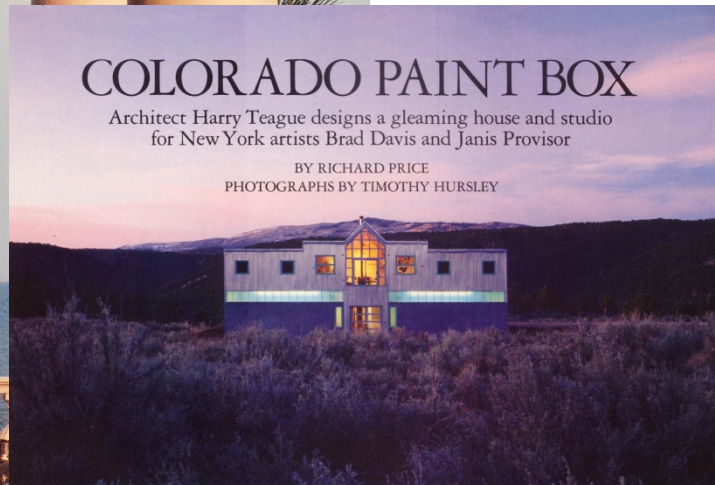


#30YEARSAGOINCOLORADO

A LOOK BACK AT JANIS & BRAD'S COLORADO HOME
PUBLISHED IN HOUSE & GARDEN, AUGUST 1986



In August 1986 artists Janis Provisor and Brad Davis had their newly constructed Colorado home featured in House & Garden magazine.

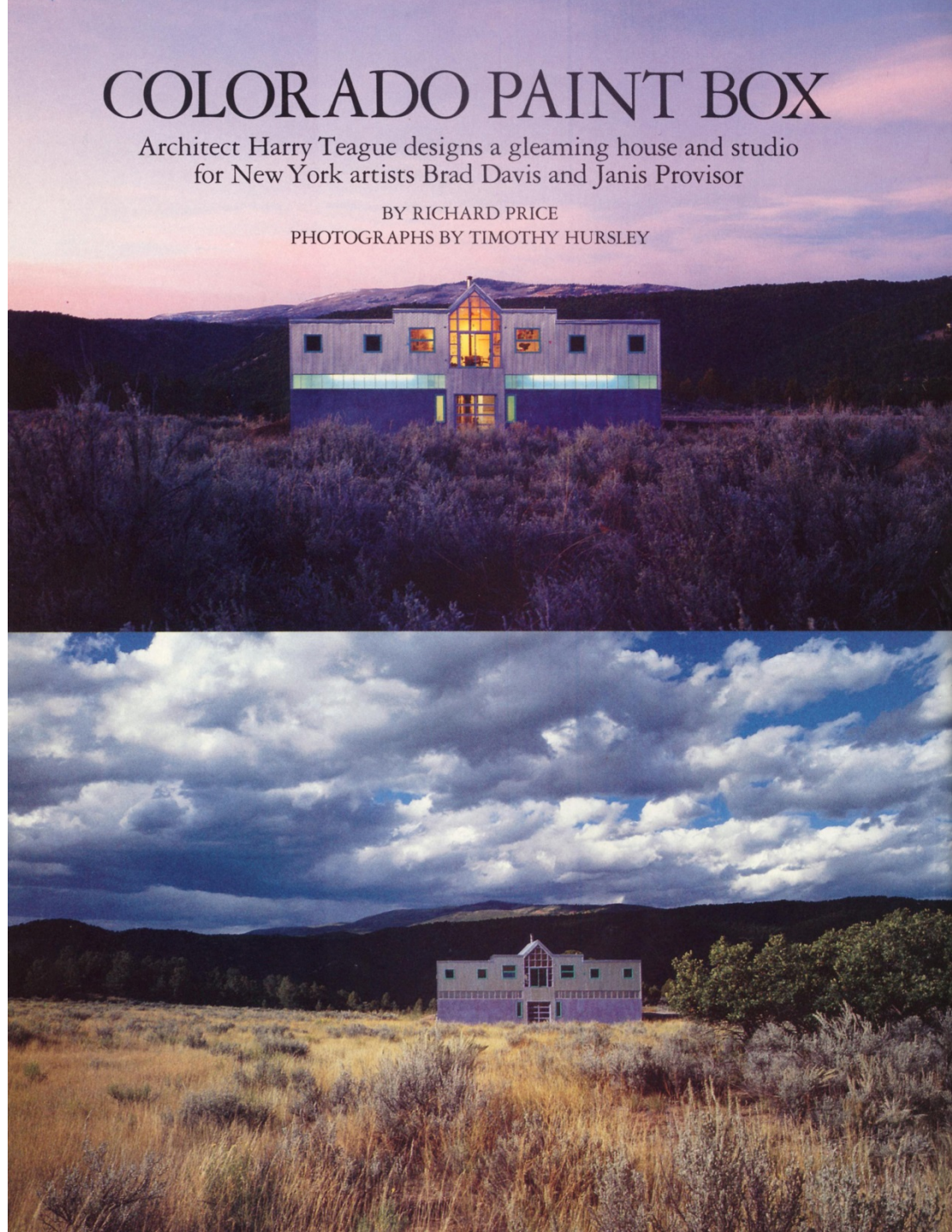
30 years later, in August 2016, we're looking back on this eclectic house – designed by architect Harry Teague in collaboration with Janis & Brad – by sharing insights on its unique construction, the pieces they acquired and art they made while living there, and their reflections on it today, including how a remarkable invitation and one memorable item started them down the path to becoming Principals and Creative Directors of FORT STREET STUDIO, makers of luxurious hand-knotted carpets.

