

# ModernCabin



MICHELLE KODIS

The asymmetrical roof, clad in standing seam zinc, cuts away at the east façade to avoid blocking a window high in the art studio wall. The program specified a transparent house, apparent here in this twilight view. When lit, the vestibule windows are transformed into welcoming lanterns.

## 02 SECTION

# europa n - i n f l u e n c e d alpine dwelling

DESIGN: RICHARD CIECIUCH, PROJECTWORKSHOP

PHOTOGRAPHS: GERRY EFINGER

LOCATION: TELLURIDE, COLORADO 2,350 SQUARE FEET

his home's meticulous construction and fine materials prompted one person to call it a cabinet in the meadow. The description is fitting: everything about the house, from its evenly spaced wood slat siding to the sleek but warm interior finishes, speaks to high-end craftsmanship and finesse, but this is where the comparison ends. Designer Richard Ciecuch appreciates the romance of the image but is more practical in his thinking: "Aesthetics aside, this is a mountain home that will have to survive the extreme setting," he says. "It has been constructed to withstand whatever the alpine environment might bring—it's very sturdy."

Built for a Munich couple with a passion for art (she owns an art gallery), the 2,350-square-foot "art barn" rests on a patch of pastoral ranch land at 9,700 feet in the San Juan Mountains, near the town of Telluride. The setting is straight out of *The Sound of Music*—wildflowers dot the meadow in late spring and summer and robust stands of aspen trees provide a kaleidoscopic color show: shifting shades of green during the warmer months, gold and blaze orange in autumn, bare white trunks and branches in winter. As if that weren't enough eye candy, Utah's La Sal Mountains hover on the horizon. Ciecuch says the goal was to balance the more contained foreground views with the panoramic vista. "It was important to prevent the background from becoming overwhelming," he says. "The owners love to see mountains from their windows, but they equally value being in contact with what's happening right around them."





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#### SPECIAL FEATURES FOR THIS PLAN

- FINELY CRAFTED BUT DESIGNED AND BUILT TO WITHSTAND HARSH WINTERS HIGH IN THE COLORADO MOUNTAINS
- CONFIGURED AS TWO DISCRETE SECTIONS—LIVING SPACE AND ART STUDIO—CONNECTED BY A BREEZEWAY THAT ALSO FUNCTIONS AS AN OUTDOOR ROOM
- RIVER-STONE GABION IN LIEU OF A TYPICAL STONE WALL TO BRING COLOR AND TEXTURE TO THE HOUSE WITHOUT WEIGHING IT DOWN



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**1** A gabion along the base of the east façade is a refined alternative to more rustic and conventional forms of stonework. The designer created a mesh metal bin and filled it with smooth, colorful stones from the Colorado River. The gabion was less time-consuming and thus less expensive than a traditional stone veneer wall. The windows and doors throughout the house are African mahogany.

**2** The cabin's design maximizes distant views of Utah's La Sal Mountains and keeps the owners in intimate connection with the

surrounding meadows and aspen groves. The low-slung building is appropriately scaled and its careful placement along the contours of the site minimized the cost and effects of excavation.

**3** Long-lasting and low-maintenance massaranduba siding brings texture and rich color to the exterior. The boards are backed with insect screen for an elegant black reveal, and exposed glulam rafters establish an eye-catching rhythm that extends from the interiors. Slats at the corner steam shower provide privacy without obstructing the views from inside.

**4** The art studio's eighteen-foot-high window is inset with operable hoppers at the top and bottom to enhance fresh air circulation through the space. The wall paneling here and throughout the cabin is rift-cut white oak plywood with a natural finish.

**5** Commercial-grade aluminum garage doors can be easily lifted to expose the art studio to the outdoors. The floors are polished concrete with radiant in-floor heat.

Cieciuch, working with carpenter-turned-architect Dylan Henderson, took his initial cues from the regional barn vernacular but updated his building with modern materials and functional living and work spaces. He also studied European mountain houses, in the process developing an appreciation for their "human" scale, appropriately sized floor plans and low-key elegance, he explains. This approach pleased the owners, who weren't keen on a log cabin reenacted in the traditional American style.

The house is divided into two sections: one combines living, dining and sleeping quarters while the other is a spacious, light-filled art studio with a soaring eighteen-foot ceiling and commercial garage doors (in lieu of French or sliding doors) that can be pulled up to fully open the room to the deck, thus expanding its usable dimensions. A breezeway connects the sections and serves another purpose: in cooperative weather it doubles as a covered outdoor room/entertainment patio.

Cieciuch used only a handful of materials on the house, opting for an uncomplicated palette that allows the individual elements to stand out. Massaranduba wood slats clad the exterior and the deck, mahogany plywood covers the breezeway ceiling, and the roofing is beautiful and long-lasting

matte-finish zinc. Rather than follow the crowd and use chunky stone to protect the lower portion of the building from prolonged contact with accumulated snow, Cieciuch chose a veneer that recalls a gabion, a steel mesh structure filled with loose-laid rock, in this case smooth-to-the-touch stones from the Colorado River. The gabion, which runs along the east façade, was less expensive than a regular stone veneer wall and took less time to install. "There's a lot of Colorado geology sitting in that wall," he quips.

Other materials include African mahogany (windows), rift-cut white oak plywood (interior ceiling and walls), mesh steel (railings), solid white oak (counters), glass tile (shower) and polished concrete floors with radiant heat.

To Cieciuch it all comes down to a bigger-picture idea. "Here in the West, the familiar log cabin has shaped many a notion of retreat," he says. "Our goal, which was enthusiastically endorsed by the clients, was to redefine that notion by combining a practical floor plan, sensible form and scale, and simple materials with an extraordinary site to create a lasting and soulful building."



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6 The west façade opens up to the setting with ample sliding glass doors and commercial garage doors that encourage indoor/outdoor living. The building was designed for maximum energy efficiency: triple-gasket seals at the doors and windows prevent heat loss, and the use of structural insulated panels resulted in R-values well in excess of local code requirements. Seven-foot roof overhangs protect the deck and help shade the interiors.

7 One of two in the house, the wood-burning fireplace is covered in white oak panels set slightly apart for an interesting geometric effect. The sliding door and glass panel at the vestibule are set on high-end stainless steel track hardware.





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Floor Plan

Wood Deck

8 The ceiling, clad in rift-cut white oak plywood panels, is a backdrop for a series of intricately “laced” trusses, which were prefabricated off-site to save time and money. The beams are glulam and the tie rods and connectors are steel. The railing incorporates woven stainless steel mesh skillfully integrated with blackened steel posts by metal artisan Jeff Skoloda.

9 The compact and efficient kitchen is equipped with stainless steel appliances and custom cabinets crafted from white oak. Strategically placed light fixtures on the ceiling showcase the dramatic trusses.

10 The master bathroom includes a spacious steam shower enclosed with floor-to-ceiling glass partially shielded on two sides by an exterior wood slat screen. Pale green glass tiles in the shower bring soft color to the otherwise monochromatic decor. The cabinet and paneling are white oak.

11 The vestibules are a transition between the indoors and outdoors and, thanks to their sturdy and easily cleaned concrete floors, they can handle everything from snow-packed boots to muddy paws. The massaranduba deck is durable enough for long-term mountain use.





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