

AT HOME

A Style for Today
with Things from the Past

SUZANNE RHEINSTEIN

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MOUNTAIN RETREAT

One thing you notice immediately about this Sun Valley house is the way it nestles comfortably into the surrounding landscape. The property borders on the vigorous Big Wood River in Sun Valley, Idaho, and the view across the land is straight to the spectacular evergreen-covered Bald Mountain.

Phil and Shelley Belling thought a great deal about the kind of holiday house they wanted for their family, long before they started plans to build. They wanted it to be smaller rather than larger, and to feature traditional details. It was important to them that the house be warm and inviting both in summer and winter. Essentially, though, they wanted it to be an easygoing house for a modern family actively involved in the outdoor life that is the glory of the area. It was interesting and satisfying—and a great deal of fun—collaborating with the Bellings and the architect, Janet Jarvis, to design this house.

We used a lot of beautiful natural materials, such as repurposed oak for the floor, which was given an oil finish that makes a floor age better and doesn't require a lot of upkeep. Everyone can come in with hiking boots or fishing and skiing gear without worries. There is handsome, rustic stonework on the fireplaces, both inside and out, and we used reclaimed wood for some of the walls. Where there is paint, colors were carefully chosen not to be assertive, and to evoke the colors outside. Even the flowers placed about the house are from the local farmers market or are wildflowers, grasses, and leaves that grow nearby.

The house has a strong sense of place. This is abetted by its immediate landscaping, which has been coaxed back into a style in keeping with the natural surroundings. A manicured lawn and flowerbeds would be an affront to the majestic mountain and river.



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All the time we were planning and building, we were also gathering handmade pieces—some old and some new—for the house and the original cabin on the property, which is now used as the bunkhouse. Leatherwork hassocks, a bark-decorated Swedish table, a Mexican Colonial worktable with large rounded nails, and Austrian antler-leg stools are some of the items that give the rooms a unique feel. The idea was to create a place that is rustic, but not in the traditional Adirondack or hackneyed Western style, a house of the mountains but with a contemporary sensibility.

A two-story living room serves as the core of the house, with a tall stone fireplace and a balcony looking down from the second story. From the beginning, we knew we wanted to create a large, welcoming room that could accommodate children and friends and children's friends, but that would still feel good when there were only two or three people there. The rug is wool, woven in concentric squares of soft wheat and gold, with an inky blue and a little bit of red. The squares and colors were painted in our design studio and then sent off to Tibet to be woven. The sofa is long enough for lots of people to sit and watch the Super Bowl or other sporting events, and is covered in the softest corduroy. The television is housed in a pared-down cabinet I designed made of rusty-looking steel.

The house and the original cabin are nestled into the landscape of the Big Wood River. RIGHT: The painted banister detailing was original to the outlying cabin, which we turned into a bunkhouse. The furnishings were made in many places and periods, but they all combine to create a harmonious sense of place. Here, an American stoneware jar sits on a Louis XV walnut country table. The flowers used in the house are simple wild- or country flowers, such as this Queen Anne's lace.



Everyone is drawn to the central, two-story living room, furnished with comfortable places to sit and talk, play games, or watch sports on television. In the winter, the room has enveloping warmth, and during the summer, as here, it invites the outside in. Striped linen slipcovers are placed over the winter upholstery. Rustic pieces, including a Spanish table used for games, an English low table in front of the sofa, and a hollowed-out tree trunk used as a child's chair near the fireplace, help establish the room's individuality. It is easy to feel part of this room even when in the kitchen, which is just visible to the left, below the balcony.







The large stone fireplace is perfect for roaring fires. The logs are stored in the bottom half of a spare steel cabinet that also houses the television. In back of the very long sofa is an equally long table made from a single slab of tree trunk, with slotted legs for easy disassembly. On holidays, it serves as an auxiliary table, perfect for eighteen children eating around it. Or it can be pushed against the wall and used as a buffet beneath the eighteenth-century screen painted with an Austrian alpine hunt scene. The food is presented on a collection of rustic serving pieces, and the tables are decorated with materials gathered from the outdoors, evergreens and pinecones, which are attractive, easy, and feel right for this house.



It even has a hidden drawer for the remotes. The bottom holds firewood, which becomes a graphic decoration. The upholstered chairs swivel for easy conversation, and across from them are two Edwardian club chairs that were redone in sueded pigskin. A games table, with its wicker chairs and leather cushions, is always waiting.

