

at home

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BUILD TO BLEND

Couple looks to natural landscape for inspiration in creating the



Little House on the
Local author mixes old and new
in historic neighborhood

The porch spans the entire front of the house, with access from the kitchen and the master suite.



BUILD TO BLEND | COUPLE LOOKS TO NATURAL LANDSCAPE FOR INSPIRATION IN CREATING THEIR HOME

“In all things of nature there is something of the marvelous.”
—Aristotle

BY MICHELE CORRIEL | PHOTOGRAPHY BY THOMAS LEE

Driving up Middle Cottonwood to the trailhead, you might miss Jim and Joanie Hammer’s house. And that’s kind of the point. “We wanted it to be private,” Joanie says, sitting outside in the late afternoon shade, sipping herbal iced tea and enjoying the focal point of their home — an exquisitely landscaped patio garden. “Even if we do get plenty of company — moose, bear, deer, and mountain lions come here all the time.”

Not to mention the small bunny hiding under a nearby Douglas fir. Or the hummingbirds.

“They’re demanding,” Joanie says, just as one darts to the feeder, its blurred wings thrumming. “If the sugar water isn’t at the right level they squawk.”

The sweet mixture must be OK this afternoon.

The front of the house faces away from the road into a heavily wooded forest. The summer smell of sunshine on pine needles lingers like the long evening sun. Sounds from nearby Middle Cottonwood Creek whisper constantly. The trill of a meadowlark, the chirp of crickets and the chattering of squirrels cross the lodge pole pine jackleg fence like emissaries.

Puzzle-pieced, the flagstone path winds around the yard allowing a patch-

work of creeping thyme encrusted with tiny purple gems to traverse the stone. Along the path that follows the footprint of the house columbines hang their flowery heads, as do the twilight-colored lupines and pinked petals of sticky geraniums. Off to one side a fenced and raised vegetable garden stands, small green sprouts showing a modest start.

Landscape designer Beth McFawn, of Beth McFawn Landscape Design, actually went out on the property before any digging took place and mapped out the areas where each species of wildflower grew, where the larger granite rocks had been, and then dug up the flowers to be replanted after the house was finished.

“If you go on the Middle Cottonwood trail you can see those flowers here,” Jim says, pointing to a hillside resplendent in yellow clouds of arrowleaf balsam root. The buttery flowers pop up in sections all around the home.

In the late afternoons the overhang of the porch roof shades a wooden deck and the Hammers move from the open yard to the cooler area.

“From May to October something is always blooming,” Jim says, taking a seat in a deck chair. “We always seem to have color out here. And one thing I didn’t want to do was mow a lawn. We wanted the land to return to its natural state.

The Hammers do trim and prune limbs, replanting the bushes nibbled on by the deer, but they stick to the plan and keep it true to the natural environment.



A fire patio sits between the porch and Middle Cottonwood Creek, which runs near the house.

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Besides the beautiful landscaping the Hammers also wanted their home to be sustainable.

Architect Thor Arnold, at the time with Zimtor Architecture, now founding partner at Styxworks in Bozeman, used Durisol blocks made of recycled wood chips and laid stucco over it while also incorporating reclaimed wood into the design.

“We call it the Hobbit house because it’s so built into the land,” Joanie says. Walking around the home through sticky geranium, Oregon grape, columbine, snowberry bushes, mountain honeysuckle, mountain ash, asters, balsam root, prairie smoke, dogwood, hawthorne, mock orange, maple, aspen and Douglas fir, it’s easy to see how it got its moniker.

Inside the Montana farmhouse-style home the rooms are inviting and cool. Somehow they’ve managed to keep the summer outside.

“There’s no central air conditioning,” Jim says. “And we have radiant floor heating in addition to the wood-burning fireplace and a Tulikivi soapstone stove which keeps the house nice and warm in the winter.”

The house is 2,700 square feet situated on a cozy two acres with four bedrooms and two-a-half baths. The counters in the kitchen and the baths are the same grey/black soapstone as the Tulikivi stove.

One of the interesting features of the house is all the old wood-paneled hotel doors with the ghosts of keyholes and room numbers barely visible.

“Before we even built this house we bought 14 doors from an old hotel in Butte,” Joanie says, opening one of the doors leading into the master bedroom. In this room the builders, Riverbend Builders, cleverly used two of the doors for the twin built-in closets hugging a small fireplace near the king-sized bed. Here the adobe walls from the outside are brought indoors, a little darker with a deep-stained terra cotta color.

