

# Team Spirit

**C**limbering into the haylofts of old barns isn't what you might typically think of doing when it comes to creating a new home. Yet this was the first step in the design process of John and Alex Tucker's Ouray County abode. After purchasing their property northeast of Ridgway, the Tuckers and their architectural designer, Tarek Ashkar, set out exploring these iconic structures that spread across the Uncompahgre Valley, known more for its historic ranches than modernist architecture.

A New York-and-Paris-based designer with a master's degree in architecture from the Harvard Graduate School of Design, Ashkar was part of the large collaborative team the Tuckers drew on to create the fine details of the their residence. He was also their good friend.

After living in Santa Fe for several years, the Tuckers were ready to spread out, but they'd been having some trouble finding a larger property, with plenty of space for their horses. They'd always liked the Ridgway area for its natural beauty and wildlife. And they loved the valley below the Cimarron peaks, particularly the south-facing side, with its views of the San Juans and abundant sunshine.

There was just one catch: People told the Tuckers they would never find the kind of property they wanted here, because ranch land was rarely on the market. The Tuckers nearly moved to Taos, but they received a serendipitous phone call from their realtor: The property of their dreams was up for sale. They arrived in Ridgway the next day and quickly made an offer. "We moved here to live closer to the earth. This agricultural area provides that," Alex said. "We think it's the most beautiful valley in the world."

The Tuckers knew from the start that they wanted Ashkar, whose architectural style ranges from Tudor to Modern to vernacular, as the first member of their homebuilding team. Not only was he

their comrade, but his design process always honors the historical context and environment surrounding each structure he creates.

"We wanted architecture that was 'indigenous' to the land," Alex explained. Thus began the research process. "We drove around a lot looking at different kinds of buildings in the area," Ashkar recalled. "The buildings we saw the most were the hay barns. They were so graceful, and so much a part of the landscape. They really became the model for the way the house would look." Added John, "They are really beautiful structures."

Modeling the Tuckers' home on the shape of local barns lent the structure grace, flow and context. But its height presented difficulties. "I originally wanted a freestanding stucco building to sit underneath wood trusses and a steel roof, but the issue of birds and rodents was a serious one, particularly because of the stable and horses. So we pulled the buildings up to the bottom of the trusses," Ashkar said. "That made for a series of very high rooms with clerestory windows."

Over a period of five years (they took a year-long break at one point), the home and stable were constructed, courtyard-style, on a gentle slope. The north side, a stable with four large stalls and a second floor, was constructed first. After that, the studio/office wing was built, and finally the home, with its main and lower levels, was completed. The western side of the compound was left completely open facing the Cimmarons.

While the simple block structure of the exterior is typical of American modernists, the interior courtyard and stable massing were inspired by the style of the internationally award-winning contemporary Mexican architect and engineer, Luis Barragán. Acclaimed for his work in the mid-1900s, Barragán was influenced by European modernism; he used raw materials, such as stone and wood, and combined them with an original and dramatic use of natural and artificial light. His design philosophy: "Any work





A bevy of fine craftsmen —  
and good friends —  
joined to create a  
modernist Ridgway home



On the opening spread (previous pages) as seen from above the stone walkway: high ceilings and metal roofing recall local hay barns, "indigenous" inspiration for the Tuckers' home. In the photo below, the kitchen, with expansive views of the Cimarrons; at right, from the home's west side, the Sneffels Range.





of architecture which does not express serenity is a mistake.”

In fact, in its openness and natural color scheme, the house is a bit like a Japanese monastery. But it is hardly silent: the outdoor air is filled with the chirps, songs and cawing of birds, the bellow of the Tuckers’ calf, Petunia, and the whinnying of their horses. The Tuckers entertain often, and the inside of their home resounds with laughter and the conversation of friends and family. Yet the tranquil, expansive views of the surrounding scenery are so much a part of its ambiance that the space resonates with a feeling of peace. “The goal was to bring the outside in, and we’ve really done that,” Alex said.

It was a complex feat, accomplished through large windows that stretch from floor to ceiling and comprise entire walls in many rooms; wall-sized sliding doors and “pocket doors” disappear into other walls. Ashkar calls these large, wood-framed glass doors that slide into thick walls the most unusual elements in the house: “They were a lot of work for Allison Construction and Bob Lake, but they made it work.”

John and Alex agreed. “Architectural simplicity can be difficult to achieve and completely unforgiving,” John observed. “We could never have built this without Bob Lake, period. He is extremely talented, pays excruciating attention to detail, and is gifted at coordinating craftspeople.”

