

at home

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CONTEMPORARY BY DESIGN

Family has room to grow on a farm near the Shields River



In Sync With the Sun
Couple's home offers a sustainable retirement



Contemporary by Design

Small family has room to grow
on a farm near the Shields River

BY AMY STIX | PHOTOGRAPHY BY ERIK PETERSEN

“NEOCLASSICAL FARMHOUSE.” That’s how architect Brian Caldwell describes one of his latest projects, situated on 75 acres of agricultural land in the Shields Valley. Caldwell, who along with architect Erik Nelson co-owns the Bozeman firm Think-tank Design Group, was asked to design a home that took advantage of the rural parcel’s proximity to the Shields River and dramatic vistas, without diminishing either.

The result of Caldwell’s efforts is a 2,200 square foot, energy-efficient home that sits near a pond amidst cottonwood trees, with views of the Absaroka Mountains from the home’s expansive front porch. Caldwell noted that the project was awarded to Archer Construction through a competitive bid process and that, “Archer Construction brought the project in on time and on budget as a LEED certified home, without adding any additional costs to the project.”

“Best practices were utilized to exceed Energy Star compliance,” said Caldwell, adding that the recently completed home — as with all Think-tank Design Group projects — exceed Energy Star standards for thermal performance. “It’s our normal,” he said.

In addition to its super efficiency, the contemporary farmhouse, said Caldwell, is “very reflective” of the homeowners’ “pattern of living,” in that their new home is part of “a functional landscape.”

The husband and wife — along with their two young children — share their place with a large friendly dog, a cat, and raise numerous chickens, goats and much of their own produce in a greenhouse and large garden, located just off the home’s kitchen.

“Neoclassical Farmhouse” is how architect Brian Caldwell described one of his latest projects, situated on 75 acres of agricultural land in the Shields Valley.

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“It was refreshing to site the building almost as far as you can get away from the Shields (River),” said Caldwell, noting that his clients desired to build their home with respect for the nearby riparian habitat, as well as for their neighbors. There was never a thought of building near the riverbank or high on a bluff. Instead, the new home sits largely out of sight from the few other dwellings around it. The garage was also situated to visually buffer the rest of the house from a nearby road, and the home’s understated exterior colors, Caldwell said, lends itself to blending in with the natural surroundings. He added that the black and white palette chosen has a connection to the past, as many old farmhouses had windowsills painted black, so that snow would melt off more readily.

And though the house sits in a mature grove of cottonwoods, during the construction process, Caldwell said, “We didn’t have to move any trees.”

Inside, the home is similarly reflective of the homeowners’ pattern of living, said Caldwell. The largest space is the living room/dining area, which flows unobstructed, lending itself to easy family gathering. High ceilings and lots of windows add to the spacious feel; the abundant natural light also provides significant passive solar heat, which is augmented by a soapstone stove in the living room. The kitchen and its breakfast bar, which sit just off the dining area, also flow with the rest of the first floor, but Caldwell designed a tall partition — made from light-stained fir and steel detailing — that “affords a sense of separation without being



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visually separated.” The partition also neatly houses the refrigerator.

Honey-colored fir cabinets and trim line the kitchen, while the space’s black-honed granite counters are “bomb proof” said the wife, which is important for a growing, active family. “We’re really hard on a house,” she smiled, adding, “We didn’t want too much maintenance.”

Coal-colored poured concrete floors in the kitchen and throughout the first floor are also durable, but visually appealing. Off the kitchen, which is accented by a tangerine wall, is an east-facing breakfast nook that looks out on the garden and greenhouse.

A dark-stained, sturdy oak staircase is rimmed by a clean-lined metal hand railing, which adds another contemporary touch to the home’s historic context. The steps lead to the second floor, which is also laid in dark oak. Just off the landing is the master bedroom, with a bank of windows from which the homeowners can gaze out on the Crazy Mountains in one direction and the Absarokas in another. Though the windows invite lots of warm sunshine in winter, just outside and above them is a steel sunshade, with “fins” that help block the most intense

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The kitchen and its breakfast bar, which sit just off the dining area, flows with the rest of the first floor with plenty of natural light and an open feel.



summer sun. A splash of lemon yellow saturates one wall of the light-filled room, which has its own bath with recycled "PaperStone" countertops, a deep soaking tub and separate shower lined in river stones. Earth toned, porcelain flooring and bluish-brown mosaic sea glass tiles adorn the bath. Though the master suite affords plenty of room for two, it's a cozy space.

Across the open hall is the children's bathroom, also with PaperStone countertops and decorated, like the parents' bath, in muted, bluish-brown tones and sea glass tile. Nearby and adjacent to each other are the children's two bedrooms. The small nooks open to a larger, common play area.

"The idea was that you kind of sleep in your little cubby and then the living room is where you spend your time," said the wife of the decision to de-emphasize the home's private quarters and square footage, in exchange for creating shared spaces that promote being together as a family.

Just off the children's play area is a door that opens to an outdoor bridge spanning from the main house to a loft above the garage. The large open room is where the family sometimes gathers to watch movies. A pool table, passed down through the husband's family, also sits in this space. When it's

not being used as a family den or occasional office, the loft provides privacy for overnight guests.

Standing on the outdoor bridge, one not only notices the fantastic views across the Shields Valley. Native flowers and other drought tolerant plants flourish around the home's perimeter, thanks to landscape designer, Linda Iverson. A bit farther from the house, and just off the large back terrace, is an up and coming orchard, planted by Jeremy Stark of Valley of the Flowers Landscaping. Apple and plum trees, raspberries and strawberries fill the space.

According to the husband, building his family's home was a pretty seamless process. He advised others thinking about taking on a similar endeavor to "Get on the same page with your spouse on style and the big objectives."

He added, "Find somebody (an architect) you get along with, that you have a report with. Work early on the macro goals you want for the place and then let them run with it. You don't want to squelch the creativity of the architect."

"Just being very clear about how you live and what's important to you," is the most critical piece of information to convey to a design team, advised his wife.

Brian Caldwell appreciated that philosophy. "I think they did a really good job conveying their sense of style. I definitely felt the level of trust and expectation that made my job enjoyable."

"When you make a series of good decisions there aren't any challenges," he added.

In fact, said Caldwell, for Thinktank, the construction of this modern farmhouse embodied "the way we always want to run our projects." ☺

Amy Stix writes from Bozeman.



A Polish chicken struts in front of the home. The family shares their place with a large friendly dog, a cat, numerous chickens and goats.

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