COLORADO PAINT BOX

Architect Harry Teague designs a gleaming house and studio
for New York artists Brad Davis and Janis Provisor

BY RICHARD PRICE

PHOTOGRAPHS BY TIMOTHY HURSLEY



At first glance, this steel Kleenex Box, this barn for mechanical cows, this church for cyborgs seems to be hovering over the earth. It's only on the double take that you realize that this gleaming rectangle is merely the top half of a two-story structure, and that it rests on a ground floor whose exterior walls are of plum stucco – a color and texture that blends so harmoniously with the terrain as to vanish – pulling off a tromp-l'oeil levitation.

Architect Harry Teague, who co-designed the house with Provisor and Davis, felt that in order for it to hold its own in the face of nature's massive statement it had to be designed in such a way as to reflect a larger object in the landscape. The larger object in this case is Mount Sopris, a razor-ridged, snowcapped behemoth ten miles south that dominates the valley with 'awesome' serenity.

- Richard Price
House & Garden, August 1986



The building material also anchors the house to its environs in another way – steel outdoors, is a mirror. It captures the only thing that is constantly moving and changing around these parts – Big Sky. The steel takes on colors that correspond to the mood and time of day. Early mornings make the house gleam a dull gold. High noon turns the house a blinding white. Overcast conditions create an almost oceanic blue-green gleam. Sundown, however, offers the most jarring transformation. There is a three-foot corrugated fiberglass clerestory that runs in an uninterrupted strip the length of the house dividing steel and stucco, and at night, when the stucco vanishes and the plexiglass reflects interior illumination, the house becomes an ascending or descending spaceship supported by its own landing lights.

- Richard Price
House & Garden, August 1986



Two views, *this page*, of rear of house with main entrance, *above*, protected by a thousand-year-old juniper; luminous quality of the steel exterior, *below*, allows it to reflect changing Big Sky; views, *opposite*, of front with strip of studio lights giving it a spaceship look.

“The cladding of the house was completely our idea. The corrugated metal, and the purple stucco (not painted by actually pigment mixed into the stucco). Brad and I bought the pigments at a beloved art supply store in NY... We then went home and experimented with the proportion of pigment to stucco. Brad figured it out, and gave the construction workers coffee cans to measure...they thought he was nuts. While the neighbors were aghast, we were thinking ‘purple mountain majesty.’ Not sure if I would do a purple house now!”

