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HOME & LIVING IN THE *western san juans*

From 'Flintstones' to Fabulous
A Miner Miracle
Place of Well-Being
Poppers, Perfected
Building by Example

A 'miner' miracle

On Telluride's main street, a historic cabin conceals a spacious and luminous abode

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PHOTOS BY WHIT RICHARDSON

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Architect Luke Trujillo's conception of the historic miner's cabin project (above) and, below, the way it appears today.

As a child growing up in California's Bay Area, Ethan Miller had a dream, and it wasn't to stay near the ocean. "Literally since I was seven years old, I dreamed of being a forest ranger," Miller said. "I wanted to live in a cabin in the mountains."

Miller is not a forest ranger: he grew up to become an attorney. Yet his childhood vision got Ethan and his high-school sweetheart, Karen Miller, to Telluride, where they would build a house.

"We'd honeymooned in Taos, and took a road trip over the Million Dollar Highway," Ethan recalled. "We found ourselves in Telluride.

We looked at each other and said, 'Someday, someday.'"

Fast-forward a dozen years or so, and the Millers, who by now had raised three children, were skiing in the box canyon. "It was a blizzard, and Karen was cold. Sure as hell, the first place we walked into to get warm was a real estate office. Which is like blood in the water to an agent," Miller joked.

The couple struck up a rapport with Realtor Eric Saunders, and the dream of living in Telluride began to take shape: "We wanted to be downtown," Miller said, "close to skiing, bars and restaurants and shopping. We looked all over."

The Millers nearly closed on one place downtown (it fell through) and a house in Mountain Village that "didn't have much charm."

"I do a fair amount of residential real estate, and I like to rehab super-old places," Miller said. "And Eric said, 'Well, there's this old miner's cabin for sale on main street. It's a real dump, but you said you wanted a fixer-upper!'"

"He turned me on to (architect) Luke, who was enthusiastic immediately. He saw the potential."

What Luke Trujillo, the owner of True-linea Architects in Telluride, saw, nobody else did: he imagined this "dump," a historic cabin on West Colorado Ave., as just the beginning of a larger space. Trujillo's vision was to link the smaller house abutting Main Street to a brand-new, three-story building directly behind it, with soaring views of the surrounding box canyon.



Of course the cabin, which dates to about 1890 — a boom time in Telluride, with work in the surrounding gold and silver mines drawing numerous new residents to town — would have to pass muster with Telluride's Historic Architectural Review Commission, known as HARC. So much of good design comes down to inches: how tight spaces are utilized, conserved, or in the case of this project, earned. In order for Trujillo's

vision to be implemented — and for the Miller's to get their dream home — the historic cabin would need to be relocated 16 inches to the east.

The question was whether HARC would approve the (slight) move, and ultimately, the answer was yes. "Once we got that approval, we were able to save the house," Trujillo said.

From the front, the small house is one of the most unassuming buildings in all of downtown, so spare and innocuous there's not even a front door on the place (there are two entrances, located on either side). Step inside, though, and the place immediately opens up, to a TV room, a two-tiered office (Ethan's is in a loft, and Karen's is directly below), a hidden sleeping nook, tucked away behind an elegant, sliding barnwood door, and an illuminated hallway that zig-zags to the larger part of the home out back. The shape of the hallway was designed "to suggest a ski run," Trujillo said. >>>





Above the living room in the historic cabin is Ethan Miller's light-filled office (note the ladder he uses to ascend there). Karen Miller's work space, replete with big windows, is behind the wall where the television is, almost directly below her husband's office.

A view of the living room in the historic cabin. Telluride's main street lies just outside the windows. In the photo below, directly behind the chimney, the new, larger building attached to the cabin. The two conjoined structures add up to one spectacular space.

