

A Change Will Do You Good

Designer Keira Ritter tells *CH&L* how she transformed her 1968 home in the Boulder foothills into a mountain loft.

By SARAH ANN NOEL

PHOTOGRAPHY BY BEN TREMPER

The fireplace, the living room's focal point, is a masterpiece of texture and pattern. The rusted steel mantle stands out against the brick, which Ritter painted black and then covered with a sheet of stainless-steel woven wire mesh. A slab of Colorado red sandstone, quarried in nearby Lyons, defines the hearth.

CH&L: You call your home “a loft in the mountains.” Tell us why.

Ritter: After working on multiple loft-style projects, I wanted to combine an open floor plan with more of a mountain aesthetic, so the “loft in the mountains” idea was born. I always strive to create a unique fusion of industrial and organic, and our home became the perfect canvas for this approach.

So you began with an interesting design concept. What did you hope to achieve?

The home was originally built in 1968 and was very compartmentalized. We removed walls, added windows and used exposed steel detailing inside and out to emphasize the industrial qualities we both love. The home in its original state didn't take advantage of the surrounding landscape, a problem I fixed by using materials that complement the color palette outside. We also added a sculptural porch canopy, which peels away in layers as it stretches away from the house and into the soft grasses.



Clad in corrugated metal, the house gains richness and color with each winter, as the moisture in the air deepens the home's patina. Clear aluminum storefront doors and a commercial garage door contrast dramatically with the metal. The center of the home is defined by powder-coated sheet steel lap siding, and a sculptural porch canopy stands on raw steel beams.



We wanted a sense of cohesiveness throughout the house, so we repeated certain details—like the custom iron-and-stainless-steel guardrail you see on the second-floor lofts, which tie in with the steel columns in the sunroom and exposed steel framing in the living room. And the birch slab doors with rusted steel kickplates tie the materials outside with materials we used indoors. Plus, they add a sense of warmth.

Those of us who have been through a remodel know that design goals evolve over the course of the project. Is that true even for a designer's own home?

Definitely! The design went through several iterations, thanks to budget constraints that made us re-work our ideas. The big question we kept asking was: how can we use ordinary materials in extraordinary ways? For example, most designers don't use raw steel as a finish material in residential interiors, but I love steel, so decided to use it as an accent or design feature wherever possible.

We also had our fair share of surprises, just like anyone going through a remodel. During demo, we discovered that the south sunroom wall wasn't supported adequately, so we would need to reinforce it. The typical solution would be to bury columns in the wall, but we wanted to do something

a little different, so I designed 25-foot steel columns that solved our structural problem and created a prominent design element.

That's a bold solution.

Well, my house functions as my laboratory. It's where I test my ideas. I want to be sure that these unconventional methods work before I encourage my clients to take risks in their own spaces, and thus far it's been very successful.

We're always interested in how a location influences design, and if you're going to be bold, Boulder seems like a community ready to embrace it.

There's a lot of creative thought in Boulder and a growing appreciation for good design. Our home is a bit edgier than most, but it's been well received. It's rewarding to share our project with our community. Complete strangers have stopped by, asked questions about the house, taken pictures—it's a pleasure.

