

The timber-frame home is set on a massive stone base and clad in cedar to make a visual connection with its setting.

Head For The Hills

The lure of the Rockies brings a couple West to build their dream home.

BY KAREN ASHBEE // PHOTOGRAPHS BY PETER POWLES

It was one fateful visit to Banff. A Pennsylvania couple had travelled the world, but that trip to the Rockies seven years ago did them in—and they knew it was where they wanted to be. Sights set on Canmore, they soon purchased a home in the hills. “We knew no one,” explains the couple, he an attorney and she a doctor of clinical psychology. “But we were inspired by the breathtaking vistas to build the cabin.”

Architect Alasdair Russell of Russell and Russell Design Studios was brought in to design their dream home, with builder Robert Mitchell of Natural Abode and Calgary’s Connie Young of Ce De Ce handling the interiors. Russell’s plans started with the building site. “Rather than orientating the building ‘square’ on the lot, the home sits at 45 degrees,” explains Russell. “The living room and kitchen axis face the Three Sisters mountain range, and the entry and dining axis faces toward Rundle Mountain. The homeowners get a far wider panorama than their neighbours.”

The timber-frame home boasts four bedrooms, two half bathrooms and a few luxuries too: a sauna, steam shower, media room and an elevator. The home is a ski getaway, a summer retreat and a year-round showcase for timber-frame design. “The house represents a five-year fantasy for us,” says the homeowner. “We now happily share it with friends, all year round.”

Turn the page for more photos.



OPPOSITE Twenty-one-foot ceilings create an airiness, framing the view to the mountains. Cathedral trusses of Douglas fir, acid washed to preserve their colour, raise the roof and frame the windows. South American bloodwood strips were carefully inlaid between the fir posts.

TOP Everything in the bathroom is curved, from the lily-pad-green granite vanity to the solid cherry "Hobbit" closet doors and the door to the steam shower. Hexagonal floor tiles complement the curved space, while columns imported from India add a touch of the exotic.

ABOVE LEFT The backsplash in the kitchen is a copper-leaf foil sealed behind clear glass. It works well with the island's unusual terra-cotta coloured granite countertop. Spanning more than five metres, the island is the perfect place to gather for an après-ski drink and a chat with the chef.

ABOVE CENTRE The adzing (chisel detail) on the bed, from Martin Pierce Furnishings in Los Angeles, was the inspiration for a similar pattern on the mantelpiece in the living room. The bed is dressed in a Scottish Thistle pattern by Pindler and Pindler.

ABOVE RIGHT A bold stone fireplace with a hand-adzed cherry mantel serves as the room's focal point. The fireplace screen by Kenny Ainscow features a wind-blown tree. Oversize sofas were made for curling up on a cold winter night. **wl**
See SOURCES.

LOOK This Way

On a parcel of land hemmed in by the glories of nature on one side and the diesel rush of the Sea-to-Sky Highway on the other, architect and designer Fook Weng Chan delivers a vacation home that ingeniously displays the former while handily hiding the latter.

Q+A

with architect and designer Fook Weng Chan

WL How did you create a transition from the highway to the home in such a short distance?

FOOK WENG CHAN I tried to slow down people's emotions as they approach the house. As you drive up to it, there's a series of stone walls at different heights in the front yard, so you're forced to meander. Then you land on a walkway made of concrete and basalt that hovers above the ground, leads up to the largest stone wall (the exterior of the house), and brings you through a wood-and-glass gateway. But you aren't inside yet. You're in a shallow exterior courtyard—another process of slowing down. To your right is a reflecting pool with stepping stones and basalt columns. Only then do you see the front door of the house, a solid wood door with little slats of glass so you can peek through.

WL Since the house is right on the beach you had glacier-fed Green Lake as a focal point. How did you maximize its potential?

FWC The view is definitely the most attractive feature of the site. A timber frame allowed larger windows that made views of Whistler and Blackcomb and the lake apparent from every room.

WL What kind of life were the homeowners hoping to have here?