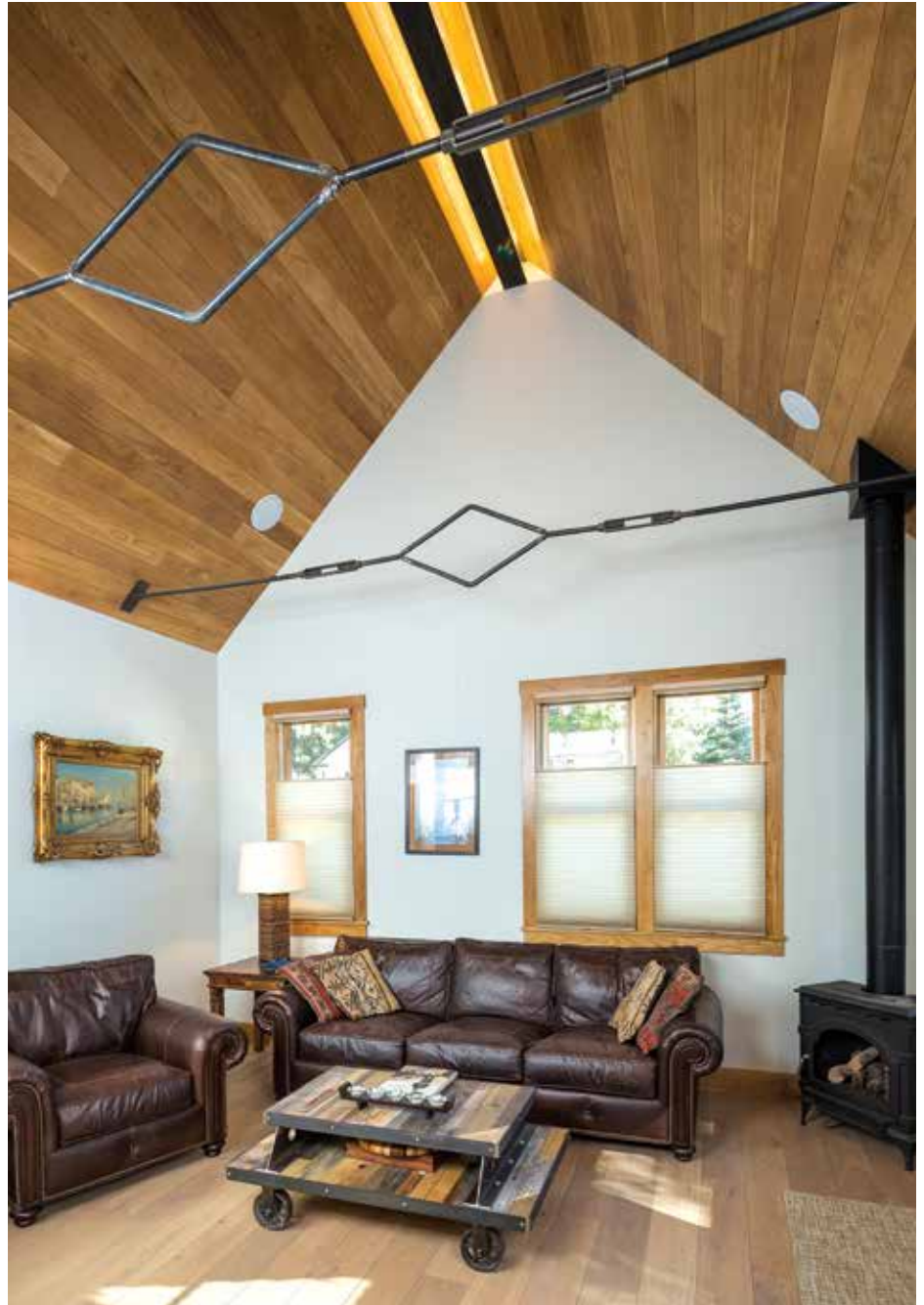
HARC, AND GEOGRAPHY

HARC proscribes a visible delineation between historic and new structures, so “all four corners of both the old and the new buildings had to be visible,” Trujillo said. The new design “is all code-compliant, down to the inch.”

Local geography posed its own constraints. The fact that the building is on a floodplain necessitated that the washer and dryer be suspended off the basement floor. The same goes for the boiler (“Because, again, the floodplain,” Trujillo explained).