The curtains are closed only on the wintriest of nights. We embroidered the ridged linen-and-cotton fabric with a chenille design down the middle of each panel, not on the leading edges, because of the configuration of the doors. The many different textures in this room quietly work to give it interest.

To one side of the living room, and completely open to it, is the games room. Its low ceiling makes it cozy, as do the curtains and the walls, which are lined in shooting cloth of a dusty olive green, a color taken straight from the outside. There are high, easy-to-move chairs to watch the action at the handsome pool table. The ceiling was too low for hanging lamps to illuminate the pool table, so we used small bronze outdoor lights above it, to avoid having to poke holes in the lovely reclaimed wood ceiling, an idea we repeated in several other rooms. A group of antlers, collected by the Bellings, was hung on the wall for a graphic decoration and to evoke an alpine atmosphere.

We wanted an individual look for this room as well, so we used a provincial Directoire painted buffet fitted with a patinated-metal sink as a bar, which seems more domestic and low-key than a built-in bar. The extra glasses and other supplies are kept in the cupboards beneath, and a handsome tray holding cocktail accoutrements is set out on top.

The entry area is contiguous to the living room and the games room and is the first glimpse you get of the house. It, too, is furnished with a restrained, sophisticated mix of rustic pieces and various textures—a bleached Continental table, pale terra-cotta balusters from an old enclosure, an eighteenth-century Spanish mirror with whitewashed carved oak leaves and acorns, and a *faux bois* cement jardinière from the 1920s, all set against the strong horizontal design of the old wood walls. To the left of the entry are the mudroom and the family room and to the right is the living room.

The family room is lined with old barn siding and the upholstery stays in the same range of colors. It has a serene air, with French doors leading to a stone terrace overlooking the river. The room is primarily used for watching movies or reading, the shelves filled with interesting books on the outdoor life of Idaho as well as classic novels. During holidays, the banquette has been filled with as many as eleven children happily watching movies.

In the games room, a painted country buffet serves as a bar, set against the cozy walls covered in shooting cloth of sueded cotton. An antique terra-cotta wine cooler holds casually arranged native grasses and wildflowers. There are a few decorative accessories in the house, and most relate to the rustic alpine setting, such as the horn box and the tusk-handled biscuit barrel.



The star attraction in the games room is the handsome pool table, which I designed inspired by an old engraving. (I prefer not to use the ones with large, bulbous legs.) The raised chairs with footrests were copied from an Edwardian tennis referee chair and provide a good view of the shots. A banquette supplies more seating and is covered in old-fashioned boiled wool, as are the cushions, though they are embroidered in a simple geometric design to carry through a bit of the living room's blue and red. Hand-thrown ceramic lamps by Christopher Spitzmiller in a contemporary ridged pattern flank the banquette. The cozy room, lined in shooting cloth, opens onto the two-story living room.

