

# Residential DESIGN & BUILD

Design Trends and New Products for  
the CUSTOM HOME MARKET

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# Big Sky Living



*The saltwater fish tank is one of the few elements requested by the homeowner. The fish tank serves as a divider between the kitchen, great room and foyer.*

*The bond between builder and designer delivers a beautifully detailed house, right down to the silverware*

*By Maureen Alley, assistant editor*

Partnership between designer and builder is extremely important and valued in the world of design/build custom home construction. It is evident from this custom log home in Whitefish, Mont., that the builder and designer had not only worked together before but also have a great working relationship.

**T**o evaluate the successes and challenges of this home, one must first start with the history between builder and designer. Randy Kaatz, president of Bend, Ore.-based Classic Log Designs, and Walt Landi, owner of Whitefish, Mont.-based High Country Builders, first began working together four years ago. Through networking, Kaatz found a partner for his design

#### HIGH COUNTRY BUILDERS

Whitefish, Mont.  
[www.highcountrybuilders.com](http://www.highcountrybuilders.com)

#### COMPANY STATS

Full-time employees: 12  
Industry memberships: NAHB  
Annual design/build projects: 100 percent  
Residential new construction: 95 percent  
Average annual revenue: \$3.5 million



*Builder and designer put extra consideration into how the placement and design of the house would affect natural lighting in the house. Ultimately the house faces east to west with the public space on the south side.*

style and Landi found a complement to his building style. The result is a great relationship, rapport and reputation surrounding these two highly talented men.

The conception of this home started with the homeowners' excitement over a past project. "The client saw a previous project by High Country Builders and wanted something similar but with a few different aspects," Kaatz adds.

From the beginning the homeowners laid out what they had in mind, including a saltwater fish tank as a divider between the kitchen, great room and foyer, and the huge cedar logs found as posts throughout the house. The past project by High Country Builders also included large cedar logs placed as support beams, and it was one of the characteristics the homeowners really liked. Every other aspect about the house was left up to the builder and designer to decide and execute.

"We did the design, construction management, interior design, interior decoration, furniture selections," Landi says. "We completely furnished the house right down to the bedspreads, dishes and silverware. The homeowner wanted us to make the decisions for them. We worked closely with them but they put all their trust in us."

Every aspect of the project required much thought and attention. "We spent a long time looking for the right logs for this project," Landi says. "I took my plane out and we flew around looking for the right logs that would fit best in this project."

The logs were dug out of the ground below grade to harvest the logs complete with roots. The logs then were stripped of the outer layer of thick bark, making them very fragile. High Country Builders put extra attention into these logs, padding them during transportation, and while stacking and installing them in the house. Landi adds that the large cedar logs emphasize the Montana-rustic style of the house.

The fireplace in the recreation room is another carefully con-



*The foyer includes a slate entry to resemble a rug, a 35-ft. tower for added natural lighting and an amazing view of Whitefish Lake.*

sidered characteristic by both designer and builder. Because the fireplace placement is between a wood dumbwaiter on the left and a bookcase on the right, Landi wanted to place a massive fireplace in the center that would protrude out. The firebricks

used in the fireplace also demanded Landi's and Kaatz's attention to detail. "The firebricks we chose were once used in a copper smelter in Anaconda, Mont. They are very old, and have been subjected to a lot of intense heat and carry a lot of history," Landi says.

There are two fireplaces in this home — one in the recreation room and another in the great room. Both fireplaces are gas- and wood-burning. "The fireplaces are true wood-burning fireplaces but also include a gas log starter," Landi adds.

The foyer also is an eye-catching characteristic of the home. It includes a slate entry to resemble a rug, a 35-ft. tower for added natural lighting and an amazing view of Whitefish Lake. "When you walk in the front doors, Whitefish Lake is framed by the windows in the great room, which are unique because the stops to the windows are the massive cedar logs," Kaatz says.