Throughout the house rustic hand-forged iron accents the rooms.

“My brother made them,” Joanie says. Her brother, Bill Moore, works at Bar Mill Forge, in Big Timber. “I just couldn’t stand the thought of putting a regular old wooden handrail in, so my brother made this and it fits the house perfectly.” He also made an understated chandelier for the dining area.

Upstairs, the mullioned windows of the two guest rooms and a home office frame an ever-changing landscape, a constant source of wonder and meditation.

“The house felt like it had been here forever when we moved in,” Joanie says. “I think it’s because of the old reused beams and the way it just fit so perfectly into the landscape.”

Jim commutes daily to Bozeman and as long as the road is plowed finds the drive to be no problem.

“It’s only 10 miles,” he says. “One of the reasons we moved here was because we were tired of the long commutes we had back East.”

The Hammers had been coming to Montana for years, but only in the summers. In 2000 they bought the property and started building in 2003. The landscaping started the following summer.



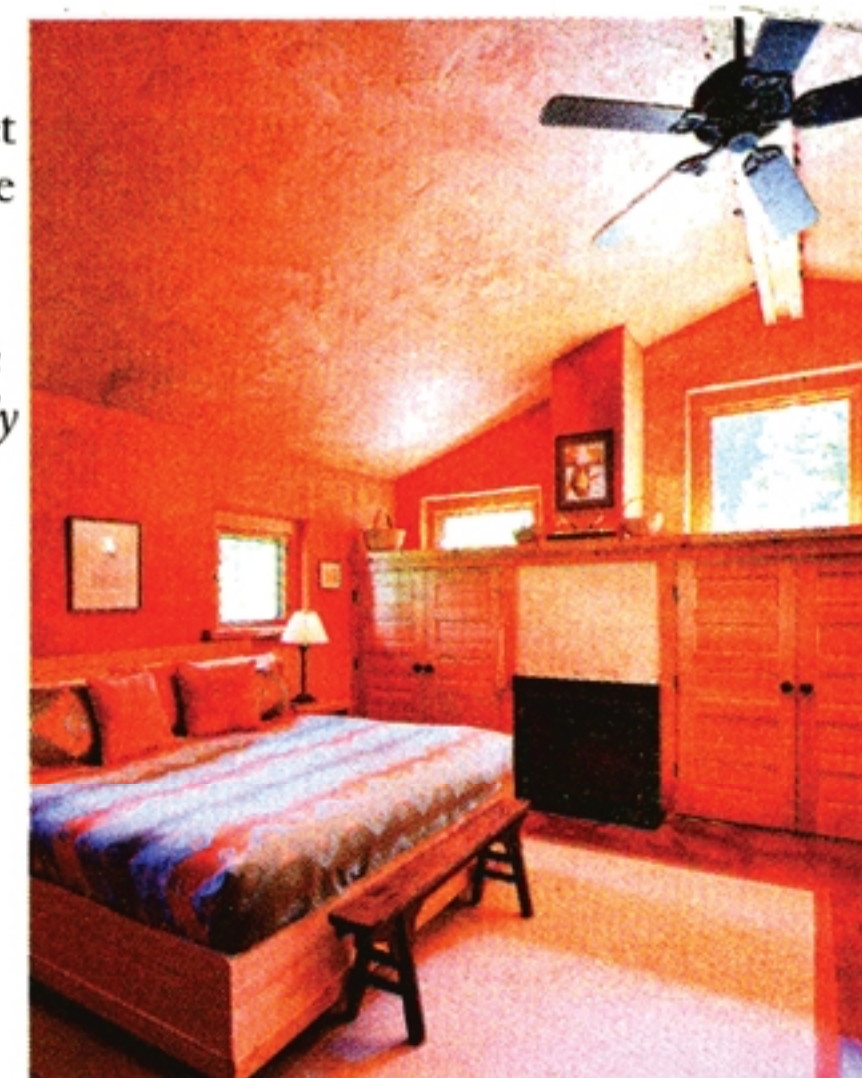
A small table sits just outside the kitchen.



Reclaimed lumber beams highlight the dining and living spaces inside the home.

“We’ve had six years of planting and it’s really taken that long for it to get wild and wooly,” Joanie says. “And we’re intentionally keeping it wild.” ☺

Michele Corriel is a freelance writer and a frequent contributor to the Bozeman Daily Chronicle’s niche publications.



Built-in closets surround the fireplace in the master suite.