxwoods Fine Homes & Lifestyles, Danielle had long dreamed of designing her own home. “I can tell you that I must have drawn and redrawn this house 100 times,” she shares.

Eventually, a clear picture emerged of what Chris and Danielle desired in the design. “We wanted a home that would showcase old reclaimed timbers, but still have a bit of a modern, clean feel,” explains Danielle. “In a way, we wanted to feel the ‘Big Sky’ of Montana — I wanted to be able to see as much of the sky as possible — but we also wanted a home that felt warm, inviting. One where we could entertain with ease.”

To finalize the design, the couple turned to architect Trevor Pierson of Black Mountain Architecture in Bozeman. “My role was to help fine-tune the plan and bring the third dimension to the design,” explains Trevor. “In other words, my job was to figure out the bones of the project and put it into a drawing package that a builder could actually build.”

The team’s meticulous devotion paid off. The resulting home is a 2,700-square-foot hybrid that marries form and function. “The majority of the house is built via traditional stick-frame construction, the exception being the great room where the exposed timber trusses are actually structural,” shares Trevor. “The great room’s design was probably our biggest consideration. Danielle had a good idea about what she wanted in terms of the exposed timber trusses, so I had to determine how those trusses would look and function structurally.”

Since the couple wanted a single-story home where they could age in place, the layout of the house is linear — a configuration that also maximizes natural daylight and panoramic views. “You can walk from one end of the house to the other, all the while seeing the view,” shares Danielle.

The beauty of the home is not only in its floor plan, but also in its reclaimed, hand-hewn timbers. Menno Peachey, founder of Peachey Construction in Helena, crafted the majestic trusses by cutting and shaping the mortises and tenons by hand, and recruiting a young Amish crew from Pennsylvania to help him. Montana Reclaimed Lumber in Gallatin Gateway supplied the eye-catching beams.

“The timbers are very old, and you can see where there used to be ladder rungs,” says Danielle. “There is even a bullet in one of the timbers! Our builder found it, but he won’t tell us where it is. We’re still looking for it.”

The timeless charm of old wood is also evident in the ceilings. Aged corral board sourced from a nearby ranch is used in the great room, which is undeniably the heart of the home. With its 33-foot-wide wall of windows that soar up to 12 feet in height, not to mention its massive hand-hewn hammerbeam trusses overhead,

it awes all who are lucky enough to bask in the space. “It’s hard not to be wowed when you face a wall of windows like ours,” shares Danielle.

The interior decor continues the grand-yet-inviting theme. “When I was designing both the architecture and the furnishings, I was thinking ‘town meets country,’” explains Danielle. “Having lived and worked in San Francisco, I will always have a bit of ‘town’ in me, but I wanted a rustic home also.”

The exterior ties the town-and-country vibe together, featuring a combination of wood siding, dry-stack stone and rusted corrugated steel. The eclectic finishes fit in nicely with the rugged Montana terrain surrounding the house, which is defined by granite boulders and scattered pines against a serene backdrop of lake and mountains.

Looking back on the project, the Fowlers couldn’t be happier with how smoothly it went. The only setback was during excavation. The crew broke not one, but two excavator jackhammers during the project, inspiring the home’s fitting name: Rockpile Ranch.

If they had to do it over again, there’s only one thing the couple would change: the size and placement of the mudroom. “Never having lived in Montana year-round, I didn’t have an appreciation for the mud during spring and fall,” Danielle admits. “I figured it would be fine if it was the second place you walked into, but it really needed to be the first.”

Nevertheless, reflecting back on their early days of enjoying the tranquility of the surroundings from their RV, Danielle and Chris feel they’ve truly captured exactly what they were looking for all those years ago — a place where they will continue the tradition their homesteading ancestors started for many generations to come.



With its distinctive tray ceiling made from aged corral board offset by windows that frame majestic views, the master bedroom is a haven of serenity. An oversized windmill fan continues the ceiling's rustic vibe.

CHRIS AND DANIELLE'S
*special
spaces*

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1 Designed completely around the view of the lake and the mountains, the home virtually melts into its natural surroundings. 2 Luxe touches, like crystal lighting, fur-trimmed pillows and floating glass shelving, bring welcome contrast alongside rustic details, such as the weathered-wood accent wall. 3 Danielle's passion for a mix of "town and country" in her decor is especially evident in the master bathroom, where an upscale flavor reigns. The eye-catching tiles are a mix of marble and quartzite, while the walls feature a stylish wallpaper by Fabricut. 4 It's easy to see why the outdoor living area is one of the family's favorite gathering spots. Serving up ample living space against a breathtaking backdrop of land and lake, the deck is a natural respite for all who visit. "In the summer, we almost never leave the space," shares Danielle. "We will sit out there late into the night with a nice fire, listening to baseball." 5 The Fowlers' hybrid timber home features a linear design that maximizes natural light and passive solar gain. The majority of the home uses traditional construction, but the great room contains exposed timber trusses that are also structural.

