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COLORADO PAINT BOX

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

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PHOTOGRAPHS BY TIMOTHY HURSLEY

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.

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.

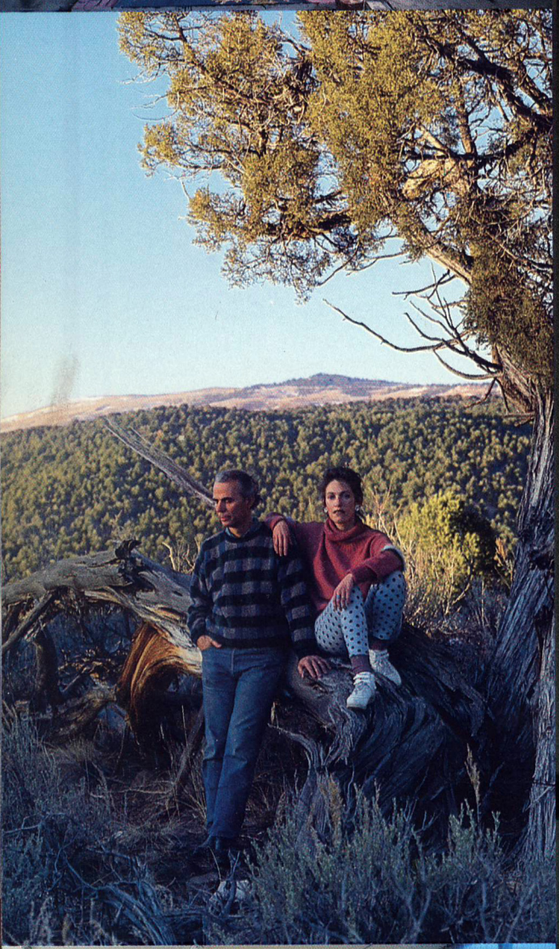
At first glance, this steel Kleenex box, this barn for mechanical cows, this church for cyborgs seems to be hovering over the earth. It's only on the double take that you realize that this gleaming rectangle is merely the top half of a two-story structure, and that it rests on a ground floor whose exterior 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.



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.*

(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, Zolatone 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 façade 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 cabinets, and twig tables—a delicate and perfect balance.

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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.