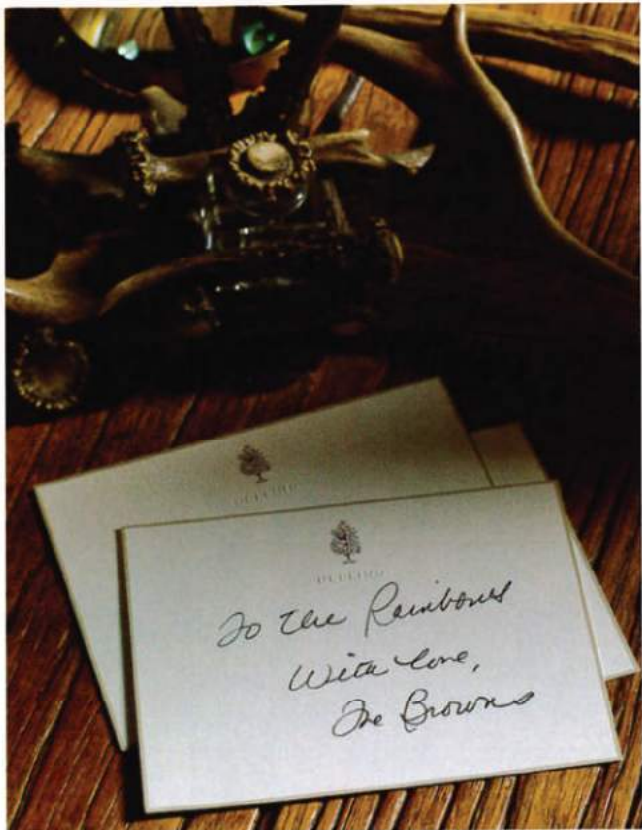






The entry, with stairs to the sleeping rooms to the left and the living room to the right. A view through a pair of bleached-horn candlesticks into the games room. The powder room, with vinylized linen covering the walls and a patinated-metal sink set in a horn-clad chest of drawers. RIGHT: A living room chair in its winter upholstery, with a Swedish tree-trunk table just visible behind it. The curtains with chenille embroidery, behind a Spanish Colonial work-table. The lamp is made from an Indonesian cloth-printing roller. Favorite landscapes hang on the wall of horizontal planks. Four antique Austrian antler-legged stools sit in front of the fireplace, and beyond the French doors is the Big Wood River. The symbol of the house is an evergreen tree, which appears on cards and linens.







In the family room, the long banquette is covered in cotton and leather with lots of pillows. Only the two bolsters on the ends are fixed. The chairs are in hand-quilted linen slipcovers and the artisanal hassocks are suede. The colors of the fabrics come from the old barn siding lining the walls. RIGHT: An old French driftwood table has two photographs on the wall above it by Wilson "Snowflake" Bentley, the first photographer to take pictures of snowflakes in 1885. They were framed by the nonpareil framer Roger Lussier of Boston.



FLY-FISHING CHARLES JARDINE

Easy Living

The kitchen opens onto the living room, yet is a little apart from it. We were all thoughtful about how it should look, since we wanted it to have a feeling similar to the rest of the house. At one end of the kitchen is the dining area, where everyone sits around an old Irish wake table. Some of the chairs are antique Windsors and some are Hollyhock Dining Chairs. They are upholstered in brown wool plaid, and wear these linen slipcovers when it is warmer. The chandelier is a modern design incorporating old mercury-glass-lined factory lights. It creates a clean-lined silhouette against the windows, which look out over the river. The same linen-and-cotton textured fabric used in the living room appears here at the windows as pull-up shades bound in blue. It is marvelous to have breakfast here with the windows open, with the sights and sounds of the Big Wood River rushing by, and the scents of the alpine trees wafting in.

The kitchen proper has the same repurposed wood floors and horizontal planks on the walls as the living room, and the same stone on the chimney breast. The cabinets are made of a different wood, with painted stiles and trim, to break up the wood and add visual interest. We cut down the size of the island that was originally proposed, as I have found that large ones are not practical or attractive in a family kitchen. By reducing the island we were able to incorporate a marvelous ancient Swedish table with a thick, old stone top. This table has so much more character, and is a great place to set out food for a party. On special occasions, the Bellings light the old hanging candleholder above the table.

The food laid out on the Swedish table personifies Sun Valley for me. The delicious smoked trout and crisp bread that is produced here and the Parmesan cheese chunks made famous by the local restaurant, Cristina's, are served with colorful yellow and orange carrots from the farmers market.

Upholstered dining chairs slipcovered for the summer mix with Windsor chairs around the antique Irish table in the kitchen's dining area. Here, in contrast to the kitchen proper, the walls are plastered. FOLLOWING PAGES: The old Swedish table is set with typical fare from the Sun Valley area. When the hanging candleholder is lit, the room becomes magical. Natural linen napkins are embroidered with the symbol of the house. On simple platters is the ideal food to enjoy with a glass of wine. The dining room chair wears its plaid winter upholstery. Right: A view over the island into the cozy kitchen fire. On the opposite side of it is an outdoor fireplace on the porch, which can be seen through the Dutch door.







Sleeping

All of the bedrooms are upstairs, off a hall with a balcony view of the living room. The hall is large enough to contain a great long table for a computer and a few club chairs for sitting, and makes the second story seem airy, though the bedrooms are not large.

The master bedroom is the only one with wood walls, which we painted celadon to blend in with the river and mountain view outside the mullioned doors. The bed is simply and comfortably made up with a soufflé-like blanket folded over the end woven by Sam Kasten. An adjoining bath is spacious and equally quiet, with softly colored paint and stone.