When possible, the architect preserved what he could of the original structure. “We saved the historic, hipped roof,” he said, gesturing to the cabin’s high, angled ceiling. He matched the new windows in front to windows on the Rio Grande Southern Depot, which is located right around the corner, was constructed at nearly exactly the same time in Telluride — 1891 — and connected Otto Mears’ railroad with the Denver and Rio Grande in Ridgway. Trujillo even managed to save part of the original brick chimney, a visible reminder of the only source of warmth for working men and women who resided in these spare, small spaces a century ago (the northern, sun-splashed side of town is where the historic mansions and grand, government buildings are).

Overall, Trujillo managed to pack four bedrooms and 3,000 feet of living space into the Miller’s new place, and 18 livable feet of space into the 19-foot-wide historic structure abutting Main Street. The zig-zagging hallway leads back and up a flight of stairs to the place everyone always gathers: a luminous kitchen, with gaping views of the ski runs — and the gondola — in one direction, and the box canyon to the left, directly east. Every possible place you can get a view, you do here. Though the north side of the back building faces Main Street (and is located directly behind the historic, smaller house), it didn’t stop Trujillo from placing a deck just outside, which has turned out to be one of the most popular hang out spots in the entire house. You can easily see around and past the smaller building for big views of Cornet Creek. “You’re not hemmed in,” Trujillo pointed out. “You still have a connection



to the mountains and Main Street, and the peaks farther north. It’s almost two ways of living,” tucked in downstairs for an afternoon of TV viewing or visiting with friends, for example, or above it all in the airy kitchen where there are high ceilings, and a feeling of both privacy and a sensation of floating, with friends and family, above it all. (The master bedroom, set far back from Main Street on the first floor, offers a sense of peace. Two more bedrooms, and a spacious TV and game room, are in the basement.)



Upstairs in the new building, the commodious kitchen/living area offers a feeling of airiness (and a look back through big windows at the miner's cabin). In the opposite direction lies a deck overlooking the ski hill, where the Millers entertain guests.

The Millers moved in in 2015. They entertain frequently, and host a Fourth of July gathering each year on their back deck, with a view of Town Park fireworks. In 2016, their new home was featured on the annual Art + Architecture tour of Telluride. It won two awards: the Audience Choice Team Prize went to Truline along with chef Patrick Laguens and guest artist Kevin Box. And the \$1000 Individual Juried Prize was given to Trujillo himself “for the same outstanding project.”

Much praise on the A+A tour went to the stonework in the house, marble downstairs and quartzite in the kitchen. In fact, they were procured by Trujillo, who often works with clients on interiors. “I flew to Denver and picked up the marble slabs, and the quartzite in the kitchen,” Trujillo said. “A lot of times, I’ll end up doing the interior myself. It streamlines the process, and saves on costs.”

For example, the lighting in the home is from the Denver firm AE Design. “I’m friends with the principal,” Trujillo said. The extensive ironwork in the home, which can be found on the stairs and banisters and imparts both a sense of rusticity and a feeling of airiness, is by Todd Herman. Tie-rods in the historic cabin are both decorative and functional: “They literally hold the walls together so they don’t splay,” Trujillo explained. “The steel detailing has taken on its own language. I try to incorporate it in all my projects. It’s a nice, Telluride aesthetic that you don’t see everywhere.” And it recalls the metal ores being mined in the mountains above, during the cabin’s first iteration. Today, Telluride’s economy is embodied by what goes on directly behind the Miller’s home — at the ski resort — and just up the street, at the historic Sheridan Opera House, which has functioned as an artistic repository from everything to opera back in the day to Telluride NightGrass and Jazz After Dark. The cabin, and its twin, directly next door, are the only buildings on main street with no “setback” from the sidewalk. This means people often stop to peer in the window (the Millers don’t mind). A couple years ago, Karen Miller stepped outside to offer assistance to several bedraggled Bluegrass Festival musicians struggling to keep their instruments from getting soaked in a summer thunderstorm. She invited the players in — they were on the way to an evening gig