- Janis Provisor, August 2016

“The sofa is an early Thonet, late 40s, we believe a prototype when Thonet first came to America. We’ve never seen another like it. It now resides in our showroom in New York. The Mies Van Der Rohe chairs, also now in the showroom, were purchased at the same time, when we started planning and collecting for the house in 1983-84. Both the sofa and the chairs have since been recovered in Pollack fabric.”

- Janis Provisor, August 2016

“When we were putting together the house, we looked for a carpet long and hard. Our furniture was mid-century or early modern for the most part, and we didn’t want an oriental or ethnic piece. The contemporary carpets on the market were super graphic, bright, hard-edge... not for us. We ended up with a Chinese deco. That rug played a very important part of our world... When we were attempting to make the very first ‘painterly’ carpets, we pointed to parts in our rug that had ‘shading’ in it and asked ‘If in one area, why not all over?’”

- Janis Provisor, August 2016



Another bit of ingenuity is a floor-to-ceiling white wood cactus sculpture that serves as a support for shelves and cabinet. These hold a staggered shower of twentieth-century pottery – German, Italian, and American.

- Richard Price
House & Garden, August 1986

“We are still avid collectors of vintage post-war European pottery. Some of the pieces pictured in the article are currently on display in our New York and Hong Kong showrooms. I am always on the look-out for new and interesting pieces.”

- Brad Davis, August 2016



“We used cattle fencing for the entry stairs and railing of the porch off the second floor living room. We had a local sculptor make them, as well as the hanging cabinet in the kitchen. All works of art. He sprayed molybdenum on it (normally used as lubricant on big machinery) to make a soft grey finish that was unique.”

- Brad Davis, August 2016

“There were 22 different tones of color on the walls and trim. Each to relate to house the light hit the walls as the light changed during the day. All the interior doors were Zolotone paint. They were a rich mix of colors – as I remember 8 colors of base tone beige and 7 bright colors in lacquer.

When they laid the carpet in the bedroom, we thought the wall color was wrong for the color of the carpet, so we completely repainted the room to make it more harmonious. The contractor thought we were nuts!”

- Brad Davis, August 2016



The kitchen/dining room, *right*, where a hanging storage unit of steel, glass, and perforated aluminum built by Steve Parzybok echoes design of the large window that, in turn, reflects the shape of distant mountains. Thonet chairs flank table designed by Davis. *Left*: Brad Davis and Janis Provisor in between his studio, *top*, and hers, *below*.

The downstairs is nothing but naked workspace and all the light you can eat. The length of the ground floor is divided into two equal-sized studios separated by a storage lane. The running three-foot border of opaque corrugated fiberglass floods both studios without offering any external distractions, although one could say, for Brad and Janis, the external distractions around here are the whole point of spending as much time in God's Country as they do in the Art Wars of Manhattan.