The guest room is subdued. Its rustic painted beds were made by Gep Durenberger, based on copies of antique ones he owned. Ticking-covered duvets dress the beds in the warmer months and linens in natural tones cover the windows and the furniture. The two daughters share a room with four bunk beds painted an alpine blue. A country table, a printed cotton chair, and a painted Austrian chest are among the few pieces of furniture in the room, so there is more space for kids. Overflow friends can sleep in the playroom, which has a pair of built-in beds and a closet full of sleeping bags. Families are usually put up in the bunkhouse.

The master bedroom, at the corner of the house, is filled with light. Its decoration is understated, with northern Italian painted bedside chests providing a bit of color. It defers to the view outside its second-story porch, which features a rustic-work railing and pediment.

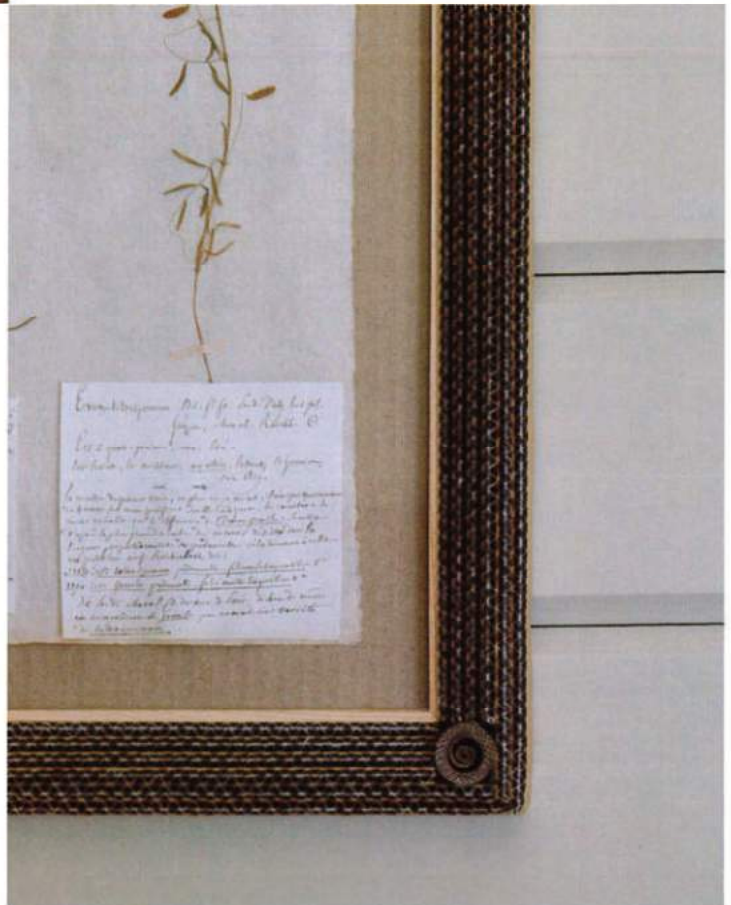






An early nineteenth-century decoupage floral picture rests on a painted Italian chest of drawers. A corner of an herbarium page, framed in a corrugated-cardboard design.