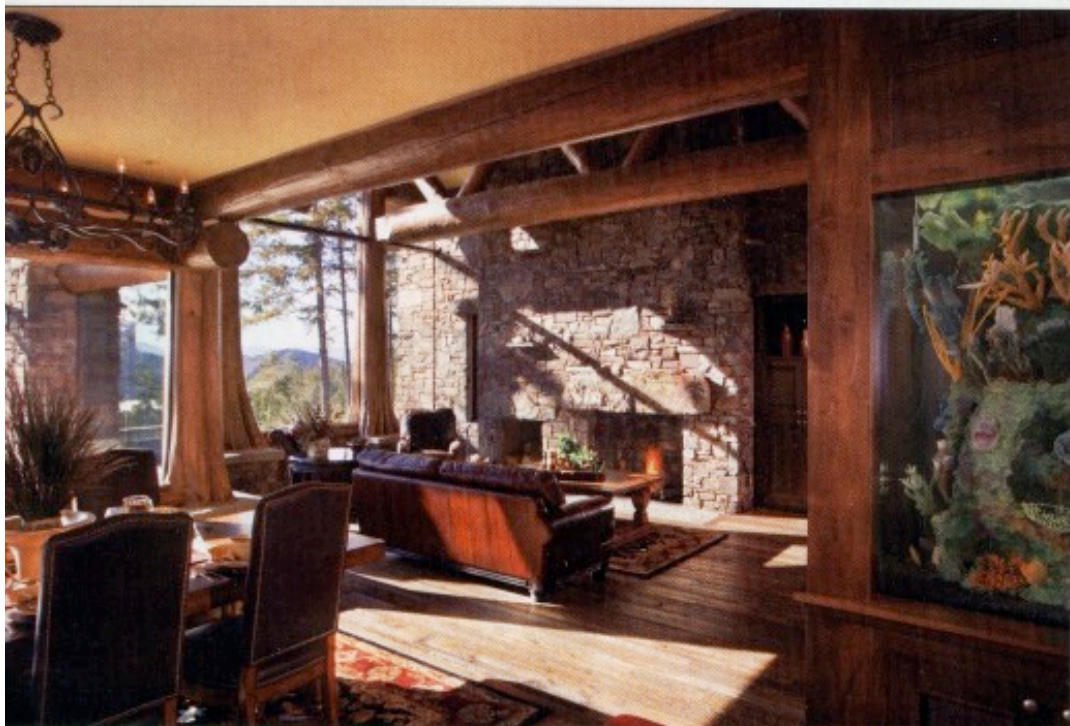
## The unforeseen

In building any custom home, challenges will always show their face, and this project was no exception. One of the main challenges was designing the two bedrooms in the lower level with the public space on the second floor. "The public space took higher priority in the beginning. We needed to have two bedrooms with children sharing bathrooms, and work that into the floor plan," Kaatz adds. "We needed rooms that were not so big and not so small."

The solution to the bedroom challenge is an example of communication and teamwork between Kaatz and Landi. "Through drawings and conversations with Walt (Landi), we came up with a couple different ways to accomplish this," Kaatz says. "Walt came up with the idea on blasting and taking out dirt to make the rooms larger. Walt has past experience on making this work."

The house was constructed on a hill overlooking Whitefish Lake. The house doesn't actually include lake frontage but most rooms include a view of the lake. "Almost every room overlooks the lake; the kitchen, great room, master suite, dining room, theater room, lower family rooms and boys' bedroom," Landi says. "You can see the lake from anywhere in the house. There is only one bedroom that doesn't include a view of the lake."

The placement of the house was carefully considered. Landi and Kaatz agreed to position the house in a way that the view of the lake could be incorporated with the view of the mountain. "We were limited to where we



*The fireplace is positioned between a wood dumbwaiter on the left and a bookcase on the right. To maintain the fireplace as the focal point of the room, it features a large design and protrudes out beyond the dumbwaiter and bookcase.*

could position the house, but we wanted to incorporate lake views and mountain views taking into account the effect of the sun in the large windows," Landi adds. "We had to angle the house away from the sun slightly."

"We wanted a striking lot but the building envelope was tight," Kaatz says. "We weren't given many options on where to put the house and a challenge was where to put the house that

fit in with what the homeowners wanted."

Landi and Kaatz put extra consideration into the way the placement and design of the home would affect natural lighting. "One of the challenges from the start was how to maximize the view while at the same time allowing for the best solar situation and bringing in the most light," Kaatz says. "There was one house to the south and an empty lot to the north. We had no idea what to expect in the future from the north, and we didn't want windows facing into the house to the south but we wanted to take advantage of views that are southwest. Ultimately the house faces east to west with the public space on the south side and the garage facing downhill.

"The landscaping came out just as we anticipated due to 1-ft. contours on the survey,"

Kaatz adds. The house was modeled on the land before it was built, which eliminated some of the surprises that would have otherwise occurred.

Nearing the completion of the project, the homeowners decided to finish areas that were originally left to be completed down the road. Originally 2,000 sq. ft. of space was to be left unfinished. "The homeowners wanted to finish off the areas that were going to be completed in the future," Landi adds. "We finished off a theater room and an apartment above the garage."

#### SPECS

The Glass Forest  
Whitefish, Mont.  
Size: 6,126 sq. ft.  
Total cost: \$2.4 million

#### EXTERIOR

Doors: Artisan Doors of Montana

#### INTERIOR

Windows: Loewen  
Lighting: Lutron  
Central vacuum: Nutone

#### OUTDOOR LIVING

Grill: Wolf

#### KITCHEN

Cabinets: Old World Cabinets  
Faucets: Rohl  
Range: Wolf

Ovens: Wolf  
Warming/cooling drawers: Dacor  
Refrigerators: Sub-Zero  
Freezer: Sub-Zero  
Wine cooler: Sub-Zero  
Dishwashers: Asko  
Washer/dryer: Whirlpool  
Microwave oven: Wolf  
Other: Wolf steamer

#### BATH

Toilets: Kohler  
Faucets: Rohl, Grohe  
Sinks: Kohler

#### HOME TECHNOLOGY

Home automation system: Elan  
Lighting automation system:  
Lutron

## Design/build harmony

Both Landi and Kaatz emphasize the importance of utilizing the design/build process in the creation of their projects. Both find that it eliminates many of the challenges and surprises — when they have total control over designing and building. "As a builder, we can maximize the owner's budget and the structure by being in charge of the design and making selection on what the lot needs and what the budget allows," Landi says. "The fact that we can do many things in-house eliminates the middle man."

Kaatz describes the design/build relationship as an unfolding process. "From conception of the project, Walt and I worked together on design elements. I provided ideas, he provided ideas, I made suggestions and he made suggestions," Kaatz says. "It's not competitive but rather meeting the needs of the client. We (designers) see ourselves as an extension of the builder." ■