Lake is a lead supervisor for Allison Construction. Founded by Bob Allison in Ridgway in 1980, the company started out building mountain cabins and a few single-family homes in Ouray County, and has since moved on to some of the most challenging and high profile building projects in southwestern Colorado: It constructed actor Dennis Weaver’s iconic “Earthship,” coordinated 106 employees on the construction of 48,000-square-foot Sleeping Indian Ranch, and worked for 30 years on the restoration of old homes and buildings on the Double R Ranch.

Even so, “I’ve been building houses since the 1970s, and the Tucker project had some of the hardest challenges I’ve come across,” Lake said. “The lines all had to be exact.”

Local architects Doug McFarlane and John Baskfield were also critical in implementing the mechanics of Ashkar’s

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design. Given that large windows and doors comprised a good percentage of the walls, not a lot of structural space was left for frames and supports. Guided by the architects, Allison Construction accomplished this with fantastic success, according to John and Alex.

Richard Couturier of Telluride-based Windows 4 Colorado found great three-pane window solutions that were energy efficient without sacrificing aesthetics, John added.

The windows are highly energy-efficient. Solar panels and a trio of independent geothermal operating systems provide heat to offset warmth lost at the home’s 7,200-foot elevation, as well as to handle other energy needs. The geothermal systems, installed by Delta Montrose Electric Association, are comprised of loops of approximately 2.5 miles of piping. The loops fill three trenches where water with a small amount of antifreeze is circulated for heating or cooling to the 32-to-55-degree ground temperature. The pipes lead to a compressor, which is connected to a ventilation system that heats and cools the house as needed.

A total of 95 solar panels, for up to 22,835 watts’ worth of power, were installed by Ridgway-based Alternative Power Enterprises. The panels “produce the equivalent of 80 percent of the energy it takes to power the home on an annual basis,” said Wiley Freeman, energy services executive at San Miguel Power Association. Due to fluctuations in the weather, the Tuckers’ home uses fossil-fuel energy occasionally throughout the year; at other times, it feeds solar energy back to the grid.

Freeman and Willy Krois of Potential Power Systems in Ridgway worked together to develop a unique sequencing system for strategically controlling the geothermal and solar energy use for maximum energy efficiency and financial benefit.

“The geothermal load control system is pretty awesome. More people should do



Upper photo, the Cimarron Range; on the far left is the Tuckers' home. Alex's sun-splashed studio and piano room, far right, and directly above, Pancho, an Aussie, one of the Tuckers' two canines; the other is Pepper, an adopted stray rescued by a Ridgway friend guiding in the Peruvian Andes.

that," said Krois (the Tuckers called him an "electrical miracle worker"). "Bigger houses have ginormous energy loads but they don't use this technology," Krois observed. "Most of those homeowners are not very energy conscious and they don't care that they are using that much electricity, whereas John Tucker does."

While Krois appreciated how John and Alex chose energy efficiency over cost cutting in their home design and construction, the Tuckers were impressed with how he went above and beyond by adding extra wiring hidden in walls and employing 20-amp outlets rather than the standard 15. Krois worked with Telluride designer Chris Meyers of enLIGHTen to outfit each room with unique, well-integrated lighting. The results of their collaboration can be seen in the LEDs in the steam shower; in reading lights above the bed; in hidden light hangers in the living room; and in the path of nightlights leading from the master bedroom to the kitchen.

Krois said the computerized lighting system is one of his favorite electrical features in the residence: The system employs four buttons on every light switch on the main level and allows the Tuckers to control the lights manually, or by using their cell phones and computers, in multiple areas of the house.

The lighting, whether luminous indoors or beaming in from the outside, was key to enhancing the natural beauty of the wooden and plaster walls. The living room is paneled in rich brown mahogany; the paneling required a good portion of the nearly 100 sheets of veneer plywood installed throughout the home. The home's lower level, which runs the length of the main house, is paneled in maple.

"The living room was one of the most beautiful rooms I have ever done. When you turn the lights on and light a fire in the fireplace, the whole room glows. I'm really, really proud of that room," said

Paul Baglione of Baglione Custom Woodworks in Santa Fe. "I'm from the Boston area, and I don't get to do the level of interior architectural millwork that I did back East. In 20 years of being in the Southwest, I have never done another room like that."

The Tuckers pointed out the intricate hinging required for the living room and office doors, which could only be achieved with great precision, and repeatedly expressed thanks for all the gifted craftspeople who worked on the project. "Symmetry is important, but it exists to establish the rhythm critical to the house," said John.

