

# MOUNTAIN LIVING®

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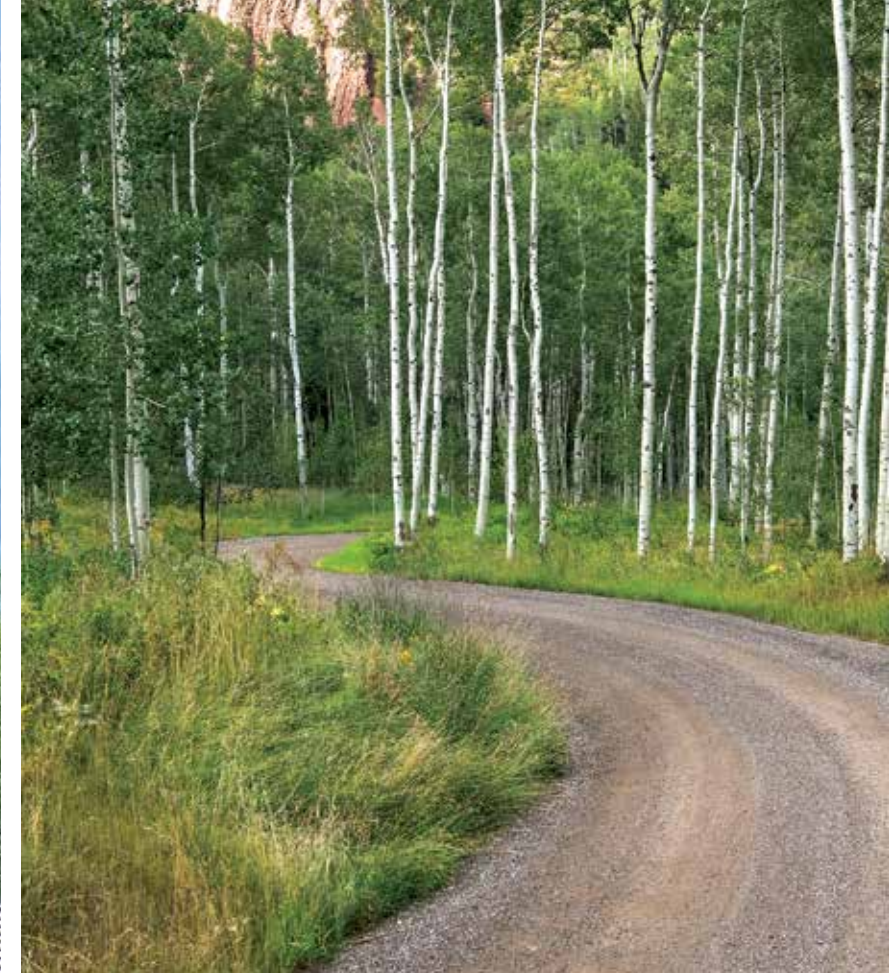
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# BLURRED BOUNDARIES

Sitting lightly in a rejuvenated aspen forest, this Aspen-area home provides a simple but well-designed indoor-outdoor living experience

STORY **IRENE RAWLINGS** PHOTOGRAPHY **BRANDON HUTTENLOCHER**  
ARCHITECTURE **EIGELBERGER ARCHITECTURE AND DESIGN**  
INTERIOR DESIGN **LINDSAY HENDERSON INTERIORS**  
CONSTRUCTION **BRIKOR**  
LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE **DESIGN WORKSHOP**

A breezeway with a rolling door links home and garage while framing a painterly vignette of columnar aspen trees. The siding is durable and low-maintenance poplar bark.



**H**ighlands Retreat is nestled under a protective canopy of a mature aspen forest in a narrow, glacially formed valley. The north- and south-facing hillsides rise hundreds of feet off the valley floor, their slopes vividly colored bands of red sandstone interspersed with swaths of blue-green spruce and fir. Nearer to the home is a rich palette of flowers and native grasses. It looks wild, but this look has been carefully planned by the homeowners and their design team.

During a summer visit to Aspen, the Pennsylvania-based couple chanced upon what would eventually become their homesite. It was a tangle of trees and underbrush. They remember that “it looked like a native aspen forest—pure and untouched.” They fell in love with it and decided to build a multigenerational home that would preserve the site’s natural features and blur the boundaries between built and existing landscape.

Not only did the owners want their land to remain essentially wild, they wanted their home to sit lightly on the land. “From the moment we saw the property, we felt a tremendous responsibility to it,” the husband says. “We didn’t want to disturb it any more than necessary, and, wherever possible, we wanted to bring the outdoors into our home.”