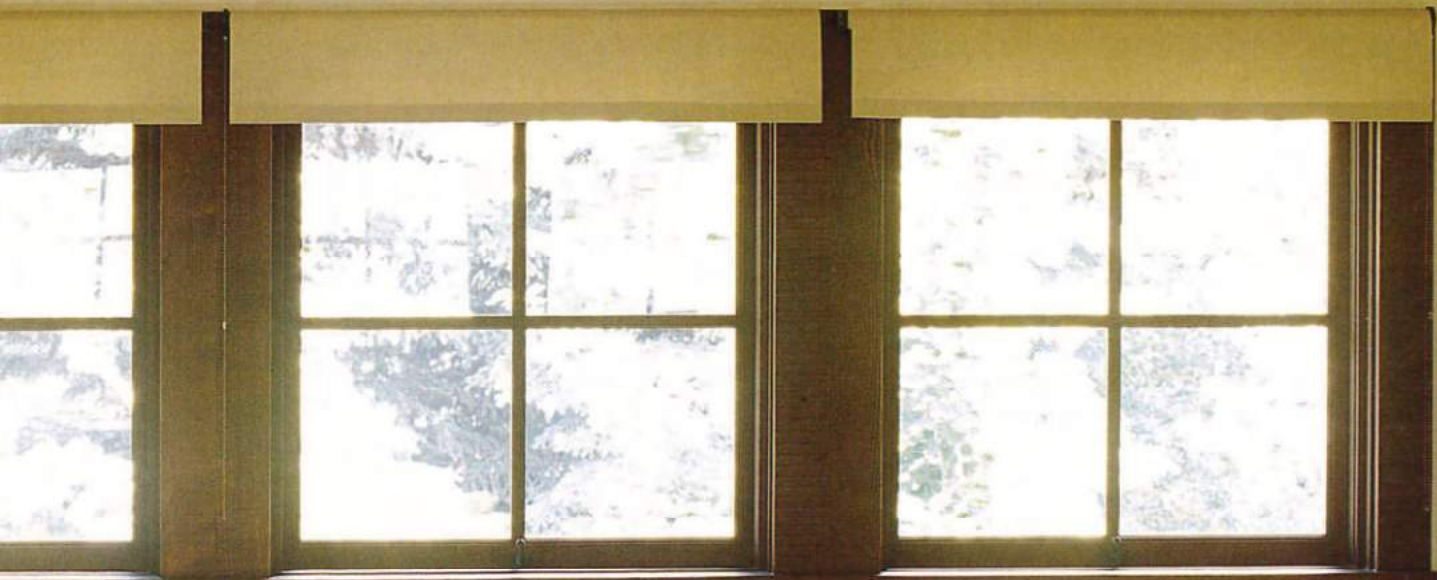
RIGHT: The light shines in on the master bath, which is flanked by tall mullioned cupboards. The towel is embroidered with the evergreen tree that is a symbol of the house. An antique armoire, a family heirloom, was lined with fabric and is used to store bed linens and towels in the adjacent hall.





The playroom over the garage is reached by a wooden staircase from the mudroom. It is a great room for foosball, board games, or watching movies. Shearling beanbag chairs can be easily moved, and there are two built-in beds and plenty of places where kids in sleeping bags can bunk down during ski weeks.







Here are views of the guest room, which is furnished simply with handsome pieces, such as the old French invalid's chair, covered in hand-screened linen. A slatted cupboard built for clothes was painted smoky beige. It is like a piece of furniture rather than a built-in closet. The adjoining bathroom's stone and wood reiterates the same tones. RIGHT: The girls' room, with four bunk beds for sharing with friends, is fitted out with simple country furniture.







The mudroom is central to the activities of the house. Clad in wood and floored in stone, it is the place to store skiing, hiking, and fishing equipment. Divided drawers hold flies, but everything else is open. In the adjacent laundry room, the cabinet woodwork is painted a dusty sage green and topped with a teak counter, tolerant of moisture. Wooden bars for hanging soggy jackets to dry line one side of the room. RIGHT: Here is a special area for waders, jackets, and whatever else needs hanging.





By the River

As wonderful as the house is, it must bow to its outdoor setting. To be on a terrace or porch and view the swift-moving river against Bald Mountain, looking through the meadow that stretches to the water's edge, is powerful yet oddly calming. The river is used sometimes for tubing or canoeing and often for fishing, but now and then it serves simply as a backdrop for relaxing with family or friends. A wooden porch off the living room has a stone fireplace for cool days and evenings and is furnished with a group of old hickory chairs and other camp furniture. This is the perfect place for sandwiches or a predinner

game of dominoes. Down the porch stairs and across a mowed patch of ground is the bocce court, where the Bellings bring out canoe chairs to sit on the grass to watch the players and perhaps have a picnic. In high summer, when the days are long, a beautiful bluestone table is piled high with tomatoes and vegetables from the local farmers market and something from the grill of the nearby barbecue. Lorna Lee and John Muller, who make modern interpretations of bark-clad branch furniture, crafted the chairs that surround the table. When it is time for complete indulgence, a hammock in the meadow grass next to the river is available for daydreaming.

The long bluestone table on the terrace overlooks the meadow grasses that edge the Big Wood River, with Bald Mountain rising steeply on the other side. The chairs are contemporary versions of American rustic furniture. Bounty from the barbecue grill and the farmers market is set out for a summer evening meal with friends.





The hammock in the meadow grasses by the river is the place to read—or pretend to read. The porch is filled with old rustic American camp furniture.

Faux bois cement seating can be found in the grasses leading to the river. RIGHT: Old-fashioned canoe chairs surround a plaid blanket laid for a picnic. An outdoor lunch and a game of bocce are delightful ways to pass the afternoon, with the sound of the river in the background.

