



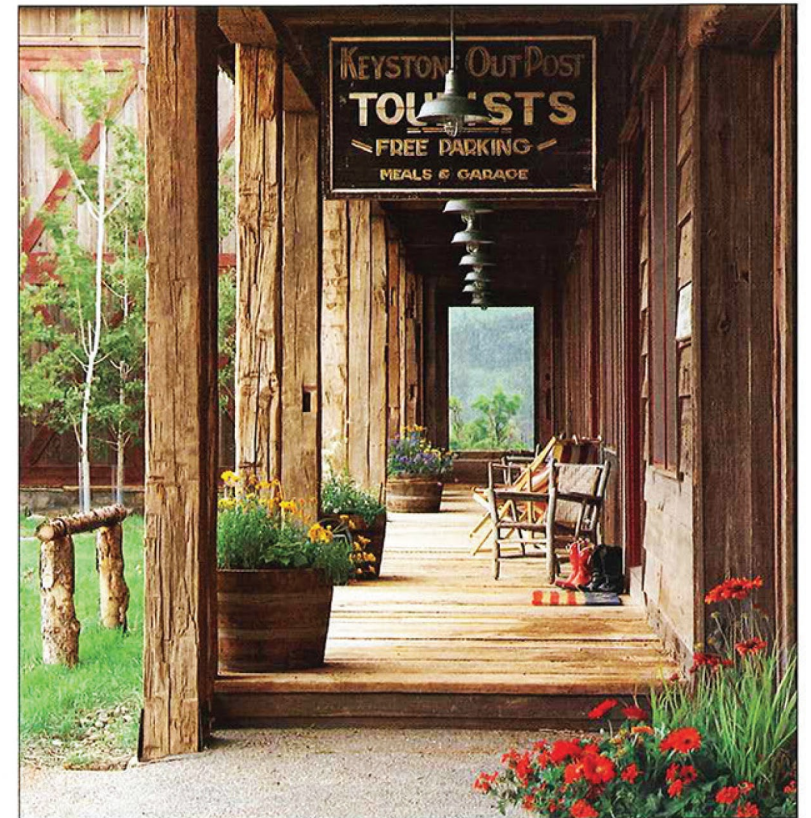
Sunset Ranch, the Utah residence of Skip and Jackie Morgen, occupies a secluded spot in the Uinta mountain range. Architects Mark Rios and Kurt Dubbe collaborated on the house, much of which is clad in reclaimed barn siding. "The site is quite magical," says Dubbe.

# Go Tell It on the MOUNTAIN

ANSWERING THE CALL OF THE WEST,  
A COUPLE OPT FOR A UTAH FARM



Architecture by Mark Rios, FAIA, of Rios Clementi Hale Studios and Kurt Dubbe, AIA, of Dubbe-Moulder Architects  
Interior Design by Jackie Morgen  
Text by Michael Frank/Photography by Douglas J. Burke



There is something positively inspiring about a couple who, instead of gliding into unencumbered retirement, decide to reinvent a large piece of their domestic life. In 2002 Skip and Jackie Morgen, he a former mortgage broker and she an interior designer, found themselves visiting Park City, Utah. Their son, Brett, had directed *The Kid Stays in the Picture*, a movie that was being shown at the Sundance Film Festival, and they had come to celebrate with him. As soon as they stepped into the landscape, the Morgens, who had

"Too many houses in the area are built to look like lodges on steroids," says Rios. TOP: The guest barn. ABOVE: A walkway of 150-year-old boards leads to the front entrance. "We looked at a lot of local barns for inspiration," says Jackie Morgen, who designed the interiors.

LEFT: "The great room is a really comfortable space that can accommodate our various collections," Jackie Morgen says. The rug in the foreground was copied from a book on American quilts by Stark Carpet. The wool rug in the background is from Elizabeth Eakins.



Nearly floor-to-ceiling windows in the dining area capture valley views. "Even though the house has a pre-dominant position in the landscape, the neighbors can't see them, and they can't see the neighbors," explains Dubbe. Embroidered silk on chair cushions, Mimi London.

a long-standing affection for the West, were besotted. They nearly gave in to impulse and purchased a piece of land on that very first trip. "But then we thought we'd better be sure it wasn't just that we were excited about Brett," Jackie Morgen remembers, "so we returned in two weeks."

Two weeks later they loved what they saw all the more. The Morgens are both winter people, and for skiers, as Skip Morgen says, "Utah is pure heaven." But what in the end truly surprised them was the summer. Apparently there's an old saying: The skiing is what brings people to the mountains, but the summer is what keeps them there.

Winter or summer, the Morgens knew they belonged. They belonged specifically on a 113-acre parcel more than 7,000 feet up into the Uinta Mountains near Oakley, where tranquility abounded. The land, subdivided from an old dairy farm, had spectacular panoramic mountain and valley views. Scrub oaks, aspens, maples and spruces grew throughout the property, where one particular five-acre, nearly level patch seemed ideal for the house they were suddenly determined to build.

The Morgens have two children, three grandchildren and a lively clan of friends in Los Angeles, all of whom they wanted to be part of their new Utah life. This meant the house had to be substantial but easy, private and public, at once intimate and rambling. Yet the couple most certainly did not want to set a suburban McMansion or overblown lodge into their Edenic wilderness. Mindful of the farm's history and being fans of the local vernacular of barns and silos, weathered siding and rusted roofs, they put together a team of architects to help them express their vision for a second home.