The homeowners worked closely with architect Cristof Eigelberger of Basalt-based Eigelberger Architecture and Design, contractor Briston Peterson of Brikor and landscape architect Mike Albert and team of Aspen-based Design Workshop. Lindsay Henderson (now retired) of Greensboro, North Carolina, designed the interiors with a simple, very textural palette that seamlessly integrates the indoor and outdoor living spaces. >>

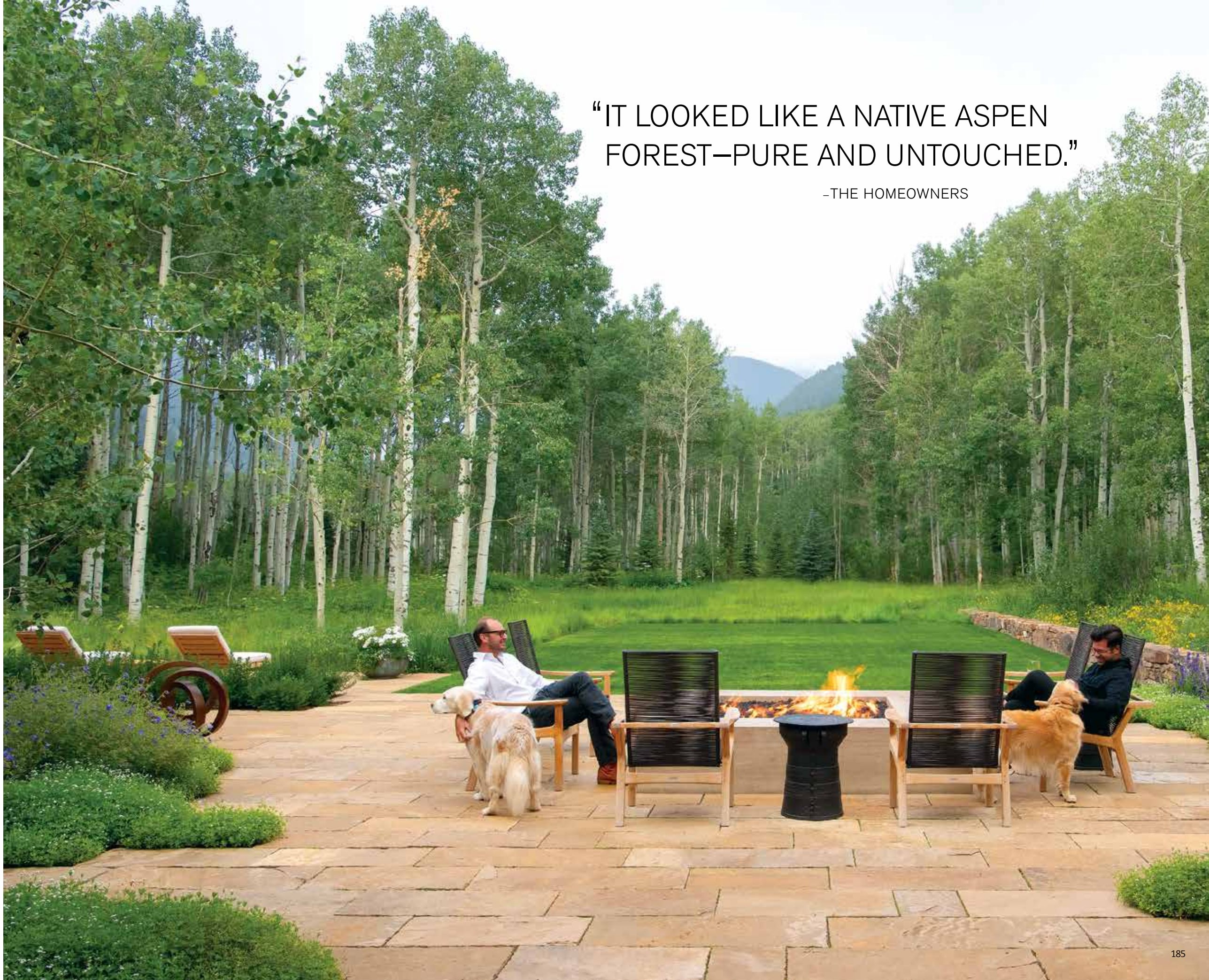
**LEFT:** The single-story mountain rural home features human-scale pavilions, covered porches, a fire-pit seating area and an exterior spa—all designed to create a seamless indoor-outdoor experience. **ABOVE:** The driveway curves and meanders through aspens up to the house.

Architect Eigelberger remembers his very first site visit. “The site was a beautiful grassy meadow that emerged out of the aspen tree forest with stunning views towards Highlands Bowl and Mount Hayden,” he says. Landscape architect Albert recalls thinking: “It was a forest that had not been maintained, with deadfall stunting the growth of young trees and native plants.” But he was already picturing a healthy aspen forest with a rich understory of ferns, grasses and native flowers. “Everyone realized that the forest was the magical component,” he says.

