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On the Banks *of the* Big Hole

ARCHITECT CANDACE MILLER'S RIVERFRONT DESIGN EMBRACES THE BIG-SKY GRANDEUR OF WESTERN MONTANA

"We wanted a low profile, in both massing and color, in response to the surrounding landscape," says architect Candace Miller of a retreat in Montana that she conceived for a California couple. Defined by reclaimed posts and beams and clad in moss stone, the house fronts a man-made pond. Calling upon the area's historic ranch-style vernacular, Miller worked closely with interior designer Teresa Scotti to establish a cohesive aesthetic, focusing on natural materials and hues.

opposite: The screened porch's rough-hewn fir flooring extends to an outdoor terrace. The chair is from Old Hickory Furniture. **below:** The porch off the master bedroom. "The Montana landscape is constantly revealing different perspectives," says the husband.

IN WESTERN MONTANA, tight by a willowy bend in the Big Hole River, a Southern California couple's house is imbued with respect for the landscape in which it is set. The Big Hole is still defined by working cattle ranches and unbroken vistas that are universally loved by fly fishermen. "We were trying to avoid the architectural clichés of the northern Rockies," the husband says. "Our intent was to conform our vision to the scenery, not to exert our will over it." Philosophically, they found a perfect collaborator in Candace Miller. Principal of Miller Architects in Livingston, Montana, she is known for her use of historic recycled wood and stone building materials.

"The surrounding environment is the dominant driver in my approach," Miller says. "Placing a house in the landscape to extract the best views and amenities the site offers is perhaps the most important step in design."

With Miller and California-based interior designer Teresa Scotti, the clients studied the setting with the attentiveness of plein air artists pondering what paints to squeeze onto their palettes. Before the main house was built, they inhabited a Miller-designed guest cottage on the property, an experience that helped them distill exactly what they wanted.

"The delightful thing about a ranch compound like this is that the detached buildings create edges within the landscape, thereby defining outdoor living spaces," Miller notes. "I believe this loose sense of containment encourages an easy interaction with the immediate outdoors in such a way as to make the large expanse of Montana's landscapes more humanly scaled, somewhat protected and therefore comfortable and desirable to be in."

With the guesthouse offering separate quarters for visiting family members, the clients were able to reduce the size of the main house to 3,700 square feet. The interior spaces are augmented by three porches and a garden terrace; created by landscape designer Beth MacFawn, the garden overlooks a man-made pond.

"Materials should be tonally responsive to the immediate landscape along with being resilient and unfussy," Miller says. Although she made extensive use of recycled barn wood and fieldstone in the house, she maintained a sense of openness and light. Along with providing vaulted ceilings, Miller strategically positioned large windows and carefully sited the house to ensure that ambient light from Montana's famous big skies would always flood through the interior spaces.

The material palette is also lightened by warmly hued plaster walls. "The plaster has so much body and depth, and it plays off the native grasses outside," says Miller's project manager Nichole Wills, who worked closely with Scotti.

"The essence of this home is that it fits the scale of the compound and the owners' personal comfort level," Wills says. "It's not too large or too small." For Miller, the house is an example of how newcomers to the Big Hole can achieve aesthetic co-existence with the natural assets of the land. "It's my desire to build bridges between interior and exterior," she says. "I want to create one contiguous living space." ↢