

preserving the land

gluck+



There is abundant topography around Aspen—rushing rivers, looming mountains, rocky valleys cascading to dire vanishing points, and meadows wild with waving grasses. Residents are passionate about its beauty and about preserving it and some—such as the owners of this family compound designed by GLUCK+—go to great lengths to ensure that their dwelling doesn't impinge on the scenic splendor around it.

Peter Gluck has made known his views on the disconnect between architecture and environment. The architect has said that the houses his firm designs are correctives to the “megahouse” (the ones with pitched roofs and turrets, he specifies). Often the firm “mines” the building into the ground. The result is a non-building where very little shows except the landscape and amazing views. It was because of the modernist's no-nonsense opinion that an Aspen entrepreneur sought out Gluck and project architect Charlie Kaplan to design a multi-generational compound for his family in a narrow valley just outside town. There were compelling reasons to collaborate with Gluck, including the fact that he has a long history with Aspen, having designed and built three houses and a 14-unit affordable housing project there. Perhaps the most cogent reason, though, was Gluck's conviction that “a traditional house would destroy the landscape.” His solution for the selvedge of property between a road and Castle Creek is an object lesson in the grace of site-specific architecture.

The project began as a main house, with the subsequent addition of a two-wing guest house. The two structures became case studies in architectural opposites. The main house came first—a two-story modernist glass, steel, and wood box that faces south toward Hayden Peak. It's sited to capture the sun and to collaborate with the river, an ever-moving force that enlivens the experience of being in the house.

The house feels as if it's floating above the landscape. Except for the entry enclosure that enfolds foyer, stairwell, and a powder room, the glass-encased first floor exists en plein air, transparent and revelatory: an open floor plan with living, dining, and kitchen spread out below the 10-foot-high ceiling supported by slender columns. Lightly poised over the soft, flat landscape, the house seems to allow the meadow to flow right through it. As prescribed by Corbusier in his *Five Points of Modernism*, there are roof gardens. Two meadows are forever in plain sight on the intersecting roofs of the guest house.

Perpendicular to the main house, and parallel to the road, one wing of the guest house integrates unconditionally with the rugged topography. One end of its roof rises out of the landscape in which the other end is literally immersed. It's a trajectory that passes over the other wing of the guest house, aiming straight at Hayden Peak. “We wanted to augment the view,” Kaplan explains, “and we used the two roofs of the guest house as emphasis.” The grassy flat roof of the guest house opposite the main house underscores the view, like a datum line; the ski-run roof emerges from the meadow at a trajectory that matches the angle of the slope of Mt. Hayden. From the vantage point of the interior courtyard, it's easy to visualize the impossible—stepping off the high end of the roof right onto Mt. Hayden's slopes (many miles away). Besides connecting an admirer to the far-away, the buildings create an immediate and intimate alliance. Together the two guest wings clasp the south end of an implied courtyard that unifies the three structures into a private family gathering place.

“We carved out the forest,” says Gluck, “and we carved into the hill. The idea was to create a space so you can't see the house from the road and vice versa.” At GLUCK+, architects manage design and construction in an integrated process that unites site and architecture. “We were trying to find a way to preserve the beautiful valley,” says Gluck. Kaplan compares the operation to mining, digging into the hill to make a natural outcropping. “The plane the three structures are on is now 40 feet below the road,” says Gluck. The effect is of three parallel universes—the public road; the river; and the meadow, each complementing the others.

Colorado topography is complicated. The architectural intervention in this family's little valley was also complicated, and the relationship between buildings and topography is elaborate in effort, but elegant in conclusion. For Gluck and Kaplan, there was only one acceptable result: “We wanted to leave the valley pretty much as it was,” says Gluck. “The valley was beautiful then and it's beautiful now.” ●





↑ In the main house, slender columns support the second floor, allowing unobstructed views. The open living space extends outside to a dining area overlooking Castle Creek.

→ A hallway extends from the entry into the heart of the house; the stair leads up to the second floor and a deck.



↑ A David Weeks Bottle Tiered Mobile hovers over the dining table in the main house. English sycamore and wenge are used for cabinetry in the kitchen and below the windows.



← [preceding pages] The intersecting bar forms of the guest house create an interior courtyard. The planes of the “roof meadow” render the house almost invisible from the road and highlight the original view from the main house.



↓ Together the main house and guest house form a private compound, sheltered by mountains and forest yet open to the sun and sky.





- ↙ The angle of the guest house roof is reflected in the upward slant of the ceiling and the widening clerestory windows, which follow the profile of the adjacent hillside.
- ↓ Glass doors in a corner bedroom in the guest house open to the lawn and pool; ipe wood screens filter out the sun and provide privacy as night. Clerestory windows give the impression that the grass-topped roof is floating above the room.



↓ Fully glazed walls in the living space of the guest house blur the boundary between inside and out.