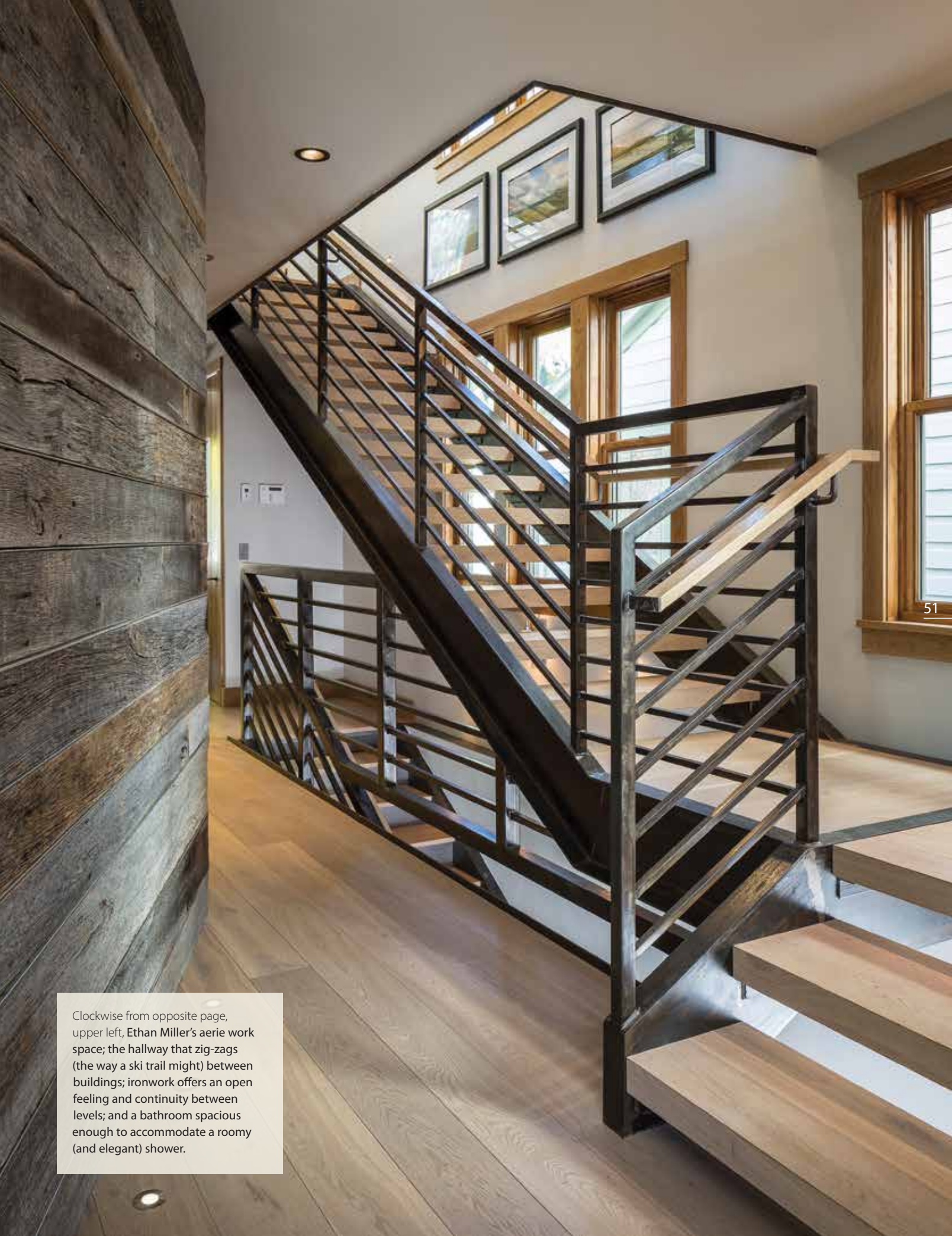


just up the street. The musicians were so grateful, they returned later that night to perform an impromptu concert in the TV room just off Colorado Ave. for the Millers and their friends.

Trujillo recalled a conversation years ago with Ethan Miller, when they were first discussing the appeal — and the hurdles they would have to take on — to build here. “Why would I ever want to do a construction project up and *behind* the little house? Miller wondered.

“Because,” the architect replied, “one day you’ll be sitting up on your deck with your friends, looking over at the ski hill. And it will all be happily ever after.” **S**





Clockwise from opposite page, upper left, Ethan Miller's aerie work space; the hallway that zig-zags (the way a ski trail might) between buildings; ironwork offers an open feeling and continuity between levels; and a bathroom spacious enough to accommodate a roomy (and elegant) shower.