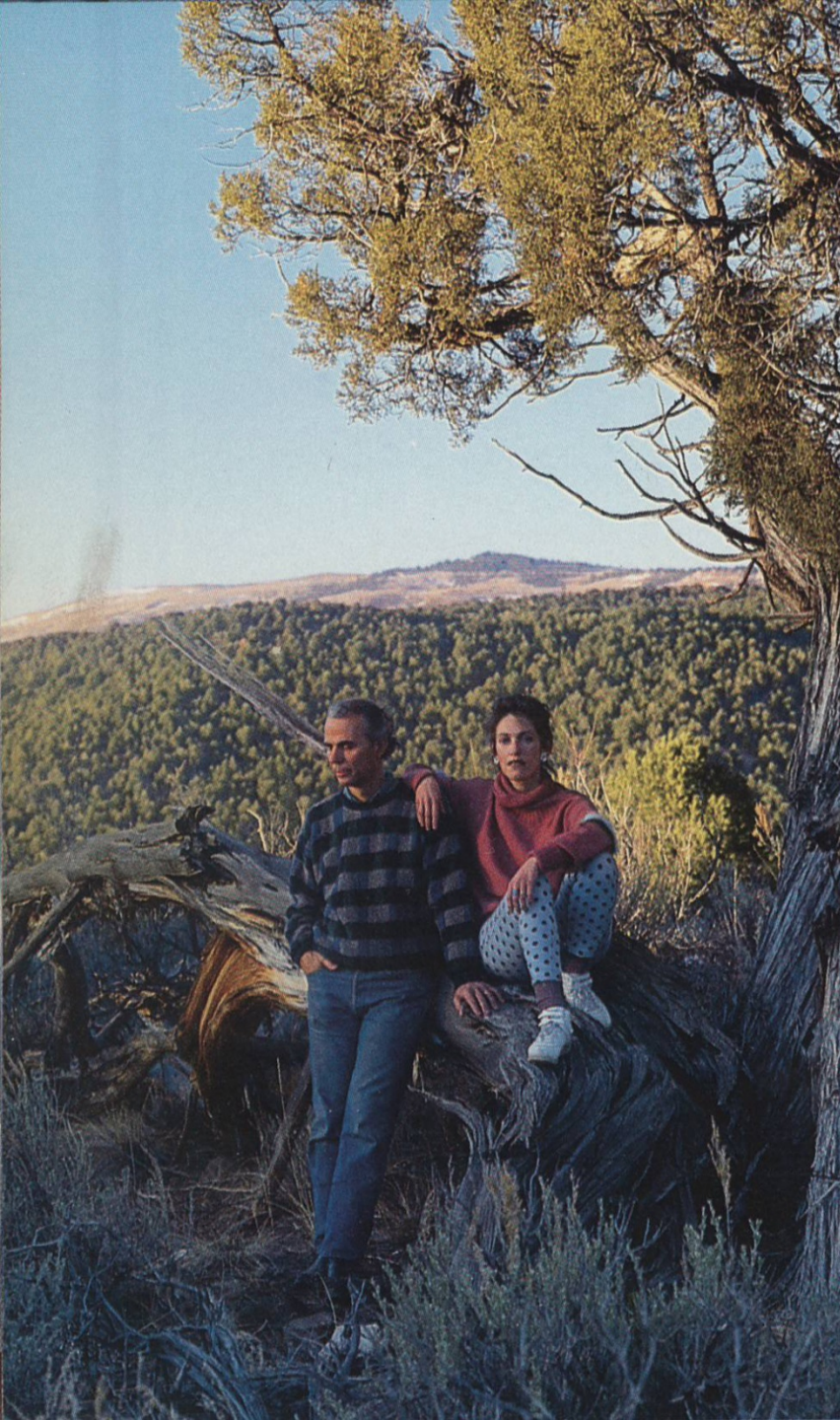
- Richard Price
House & Garden, August 1986



“At the time we were full-time artists, and liked the open spaces of living in a loft (we still do!)... Downstairs were two studios with 12-foot ceilings, separate but equal with a bit open storage space in between for paintings. We put in a big garage door in front of the storage space, lots of glass to let in the amazing south light, and easy access for moving big items in and out of the house... and a place for us to be outside.

We loved living in that house, and if we miss anything about it, is the light that poured in from morning to night. Outside our front window was a view of Mount Sopris, picture perfect like Paramount Pictures, which was an amazing focal point.”

- Janis Provisor, August 2016



The nature that inspired them, other than the obvious mountain-range drama, is startling akin to the landscape scrolls that hang from their walls. The mountains and valleys are strewn with lichen-tinted volcanic basalt, redstone. Juniper trees look like giant bonsais, gray-barked and shredded, exquisitely gnarled – a tumbling delicacy that hauntingly evokes the centuries-old Chinese paintings [in their homes].

As we drive around the countryside they fight over trees, mountains, laying claim to future subjects, dividing up the earth. They point out brooks, individual trees, trickly waterfalls that have already been used. The possibilities and combinations are endless and their absorption is complete.

