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The New Anti-Ski House

By Alyssa Abkowitz

When Karen Simon, a banking executive in Houston, decided to build a custom vacation home in Snowmass Village, Colo., the last thing she wanted was a replica of a Swiss chalet. "I didn't want one gable in the entire house," says the contemporary-design enthusiast.

Armed with pictures of modern homes, Ms. Simon asked for curves, open space and the maximum amount of glass allowed within the town's building codes. Her architects, David Johnston and John Hufker in Aspen, Colo., designed a 4,950-square-foot home with barrel-vaulted roofs, stone exteriors and clear cedar siding more akin to a California contemporary than a Rocky Mountain retreat.

To combat the stark look that's often associated with modern architecture—85 beams of steel support the home's unconventional style—Ms. Simon chose soft creams and warm browns for the interiors. "There's a lot of stone inside, but the feeling is soft and user-friendly," she says.

After decades of traditional mountain design—heavy overhangs, a plethora of pine wood, a deer's head hung in the entryway—ski homes across the globe are shedding the antlers. Homeowners once enamored with dark and cozy rustic retreats that shielded them from cold winter nights are now opting for sleek architecture that lets in lots of light, a look that has gained momentum in the past five years.

Modern designs have dominated recent big-ticket mountain-home sales. Last month, Fred Smith, the CEO of FedEx, bought a contemporary chalet in Utah's Deer Valley for \$11.2 million. This past spring, a modern, 6,372-square-foot ski-in, ski-out chalet with five bedrooms, a Turkish bath and massage room in Courchevel, a town in the French Alps, sold for more than €20 million (\$25.5 million). In July, a glass-and-stone home with mahogany and steel accents called Pa Gomo, set on 35 acres in Telluride, Colo., was auctioned off for \$13.2 million. It was a record single-family sale for the town, according to Telluride Consulting, a real-estate analysis firm. Stuart Ross and his wife, Valarie, the former owners and builders of Pa Gomo, says

they specifically looked for an "antimountain" architect. "We told him 'no antlers and no logs,'" says Mr. Ross. Instead, the couple got a home with a master suite that floats above a pond, a custom stained glass-and-steel wine rack and a curving copper roof. The couple liked Pa Gomo's design so much they enlisted

its architect, Jack Snow of RKD Architects, to build another contemporary home in Glenwood Springs, Colo., about an hour from Aspen. A variety of changes, from technology to demographics, are driving the shift. As the rise of the digital age makes telecommuting more commonplace, more owners are beginning to live in resort areas year-round, says Aspen architect Willis Pember. After all, the bear rugs and pine floors that were so comforting over Christmas vacation can seem a little kitschy in July.

Technology has also eliminated the need for some signature styles of alpine design. Steeply pitched roofs aren't mandatory for heavy snowfalls because many new metal roofs are designed to hold the snow for insulation, says Ann MacQuoid, an associate broker in Deer Valley. Instead of small windows with thick shutters, large windows with triple panes are able to keep the heat in, and often are strategically placed in parts of the home that let in the maximum amount of sun, thereby reducing heating costs.

Part of the evolution also relates to the aging of the population, as a sleeker and cleaner look is often popular with empty-nester homeowners, says Debbie Evans, an interior designer in Whistler, British Columbia. "When you have children there's chaos and things are busy, so design re-



Getty Residence, Woody Creek CO

flects that," Ms. Evans says. "Now it's more sophisticated."

Some doubt the look will have the lasting power of the mountain-timber style. When a chief investment officer for a capital-management firm in Greenwich, Conn., recently built a 10,000-square-foot ski home in the Aspen Highlands, he and his wife chose a traditional European alpine design, complete with thick wooden trusses, dark leather couches and wood carvings of deer heads. "There have been homes like ours for 200 years in the Alps and in 200 years from now, you'll find the same thing," says the owner, who asked not to be identified. "Whatever seems modern now will look outdated." Gareth Jefferies, a partner at French Alps real-estate firm Alpine Property, also worries that nontraditional mountain homes are more of a fad. "Are people going to be thinking like this in a few years?" he asks.

Ms. Simon, the owner of the Snowmass Village home, concedes that the layout and design of her home, on track to be completed in February, might not appeal to everyone. "Selling this house could be interesting," she says. "But right now, I'm just ready to enjoy it."

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