In Los Angeles, Mark Rios conceptualized the design, and in Utah, Kurt Dubbe (whose office is actually in Wyoming) supplied working drawings and supervised construction. While it is nearly 12,000 square feet in total, the house has been cleverly broken down into units of different size and weight, in order



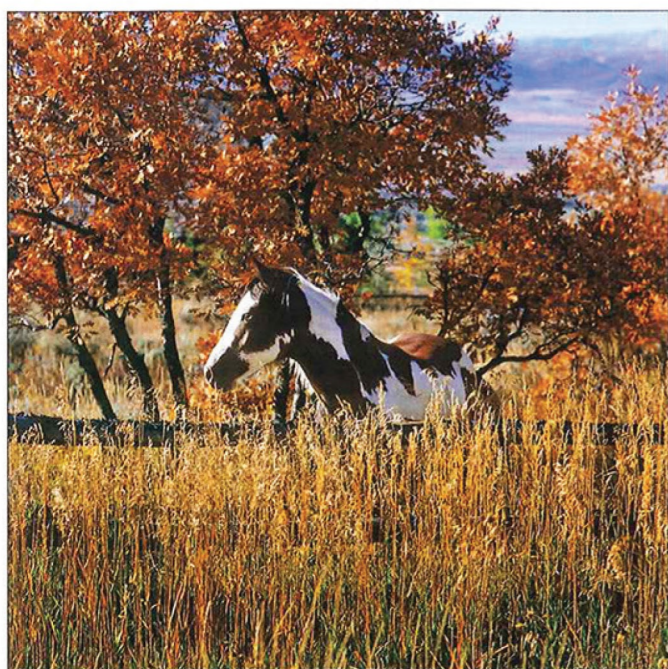
The kitchen. "It's challenging to work with existing materials, which are basically found objects. Very few pieces, whether of stone or wood, are similar," says Dubbe. "Flexibility is key, as is spending time at the site." The grill is from Thermador. Viking range. Rohl sink.

“Sometimes,” says Jackie Morgen, “less is more. What matters is the landscape, and treating it with respect.”



ABOVE: Jackie Morgen's collection of brown-and-white transferware adorns the master bedroom's salvaged-wood shelves. "I keep finding things carved in them—initials, names, doodles. It's living history," she says. BELOW: Tehya, the Morgens' American Paint Horse.

RIGHT: "The iron tension rings mimic a traditional silo," Dubbe says of the two-story structure that houses the master bath and hot tub. The reclaimed-wood siding, like much of the building material used for the interiors and exteriors of Sunset Ranch, is from Conklin's.



to seem more at peace in its setting.

Deciding on a program for the public face of the house required that the team engage in some conversation. "Though Mark's initial drawings were beautiful conceptually," Jackie Morgen recalls, "it took some time before we arrived at how the house might actually look from the outside. One day I said to him, 'Close your eyes and picture this house dressed as a woman, and this woman is a barn!' That seemed to click with him—and with us."

"The main house was conceived to look like a big barn on the landscape," Rios explains, "which had other masses added to it—a silo, a porch, outbuildings—perhaps over time. Each of these structures has its own identity and spatial idea. They're taller or shorter, larger or smaller. My goal was to give the house a sense of fit on the site, both with its specific sloping topography and its memory."

Rios also sought to imbue the house with a sense of mystery. He liked the idea that it might look as though it had once been an actual barn and was later converted. Enormously contributory to this impression, as Dubbe explains, was the use of local or salvaged materials, chiefly recycled lumber for the siding, interior walls and beams, and a Utah quartzite sandstone known as Oakley stone, whose rich and varied palette gives heft and warmth to the fireplaces, inglenooks and kitchen. Another local inspiration was rusted corrugated-tin roofs; for the Morgens, the builders applied Cor-Ten, a heavier-gauge steel that, in purposefully rusting, both seals the house and develops a mellow patina.

"Even though we used old materials," Dubbe says, "the house is not intended to be a historical reproduction. It's actually a contemporary twist on a traditional barn structure." Dubbe points to the front door—a slab of glass hung on offset pivots, which allows a visitor to see through the house and out into the landscape beyond—as the kind of detail that anchors the house in the early 21st century rather than the early 20th.

Second homes often have a kind of split identity. There are times when they contract to be used by a couple alone and

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## ON THE MOUNTAIN

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others when they expand to embrace a large party of guests. Since this metamorphosis can never be actual, it has to be suggested, and for Rios one key solution was to contrast open volumes with more intimate ones. Hence the large great room, with ceilings that soar to 32 feet, versus the more intimate master suite next door. The latter, intelligently situated on the first floor in order to make life easier for the owners in their later years, is compact and comforting. The house is full of quirky, especially pleasing spaces too, such as the master bath at the bottom of the silo and an outdoor hot tub at the top.

For the interiors, Jackie Morgen turned to easterner Morrie Breyer for consultation and guidance, but for the most part she realized she—and her husband—had been unconsciously anticipating a western house for many years. He is a longtime collector of Pendleton and western blankets, she of brown-and-white transferware, charming old signage and vintage kitchen tins. Together they bought rustic furniture and atmosphere-warming rugs, but “in truth,” Jackie Morgen says, “the decoration was secondary to the architecture for us. We felt that if we got the bones of the house right, the interiors would fall quite naturally into shape.”

So speaks the professional, whose assured hand is as palpable in the cozy papered guest rooms as it is in the dining

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Sunset Ranch had to be substantial but easy, private and public, intimate and rambling.

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area, with its primitive table expertly placed to look out over the stunning valley view. “Sometimes,” she explains, “less truly is more. What matters is the landscape, and treating it with respect.”

“This place is called Sunset Ranch for a reason,” adds Skip Morgen. “You’re right close to heaven up here, with the sunsets, the sky and the stars. It’s a cowboy sky, navy blue, with a moon just full of light. It’s like you’ve tumbled into a western novel of long ago. Our goal is to keep it that way for as long as possible.” □