- Richard Price
House & Garden, August 1986

“Colorado was a big influence on us in many ways, and we remember our time there with great affection. We both became involved with the art scene in Aspen. I was on the board for a brief time at the Aspen Art Museum while Brad was the artist member on the board of the Anderson Ranch Arts Center (we were both instrumental in helping them develop a painting program).

Brad’s work became even more landscape involved as he worked to combine his interest in literati Chinese Painting and the natural world around him. He even spent time working outside. My work grew leaps while there, and I too incorporated the landscape in my work, but on a much more abstract and psychological manner.”

- Janis Provisor, August 2016

Colorado architect Harry Teague says that when designing a house in the face of such overwhelming nature as the Rocky Mountains, one has two choices: blend in or contrast. It would seem safe to say that building a galvanized corrugated steel house with lime-green window trim, in a land of juniper trees, sage bushes, and snowcapped vistas is opting for the "contrast" approach, but there's more here than meets the eye.

At first glance, this steel Kleenex box, this barn for mechanical cows, this church for cyborgs seems to be hovering over the earth. It's only on the double take that you realize that this gleaming rectangle is merely the top half of a two-story structure, and that it rests on a ground floor whose exterior walls are of plum stucco—a color and texture that blends in so harmoniously with the terrain as to vanish—pulling off a trompe-l'oeil levitation.

This is the Colorado home of New York-based artists Brad Davis and Janis Provisor—a bit of elegant singularity in a bowl of a plateau of a valley of a mountain range thirty miles from Aspen in a subdivision of rustic, woody "blend-in" homes and magnificent primordial vistas. Unfortunately, elegant singularity does not appeal to everyone. The neighbors seem distinctly ill at ease around this UFO of a house; a party-line sharer calls and asks if he has "the trailer" on the line; a nearby resident refers to it as a house in a Woody Allen movie; another says purple stucco just isn't American—purple isn't even American, until someone else says, "Oh yeah, how about purple mountain majesties?"

But if the neighbors would observe while watching they'd realize that steel can pay homage to nature more ingeniously than wood. Architect Teague, who co-designed the house with Provisor and Davis, felt that in order for it to hold its own in the face of nature's massive statement it had to be designed in such a way as to reflect a larger object in the landscape. The larger object in this case is Mount Sopris, a razor-ridged, snowcapped behemoth ten miles south that dominates the valley with "awesome" serenity.

Staring at Sopris, the roof of the house, a flat symmetrical two-step bisected by a small triangular pediment, seems an effigy of a mountain range—and the house is to Sopris as an idol is to its deity. The fact that this idol (*Text continued on page 176*)

Kim MacConnel's painting *Caveman*, 1985, in living room, *opposite*, hangs behind Thonet sofa and fifties kidney-shaped table on twenties Chinese Deco rug. On left, Haitian spirit bottle and Arteluce lamp on three-step Swedish table. *Top*: Storage unit designed by William Lipsey built by Don Stuber combines cactus forms with Chinese fret shelving above fifties-style drawers. Piazzetta stove and wall relief, *Deuces Wild*, 1980–81, by George Sugarman are to right. *Right*: A Hopi-inspired kiva-style entrance of tiled stairs leads to main rooms.

COLORADO PAINT BOX

(Continued from page 93) is made out of industrial material only enhances the tip-of-the-hat gesture of the builders to the power of nature.

The building material also anchors the house to its environment in another way—steel, outdoors, is a mirror. It captures the only thing that is constantly moving and changing around these parts—Big Sky. The steel takes on colors that correspond to the mood and time of the day. Early mornings make the house gleam a dull gold. High noon turns the house a blinding white. Overcast conditions create an almost oceanic blue-green gleam. Sundown, however, offers the most jarring transformation. There is a three-foot corrugated fiberglass clerestory that runs in an uninterrupted strip the length of the house dividing steel and stucco, and at night, when the stucco vanishes and the plexiglass reflects interior illumination, the house becomes an ascending or descending spaceship supported by its own landing lights. All of which is to say that people who live in wooden houses shouldn't throw stones.

