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TITLE: MINING THE ARCHITECTURAL TRADITIONS OF TELLURIDE

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The immediacy of the mountains," the owner says, is what lured him and his wife to Telluride over other Rocky Mountain resort communities, and what they most wanted the architecture of their house to draw upon. From the moment that they acquired property overlooking the valley of the historic Colorado mining town, the Iowa couple knew that their vacation residence had to substantially engage the surrounding landscape. They had in mind a building that would embody the spirit of the more than century-old mining structures indigenous to the region. The imported styles that they saw proliferating in the area held no interest for them, nor did they care to erect[cont. on p.70]

another sprawling log cabin. Purists, they chose as the design determinant for their house "the very sane way in which the early settlers had responded to the mountains."

Having spent several family vacations in Telluride, the couple were familiar with the unique flavor of the town's buildings. They talked at length with several architects, but, recalls the owner, "it was one stunning house"--a wood-and-stone Telluride residence--that led them to San Francisco architect Daniel Solomon (see Architectural Digest, June 1992). Solomon, who in researching the context for the previous house had toured the area by mountain bike and extensively photographed it, was committed to preserving the local design character. His feelings about the encroaching development matched his clients', and he saw in their land "an incredible site--with some wonderful views to reveal and some others to mask." His plan would place the house "in communion with the mountains," he says, reaching out to and echoing the forms of the enveloping peaks.

Telluride is mining country, and Solomon's design is based on that enduring aesthetic. "The old mining buildings have a dignity in their aging that is remarkable," he comments. "I admire that vernacular enormously. It's such a pragmatic style and so right for the setting." Solomon incorporated the primary tenets of the idiom in the house: Stark massing and the use of a single material--in this case slate--make it of a piece with the more traditional built environment. "In serving as both roof and wall, the slate simplifies everything," the architect says. "It's a reductive approach in that it unifies all the disparate parts of the building's exterior."

Ironically, achieving a regional appearance[cont. on p.72]

meant at times traveling to distant locations for materials. To select the slate that would best pick up the shade of Telluride's red-stone cliffs, project architect Patricia McBrayer went to Vermont, where she found the perfect specimen, one called "unfading purple." She picked out the timbers that beam the house--all of which are recycled--in northern California; that wood was much drier than the new varieties and was impressively large and stable, qualities that were needed to support Solomon's vast volumes.

Colorado was the source of the patinated copper for the striking chimney. For the fireplace and paneling in the living room, Washington yielded an ideally rusted steel: This dark and heavy substance gives a modulating tone to the house's interior, which is

sun-filled and neutrally shaded. Moreover, it provides an earthbound dimension to the central portion of the house, a space that is nothing short of monumental in scale.

"I designed the building to be understated and modest on the exterior yet quite luxurious inside," Solomon says. The interior gains its sense of opulence and grace from, more than anything, the cathedralesque chamber that holds the living room. "The space soars--like the mountains," the owner says. "The result is that it is always uplifting and energizing."

Although the twenty-nine-foot-high living room is unusually vertical and open, largely due to the selection of furnishings by Seattle-based interior designer Terry Hunziker (who was responsible, as well, for the interiors of Solomon's earlier Telluride house). "I was sensitive to the greatness of the space," says Hunziker. "But to bring in overscale furniture would have diminished the effect. The clients desired a light, casual feeling--comfortable and durable and not at all formal. I decided to go with a combination of rustic and contemporary because it was a look that could work within the dimensions of each room."

The architectural element that most mediates the size of the central space[cont. on p.143]

is the steel bridge that spans it near the top. "The bridge does the necessary job of connecting the two small upper studies," Solomon notes, "but its most important purpose is to bring down the scale of the area below." While he allows that the house holds "one of the grandest living rooms" that he has ever created, he goes on to say that "even if it has a grandeur, the house is straightforward. It's big and spacious but not at all complicated."

The cruciform plan for the 6,000-square-foot residence has as its core the living room, which opens, on the private, "wilderness" side, to the north deck. Tall openings opposite the equally high fireplace wall lead to the dining room and kitchen, which are balanced in the floor plan by the master bedroom and bath. The lower level consists of two guest bedrooms with a bath and two garages; two larger guest bedrooms are placed above that combined area on the main floor. The two small studies are the only spaces that constitute an upper level. Explains McBrayer: "The house was basically designed as one large floor."

"We wanted a house that would seem filled with just the two of us in it and that would also accommodate lots of guests," says the owner. "And this one succeeds on both counts." Indeed, regardless of the activity, there seems to be something hallowed about the primary spaces, something that causes one to take a deep breath and contemplate the snowcapped spires that mark the neighborhood. "The house wasn't really intended to be ecclesiastical," Solomon says, "but in that it's serene and sustaining--and that it totally gives itself over to nature--it's a somewhat reverential private world."

Added material

ARCHITECTURE BY DANIEL SOLOMON, FAIA

INTERIOR DESIGN BY TERRY HUNZIKER

PHOTOGRAPHY BY ROBERT RECK

"We wanted it to be contemporary but with forms traditional to the mountain," says the owner of a Telluride, Colorado, retreat designed for him and his wife by Daniel

Solomon. RIGHT: The slate-shingled entrance tower echoes the verticality of both its aspen grove setting and the local mining structures. BELOW: The main floor is a cruciform in plan.

BELOW: Resembling a skylit mine shaft, the entrance passageway expresses the house's principal axis, with the main stair ascending to the living room. Stained-timber trusses reach a height of 29 feet; the steel bridge spanning the space "effectively mediates that scale," Solomon says.

ABOVE: "A highly formal composition of light, movement and space," is Solomon's description of the mezzanine area. The sandblasted-and-oiled-steel bridge, which met "the very real challenge of making sense of the big volume," connects two small his-and-her studies. The finishing technique gives the bridge "a wonderful kind of soft luster--it has that intrinsic metallic quality yet is more uniform and refined than steel typically is." Canted skylights illuminate the entrance passageway.

"Any one-person space," notes Solomon, "requires a complete reversal of scale." ABOVE: With sisal carpeting, painted wood cabinets and spruce paneling, the west-facing study maintains the overall bleached, rough-hewn look of the interior.

OPPOSITE: In the living room, interior designer Terry Hunziker "highlighted the boldness of the dimensions," he says, with rustic and primitive furnishings. Hunziker's own designs include the sofa and most of the chairs and tables. The steel fireplace and wall panels were designed by Hunziker, Solomon and Seattle artisan David Gulassa. Mimi London woven baskets and "Twist" tables.

"Simple juxtapositions of robust materials," remarks Solomon, was his approach to the interior finishes. ABOVE: A loftlike steel-clad study dominates the kitchen/breakfast area. Overhead lighting is a combination of industrial pendants and an iron chandelier. Donghia woven-rattan dining chairs.

"There are four guest bedrooms: a masculine one, a feminine one and two children's," says Hunziker. ABOVE: In one of the bedrooms, Ralph Lauren fabric covers the Hunziker-designed maple bed and the chair cushions. A lamp made of a turned wood candlestick is placed on a 19th-century tansu chest.

"The key to the exterior is in the mining vernacular of uniting the wall and the roof, thereby creating something of surprising simplicity," Solomon says. "Some of the newer structures in the area get extremely complicated. With their cut-up roofs and cross dormers, they seem so restless in the landscape." OPPOSITE: At the eastern elevation, steps rise along the stone base to the kitchen deck. The building is situated for northern views; double timber piers that mark the perimeter of the living room are at the far right. "This house is much less complex than a lot of others--it has a gable because there's snow to shed--which is precisely what gives it its presence."