Interior and exterior stonework required equally precise lines: the stones extend from the entrance to 100 feet beyond the breezeway. Don Batchelder of Ridgway Masonry & Concrete and his son, Jordan, were contracted to install flagstone brought up from an Arizona quarry. They also built the fireplace. Ridgway metalworker Lisa Issenberg created a beautiful fireplace surround and outdoor railing.

To plaster the walls that are neither glass nor wood, the Tuckers turned to Bill Roth of Modern Design Construction in Santa Fe. They had worked with Roth before, and appreciated his expertise with colors and edging. They relied on him to find an updated version of plaster not prone to cracking, with the organic feel and depth of three-coat plaster.

"What we ran into was, they had very precise spacing [requirements] with the cabinets and between the door banks," Roth explained. "Due to the minimalist design, everything had to be centered just right. We spent a fair amount of time furring out spaces so there were equidistant openings for each door, and making sure the drywall reveal around the doors was dead-on so the cabinetry lined up perfectly. There was no trim, so it would have been very obvious if cabinets



Clockwise from right: A view from the patio outside of John's studio; the Tuckers; and their mahogany-paneled living room, with fireplace by Lisa Issenberg and lighting by Chris Meyers and Willie Krois.





and doors were not centered. We worked very closely with the wood craftspeople.”

Like each of the contractors involved in bringing the Tucker home to life (all of whom brought several members of their staffs to work on the project), Roth called the process a truly fun collaboration. “Who doesn’t want to spend time in that area of Colorado? It was a combination of good architecture, and the time to do high quality work with good clients. In the construction industry, that’s what we we’re looking for,” he said.

As for the Tuckers, they remain amazed at what a wonderful consortium of artisans and perfectionists came together, sharing positive ideas and happy efforts. “We were friends with many of them before we started, and we’re friends with all of them now,” said John.

That, after all, was truly the inspiration for the home’s design: kinship. “John and Alex and their menagerie of family, friends and animals are pretty inspiring. I knew that this would be a place that would be witness to a lot of living,” Ashkar recalled.

In fact, John and Alex enjoy visits from up to a dozen of their in-laws and members of their extended families during holidays, and consider themselves “gr-aunt” and “gr-uncle” to five youngsters. The couple also freely and frequently welcomes friends’ children from the cities. Many are approaching adulthood, and come to observe where local food comes from and other discoveries that can only be found in such a bucolic setting.

“We call it ‘the march of the 20 year olds.’ Some are not quite sure what they are going to do till they get here. Their parents say, ‘Why don’t you go help the Tuckers?’ And they stay for a summer, a year, two years, two weeks, two days or two months,” said Alex. “It really creates a sort of dynamic that is just nourishing to us and kind of an unexpected benefit of living here.”

Alex’s career included building sailboats and interior design work; John is a retired real-estate investor. Today, she and John act, in effect, as part-time dorm resident advisors and as full-time farmers and ranchers (though they say they have come to realize that their animals raise them, rather than the other way around).

John likens their 70-acre property to

“We feel so lucky. The greatest sin in the world would be not to appreciate it.”

Bouquillas, a little village he and Alex once visited during a rafting trip down the Rio Grande River in Chihuahua, Mexico, in which “people, donkeys and chickens were running around everywhere.” Chickens are part of their brood in Ouray County as well, in addition to five horses, “Donkey-Hotey” and several cattle.

With 30 irrigated acres and 23 garden beds, plus a greenhouse, the Tuckers love to garden and share the bounty of their harvest with friends. This spring and summer has brought special excitement: Lisa Bright, their tenant and new friend in the cabin at the back of their property, is an accomplished organic farmer and teacher who is taking the lead in nurturing the gardens.

Returning inside the house, an assemblage of eclectic artwork from different cultures, ranging in styles and materials, is spread tastefully along the edges and in the high spaces at the top of each room. Some works of art have been found, like the Cosanti windbells by architect, urban designer, artist and philosopher Paolo Soleri. Others were handed down from their families, such as the Pueblo pottery from her mother and a large Chinese wood carving from his parents. The rest come from their ever-increasing circle of talented friends who turn up on their doorstep on occasion.

“The people we share our home with make living here quite an experience,” said Alex. “We listen to music, talk, cook, entertain... a lot of people have made this their retreat.”

John added, “I like the temperatures of each room. Each one is distinctly inviting at different times of day or in different seasons. Each encourages different behavior — conversation, reading, reflection, music, playing piano.”

Most of all, thinking about their home evokes gratitude, “a lot of gratitude,” the Tuckers agreed. Said John, “We feel so lucky. The greatest sin in the world would be not to appreciate it.”