The interior of the house is in spiritual harmony with the exterior—floating, light-filled—a beach house in the mountains vertically divided into a floor of living quarters over painting studios. Upstairs is a veritable fruit salad of subtle pastels, pale stained woods, and steel. Furniture and art are a blend of Chinese landscape scrolls with Italian 1950s cha-cha aesthetics and unadorned modernism. The central living/dining/cooking room is filled with Thonet chairs, Zolotone doors, amoeboid table surfaces, and geometric-patterned fabrics. Niches hold Mexican devil dolls. The walls are covered with Chinese calligraphy, landscapes, fans, along with modern art—the work of friends—most imposing being a wall-sized primary-colored collage by Kim MacConnel.

Across from the MacConnel, suspended from the ceiling over the cooking area, hangs a steel-and-glass combination exhaust fan and dish-shelving unit that cleverly apes the facade of the house—an idol of the idol.

Another bit of ingenuity is a floor-to-ceiling white wood cactus sculpture that serves as a support for shelves and cabinet. These hold a staggered shower of twentieth-century pottery—German, Italian, and American.

The two bedrooms that flank this central area are filled with rustic applewood beds, Chinese art and cabi-

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nets, and twig tables—a delicate and perfect balance.

The downstairs is nothing but naked workspace and all the light you can eat. The length of the ground floor is divided into two equal-sized studios separated by a storage lane. The running three-foot border of opaque corrugated fiberglass floods both studios without offering any external distractions, although one could say, for Brad and Janis, the external distractions around here are the whole point of spending as much time in God's Country as they do in the Art Wars of Manhattan.

Both Brad and Janis, who show at the Holly Solomon Gallery in New York and will be featured at the Aspen Art Museum Summer Show this year, are, in their different ways, landscape artists. Brad works in something of a spiritual realist vein influenced by Chinese landscape art. Janis's work is

more psychological and metaphoric, internalized.

"Back in New York we worked in more of an imaginary hothouse but out here, nature inspires you," says Brad. "There are natural compositions that you could never come up with on your own."

The nature that inspires them, other than the obvious mountain-range drama, is startlingly akin to the landscape scrolls that hang from their walls. The mountains and valleys are strewn with lichen-tinted volcanic basalt, redstone. Juniper trees look like giant bonsais, gray-barked and shredded, exquisitely gnarled—a tumbling delicacy that hauntingly evokes the centuries-old Chinese paintings.

As we drive around the countryside they fight over trees, mountains, laying claim to future subjects, dividing up the earth. They point out brooks, individual trees, trickly waterfalls that have already been used. The possibilities and combinations are endless and their absorption is complete.

After three days in this house I started to become acclimated to the unchangingness, the gentle relentlessness and began to sense the deep undertow of an artist's work trance—the almost physical concentration that takes over like a state of grace.

On my last morning sitting at a table looking out a small window I wrote down exactly what was before me:

waves of mountains
thousand year old juniper tree
eagle overhead. □

Editor: Elizabeth Sverbeyeff Byron

CORRECTIONS

In the April issue, A Very Special Eye, the tablecloth fabric seen on pages 126 and 130 was inadvertently not identified. It is Glen by John Stefanidis.

In the March issue, Dressed for the Country, page 112, the sculptures of boys on dolphins were not made by Paul Manship, according to his son. The real sculptor remains unknown at press time.

“While living in Colorado, I was invited to go to China to make woodcuts in the watercolor manner with Crown Point Press, an important fine art print publisher in San Francisco. That was our first foray into China, and it changed our lives by introducing us to China in a very intimate yet intense way... not as a tourist, but actually travelling and working and producing. On that trip we met contacts who helped us move there for a year, and thus began the genesis of FORT STREET STUDIO. Would this have happened if we were not living in Colorado then? Who knows?”

- Janis Provisor, Co-Principal & Creative-Director, FORT STREET STUDIO, August 2016