2011 ASLA Design Awards

Residence at Red Butte
Honor Award
Design Workshop – Aspen

Residential Design Over $100,000 Construction Budget
RESIDENCE at RED BUTTE | project fact sheet

Category 4A: Residential Design
Location: Aspen, Colorado
Construction Budget: $440,000

Project Summary | The Residence at Red Butte's landscape is a commentary on the feeling of big sky and of big views. Respecting the natural openness of the site, existing fields of sage are considered an asset, and are complimented with native and introduced plantings to infuse the ground plane with colors of the Sun. The restrained use of trees, frames key views and punctuates the landscape with highlights of gold in Autumn, and vibrant green in Summer. The incorporation of sculpture and of distinct spaces provide a layer of complexity in the design of the landscape.

Purpose | Avid world travelers, the clients desired a home and landscape that was evocative of Europe yet adapted to the Colorado environment. As major collectors of sculpture, they also desired a setting for their extensive collection. At the same time, the home and garden had to meet the immediate needs of their growing family with lawn and play space for their two small children.

The site was an existing parcel set on a ridge with panoramic views of Aspen Mountain, Aspen Highlands, and Buttermilk. With no existing trees on site, the landscape architect was faced with integrating this large home into the landscape while judiciously utilizing trees to frame the 360 degree views without obscuring distant vistas.

Role of Landscape Architect | The primary vision of the Landscape Architect was to create an outdoor experience around the home that responded to the open nature of the surrounding environment, and to concurrently offer a range of spaces to be actively and passively enjoyed by the owners and their guests. During the seven year collaborative process, the Landscape Architect crafted the site plan for the main residence, in addition to creating a master plan for the preservation of the larger historic ranch itself.

Arrival Sequence – The home and garden are approached by a narrow asphalt drive that first hugs an adjacent hillside, then follows an existing line of cottonwood trees. The careful integration of the road alignment with landform and existing vegetation provides the sense of a rural agricultural lane. An irrigation ditch was realigned to follow the length of the driveway. Opposite the cottonwoods and irrigation ditch and split rail fence contains the owner’s horses. Along the access drive a barn, garage, ranch foreman’s home, and riding ring are set behind a veil of trees. The irrigation ditch spills into a pond constructed to terminate the view at the end of a long tangent of the driveway. The views of arriving guests are then focused on a pond, its central island, and beach for the children. Only after rounding a small knoll does the auto-court come into focus. The home previously hidden from view by the surrounding hillside now comes into view. Silhouetted behind the home as one arrives is the outline of Aspen Highlands and Buttermilk. To capture the views of arriving guests, one of the first of many sculptures is placed in the center of the auto-court. A curved stone wall leads guests to the breezeway which focuses on the front door and opens onto a large entry lawn. Above this stone wall a shade garden which incorporates an antique cast stone bench, offers view to the pond, stone beach, and children’s play area.

Site Planning – A new home, the landscape architects worked closely with the architects to site the home. A building envelope had been defined in the course of the earlier subdivision of the land. All landscape and building development had to remain within this envelope. The principal views from the home were set on axis with the main peak of Aspen Highlands with wings of the house extended to capture these views and to provide a continuous panorama from within the home. The kitchen and master guest bedroom wing bend to capture views of Aspen Mountain, provide shade from the fierce afternoon sun, and buffer winds along the ridge.

Outdoor Living – As one passes through this space, the eye naturally moves across the lawn to views of the upper mesa, punctuated by sculpture located in the lawn foreground. The front lawn is sculpted from the existing sage and wildflower hillside, and provides a place for the children to romp and play.
Passing through the home, the residence opens to the substantial dining terrace with panoramic views of the surrounding mountains. Here major gatherings can be accommodated. A few steps lead down to a small lawn and fire pit area. A small grouping of trees with strategic placement of sculpture separate the breakfast terrace from the main dining terrace. This is more intimately scaled for family dining and provides a direct relationship to the spa and pool.

The house is pushed forward to allow views down to the Roaring Fork River from the garden terraces. An infinity edged pool takes advantage of the grade change and links the garden visually to the flowing water of the Roaring Fork River below. An illusion is created by the use of a band of blue marble which provides sense that the spa is connected to the main swimming pool. Broad steps are provided within the pool to serve as a “kid’s pool” within the main pool. This same platform is also large enough to set chaise lounges with the pool itself, providing the opportunity to recline with the soothing waters. An outdoor shower for the owners is provided privacy from the river and trail below while still offering views to the rushing river below. At the end of the kitchen wing, a small lawn, again sculpted from the sagebrush hillside provides additional outdoor dining, focused on the outdoor fireplace and pizza oven.

**Special Factors** | A key element of the landscape design was accommodating the owner’s sculpture collection. Many pieces were purchased well in advance of the home design, others were acquired during the course of construction. To keep ahead of the pace of acquisition, the landscape architects created an art master plan which identified desirable or suitable locations for pieces of sculpture, terminating a pathway or landscape view, providing intimate views from interior rooms not afforded with distant mountain views, or providing accents to particular garden vignettes.

Planting – Because of the owner’s desire to maintain the panoramic views of the surrounding mountains, planting is used very judiciously. The intentional restrained use of trees frames key views, and serves to help anchor the house in the landscape. Existing field of sage are enhanced with native plantings that carpet the ground plane as it approaches the home. An intense perennial bed forms one edge of the entry lawn. A second area of concentrated planting is focused in the shade garden where creeping thyme and other materials are reminiscent of a European courtyard garden. A particular challenge was meeting the clients desire for great variety within these planted areas yet at the same time striving for a scale of planting that was consistent with the scale of the house and the surrounding landscape.

**Significance** | As part of a historic ranch complex, the residence sits above an irrigation pond that has been resuscitated and is once again used for maintaining the grounds and animals of the ranch. Serving a dual purpose, the pond has been re-shaped to blend into the natural grade of the land and provides a smooth plane of water to compliment the sculpture and scenery within its realm.

The Residence at Red Butte respects the natural surroundings by incorporating the concepts of openness and borrowed views into the design. Whether through the framed views of the garden terraces, or through the expansive views across the lawn and dining terrace, the design keeps true to the nature of the site. Sage, wildflowers, serviceberry, and other native plants are used to tie in directly to the natural landscape, and to help forge a connection to the larger ranch complex. Bright and Sunny, the colors of the Sun (golden hues, pale sages, and the colorful display of perennials) are incorporated to pay tribute to the open and native character of the surrounding environment.