The design team walked the site in every season and at different times of day—to gain insights on the effects of light and shadow, snow, wind and temperature extremes. The team collectively agreed to situate the home at the northern edge of an existing meadow, a location that was especially appealing because of its relatively flat terrain and unobstructed vistas of the 13,000-plus-foot Mount Hayden.

To maximize views and minimize forest disturbance, Eigelberger designed a single-story, 10,000-square-foot, T-shaped home (oriented east to west). Floor-to-ceiling windows and oversized lift-and-slide doors (that retract into the walls) effectively blur the boundaries between the house and the surrounding aspen forest. “The house does not stand out as some houses do,” he says. “It hugs the treeline between the forest and the meadow.” >>

**BELOW:** A 17th-century trough with bronze spigots provides charm and authenticity. **RIGHT:** Architect Eigelberger and landscape architect Albert pause to enjoy their work; they maximized distant forest and meadow perspectives to make the 10-acre property appear larger than it really is.



“IT LOOKED LIKE A NATIVE ASPEN FOREST—PURE AND UNTOUCHED.”

—THE HOMEOWNERS

THIS PAGE: Stone walls create boundaries between cultivated and wild spaces. Heated, large-format Colorado Buff pavers around the pool provide a level of texture but are comfortable under bare feet. OPPOSITE TOP: Moveable and transparent walls facilitate connections between indoors and out, creating a fusion of landscape and architecture. OPPOSITE BOTTOM: An aerial view of the serpentine driveway.



## A HOLISTIC APPROACH TO ALPINE GARDENING

*“Biophilic design encourages connections between humans and nature and suggests that this connection promotes physical and mental well-being,” says landscape architect Mike Albert of Aspen-based Design Workshop. He offers the following tips for developing a holistic mountain garden design:*

**PRESERVE THE SITE’S NATURAL FEATURES** whenever possible. Limit unnecessary disturbance by placing utilities along circulation routes (paths and roadways) and not through existing forests and meadows. **AGGRESSIVELY CLEAR OUT** invasive species. Non-native plants like cheatgrass, Canada thistle, yellow toadflax and spotted napweed will quickly crowd out native species. **TAKE YOUR PLANTING CUES** from the surrounding high-mountain environment. Hike the local terrain; see what’s thriving. **PLANT IN ABUNDANCE**. Mountain growing seasons are short, typically 70 frost-free days. “That’s a short season to get that ‘wow’ factor and to make sure there’s enough for both you and the grazing deer,” he says. **CUSTOMIZE THE SEED MIX**. Because native grasses have a tendency to “take over,” mix wildflower seeds with a little native grass—instead of the other way around. **MAKE A LANDSCAPE PLAN** and a list of plants that grow quickly in alpine environments. Closer to your home, flowering shrubs provide structure to the garden, but be cognizant that such shrubs also produce berries, thus attracting bears, so it is important to strike a balance. Further away, think about reestablishing indigenous plant communities and enhancing wildlife habitat.

*For a listing of trees, shrubs and grasses that thrive in mountain landscapes, visit [mountainliving.com/AspenForest](https://mountainliving.com/AspenForest). >>*



Because long-term sustainability was important to the homeowners, the exterior is dry-stack moss rock locally quarried in Montrose, Colorado; the repurposed shingles are poplar bark; and the copper roof develops a mocha-brown patina over time. "These materials make the exterior of the house practically maintenance free," says Peterson.

The serpentine entry drive (surfaced with recycled asphalt—a by-product of an adjacent county road demolition project) negotiates 70 feet of vertical climb and follows the natural contours of the site, gracefully wending its way through lush stands of aspen before arriving at Highland Retreat's entrance court and garden. Low dry-stack stone walls delineate the "civilized" area from the wilderness. Flowering native shrubs and plants flank the gracious stone steps. In the distance are glimpses of spruce and aspen forests, restored wildflower meadows and the Elk Mountains.

"This is a great house for entertaining," says the wife. "The walls in the living room fold back and we can walk through the house ... almost like it is a park." But, perhaps, their favorite time is sitting outside with a glass of wine in the evening's gathering dusk—listening to sounds of night birds and the distinctive rustle of the aspen forest. ○

**BELOW:** Wildflowers and native grasses thrive under a high canopy of aspen trees. **OPPOSITE:** The home is tucked into a forested hillside. Nature is invited in via large windows—some of which retract completely into the walls, allowing unobstructed views of the outdoors.

» For a guide to this home's products and pros, visit [mountainliving.com/BlurredBoundaries](http://mountainliving.com/BlurredBoundaries)