FWC They've been Vancouver residents since the 1960s, a couple that used to come up here and ski out

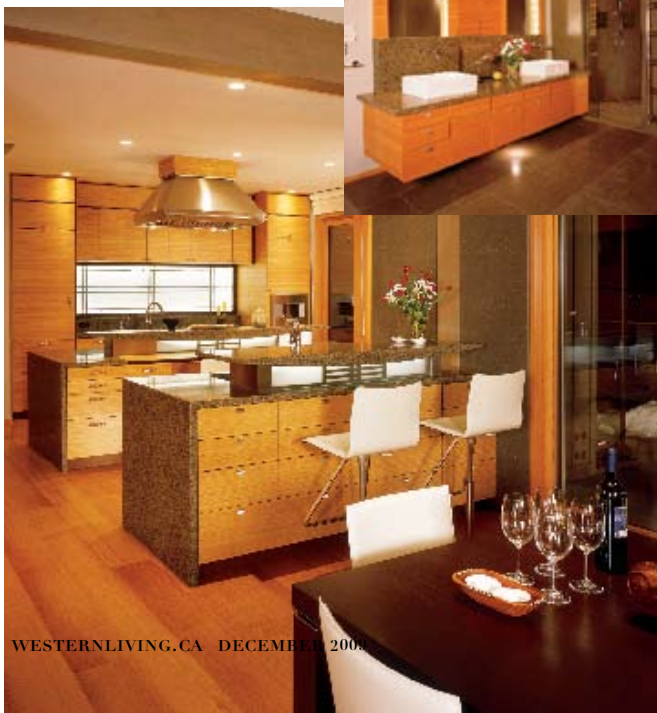
A lakeside Whistler chateau is designed to celebrate shared family time.

BY MICHAEL HARRIS
PHOTOGRAPHS BY PETER POWLES

The main living area is bolstered by a confident post-and-beam structure. Lighting is integrated into double posts and bounces off Douglas fir ceiling panels for cozy, lamp-like effects.



The colours for the commissioned circular painting were selected by the owner's daughter. Other artworks—especially an impressive ceramic collection from global travels—are given generous roosts. The five-foot-long fireplace, designed by Fook Weng Chan, is custom built: standing only 18 inches high, it allows a television (concealed by sliding bamboo panels) to sit at the optimum sight level (above). The homeowners have a special distaste for electrical outlets and tangles of unsightly cord. Solution: between the two vanities a recess was built where plugs and electric toothbrushes can hide (below). Where most kitchens are fitted with a backsplash, this one boasts a shoji-style back-illuminated panel with milk-laminated glass. The faint grid recalls the pattern of the timber structure the house is based on. Similar panels glow from under the raised counters on two islands (bottom).



of their motor home. They were hitting retirement age but were very active—still skiing and even doing the zip line up there. This was a couple that had travelled on every continent, and now they wanted a place where they could enjoy life with their kids and grandkids. I put the master suite on the upper floor and the kids' suites below—to attract kids you have to offer them some independence. We also did one room for bunkbeds so grandkids can all sleep together as a bonding experience.

WL *There's a kind of great hall on the main floor, where kitchen, dining room and living room all flow together under massive windows and a timber frame. Were you imagining après-ski moments?*

FWC Actually, I think a successful retreat needs to cater to a variety of scenarios. There's always going to be après-ski gatherings, but you also need to cater to moments when a person wants to cocoon. We designed nooks that branch off the central room.

WL *How does the skiing lifestyle fit into the design?*

FWC All the main circulation corridors were done in stone so they could be mopped up; nobody's damaging the wood floors in the rest of the house. And in eight closets around the house I designed huge drawers for ski mitts and wet things—there's a wire mesh bottom and hot air circulating through them.

WL *How does the place look from out on the lake?*

FWC We brought the house as close to the lake's edge as we could. There are three levels of concrete planters that terrace down to the shore from the home, a kind of stand for the house itself. And when lit at night, because there's so much glass, it looks like a large glowing lantern.

WL *What advice would you give people who are looking to build their own chalets?*

FWC What's paramount is to find someone who knows how to respond to the site, the landscape. Because that's what you're there for. Also, it's sensible to have large common areas and small sleeping quarters—smaller than in a primary residence. This fosters shared group time.

WL *What is the biggest mistake people make with these?*

FWC Often in Whistler I think the timber is overwhelming. What we did for this home is allow the wooden structure to maximize the amount of glass we could have. In other homes, the timber becomes the dominant force as opposed to the surroundings. And, always, people just need to be sure of their own priorities. **WL** See SOURCES.

Fook Weng Chan's Design Tips for Vacation Homes

KEEP IT SIMPLE

The materials palette should be small and stable throughout the house to create a sense of tranquility.

MAKE IT EASY

Use low-maintenance materials. Pay more if you have to—you'll thank yourself later.

THINK SMALL

Bedrooms, ensuite bathrooms and closets can all be pared down at retreats. Instead, consider devoting more space to large common areas.

COMMUNE WITH NATURE

Provide outdoor showers for washing up before entering the house. And for the pure enjoyment of it.

GO REMOTE

Remember that houses can be remotely monitored. Your heating, electricity, et cetera can be controlled from anywhere via the Internet.