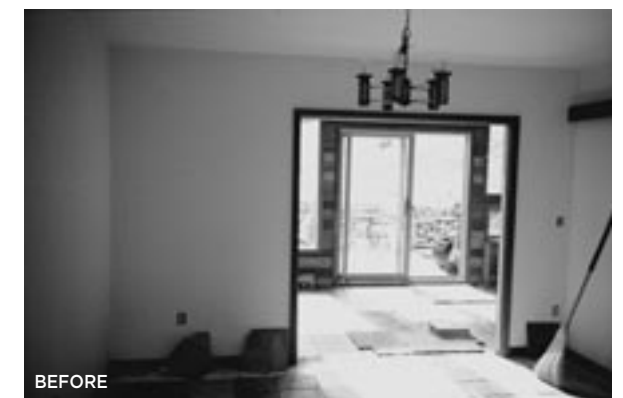
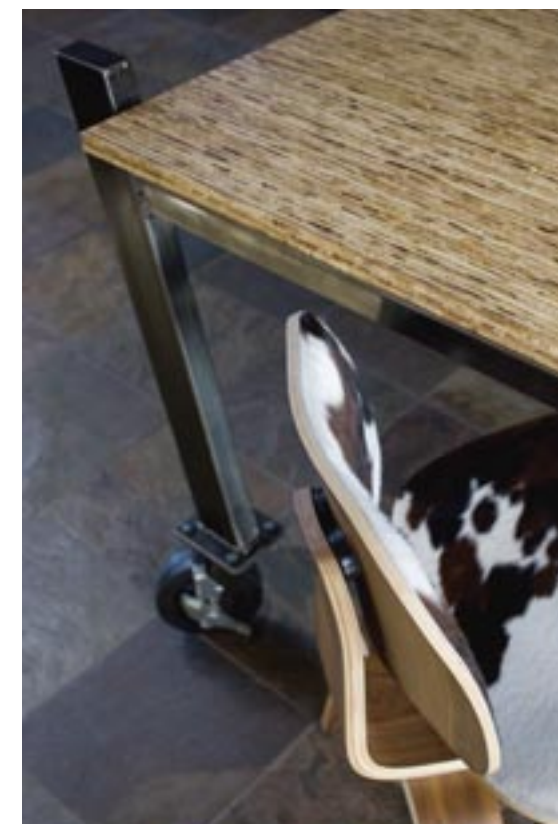
We certainly have our favorite features of your home, like the beautiful rust patina on the fireplace mantle. What do you like best?

There is this amazing combination of hard materials and beautiful



(above) Adjacent to the sunroom, the dining room is a simple space defined by a few exquisite pieces. The custom-built dining table sits beneath a pendant light from Avalanche Ranch; barbed wire wraps a delicate, handmade paper shade. Ritter bought the wall sculpture, by Santa Fe artist Pascal, after moving into the house. "The color, lines and materials are a perfect complement to our palette," she says.

(right) This custom-built steel table, topped with Kirei Board (made from recycled sorghum stalks), rolls outside in the summer. Eames chairs covered in cowhide marry mid-century modern design with western accents—a concept Ritter used in many parts of the home.





Sliding doors once separated the sunroom from the main house, but today, the room is a natural extension of the home. Ritter made the most of the room's double-height space, allowing sunshine to pour through the windows. Notice the steel columns, which reinforce the two-story wall while serving as a strong design element.



"The library loft is for reading, daydreaming and enjoying the view," Ritter says. The bookshelves and pendant light are the only original elements. Ritter designed the iron-and-stainless steel railing to define the opening to the living room below.

AT A GLANCE

Architectural style: Mountain Modern

Total square feet: 2,100

Length of project: "We worked on our home for two years: one year for the design process and one year for the construction."

Biggest Challenge: "It was difficult to achieve the unique quality of space we were looking for within tight budget parameters. This forced us to think very creatively about space and materials."

Solution to the challenge: "Joe [my fiancé] and I had an ongoing, endless supply of ideas, and we did a tremendous amount of research and exploration—testing materials and concepts until we arrived at the best ways of creating the quality of space and detail we wanted."



(right) Slabs of Colorado red flagstone sit on exposed raw steel beams to form the two-tiered vanity—and echo the natural beauty of the rock ledge just outside the door. Stainless steel sinks and Hansgrohe/Philippe Starck chrome faucets provide an industrial contrast to the raw stone material.

(below) The master bedroom in this home is small, more typical of the 1960s than of today's master suites. Ritter redesigned the space to take in the surrounding landscape. She rebuilt the wall separating the bathroom and bedroom as a partial wall, and suspended a double-sided mirror that functions as a partition between the vanity and the bedroom; it also reflects the view from the opposite window.



The kitchen feels light and airy, with maple slab cabinets on stainless steel feet. The concrete countertops in a gray-sage green pair beautifully with the stone floor and stainless steel appliances. The open shelving system adds to the airy feel.

mountain light that creates a sense of warmth you wouldn't expect from a house full of steel, stone and aluminum. We found the right blend of color, material, texture and light—and we've ended up with an extremely serene space.

There's one piece of this remodel story that's not so much about the materials or structures. This home was originally your fiance's, and your relationship grew over the course of the remodel. Does the finished result reflect your relationship at all?

Believe it or not, Joe and I agreed about the design direction from the very beginning. We're both creative and innovative people, and the house is proof! Our individual tastes have contributed to the overall vision: Joe loves Bang & Olufsen and Philippe Starck—and motorsports. I collect Eames furniture, books, plants and anything orange. We thrived on the process of bouncing ideas off one another, and our home really is an expression of our personalities. □



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