

**DESIGN REBELS** RISK-TAKERS AND INNOVATORS WHO PUSH DESIGN FORWARD

# Gray

PACIFIC NORTHWEST DESIGN

№ 29: AUG. SEPT. 2016

**“THINKING  
FOR YOURSELF  
IS THE MOST  
IMPORTANT  
THING.”**

STEVEN HOLL

**BREAKING THE RULES:** WHO ARE  
THE CREATIVES LEADING DESIGN  
CHANGE IN OUR PNW CITIES—  
AND AROUND THE WORLD?

**FOR THE PEOPLE:** ONE PORTLAND  
DEVELOPER FIGHTS CORPORATE GREED





# PLAYING THE TRIANGLE

Part striking architectural statement, part social gathering place, a vacation house in the Colorado Rockies is Skylab Architecture's latest foray into bold residential spaces—and it's perhaps the firm's most distinctive project yet.

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Portrait by **WILLIAM ANTHONY**





In Snowmass, Colorado, a modern home designed by Portland firm Skylab Architecture perches on a rocky promontory. The rusty tones of its Cor-ten steel mimic the hues of fall foliage, the iron oxide in the surrounding mountains, and the corrugated steel roofs of old Rockies mining shacks. Loewen windows frame sky-high views of Snowmass Valley. The kitchen island opens to the outdoors through a bifold window. **OPPOSITE:** Architect Jeff Kovel, founder of Skylab Architecture. »

DESIGN TEAM

*architecture:* Skylab Architecture

*interiors:* Studio Lambiotte

*construction:* Ridge Runner Construction

*structural engineering:* Mountain Design Group

*landscape architecture:* Artifex 10



"I'm in a triangle phase right now," says architect Jeff Kovel, a fact evident throughout the house, from its overall form to its interior details. The triangular coffered ceiling is made of Alaskan yellow cedar inset with LED lights. Triangles also inform the custom-made leather sectional couch from In-House PDX, offset by circular Tyne cocktail tables from Room & Board. The Friday Lounge armchairs are by Formstelle, sourced through Avenue Road.







**P**ortland-based firm Skylab Architecture prides itself on pushing the design envelope. From downtown Portland's mod, spaceship-sleek rooftop restaurant Departure to a cantilevered tree house tucked into a forest (and featured in the *Twilight* films), Skylab projects are meant to be noticed. That's what drew an East Coast couple to the firm. They'd just purchased a lot on a bluff in Snowmass,

Colorado, their longtime getaway spot, and they wanted to build a vacation house—or, rather, “an architectural experience that hadn't been considered before and that captured the surroundings,” as the husband puts it. Most houses in the area are traditional, rather bland 1970s-vintage structures, and a home upstaged by the stunning landscape wasn't what the clients had in mind. “We knew that Skylab created unique, one-of-a-kind spaces, so it seemed a perfect fit.”

The Snowmass project, about 15 minutes outside Aspen, was especially appealing to Skylab founder and design principal Jeff Kovel. “I'm an avid skier and mountain guy, so this was a dream opportunity to build a ski chalet in a beautiful natural place,” he says. “It achieves a level of integration among landscape, architecture, and interior design that sets a new high bar for our work.”

Shaped as a triangular wedge to maximize views and slot cleanly onto the site, the house deliberately echoes its stony, jagged setting. “We wanted to make a dynamic form, but we also wanted it to feel native and grounded,” says Kovel. “So we looked to the angular forms found in the surrounding landscape as inspiration.” The locally sourced sandstone cladding the ground-floor level makes the house look “as if it were carved from the earth,” says the homeowner. The second level is mostly glass, with a Cor-ten steel roof and siding. The rust tones of the weathered steel mimic the iron ore that colors the surrounding hills; the steep slope of the roofline “shoots out the way boulders do,” says the homeowner. A prefab steel frame increased efficiency and decreased costs since “we could fabricate it down-valley, where it was a little less expensive than trying to do it with Aspen labor prices,” says Kovel.

Inside the 4,500-square-foot house, Denver-based interior designer Anna Lambiotte used a palette of warm grays and neutrals, accented with shades of blues that “play off the Colorado skies you see from every room,” she says. The open-plan public areas—living, kitchen, and dining—on the top two levels allow guests to gather and interact easily. The lower two floors contain the bedrooms and bathrooms. All four floors spiral around a central staircase, with amphitheater seating built into its base and oriented toward a screen that lowers for movie watching.

Dramatic amenities—such as a custom hot tub that points down the valley and an angular deck opening off the kitchen, with a built-in ice trough to hold cold drinks—cry out for large parties. A mud room complete with lockers welcomes skiing guests. At night, guests retreat to the five bedrooms downstairs, led by the soft glow of LED lights hidden under steel baseboards along the stairs. There are two master suites (so “there's no hierarchy of owners versus guests,” says the homeowner) in addition to bunkbed rooms for kids.

Although it's close to the bustle of Aspen, the house feels light-years away. Elk migrate across the valley below, and the homeowners and visiting family and friends can hike, ski, and bike virtually outside the front door, then retreat to a space that's fun on the inside and irreverently modern on the outside. “It's bold architecture in a place that doesn't really have any,” says Kovel. “We created a space where you experience the site in an amplified way.” »



The amphitheater at the bottom of the spiral stairway provides a perfect place for parties to gather; about 30 kids piled in for a movie one recent New Year's Eve. Reclaimed white oak flooring is a contemporary contrast to the rustic vinegar-stained knotty cedar ceiling and walls. The local sandstone was laid by hand. **OPPOSITE:** "The geometry in the house is pretty intense," acknowledges Kovel. A custom chandelier by his sister, Andi Kovel of Portland-based Esque Studio, cascades down through the stairwell and softens its strong lines. A natural Kobe cowhide rug on a landing hints at the area's cowboy past. »













A dining table made of two slabs of walnut by Seattle-based Urban Hardwoods easily seats 12 in a fleet of Bauhaus armchairs from Restoration Hardware. A Lindsey Adelman branching chandelier made of white glass and brass floats overhead, lending the space a gentle glow. A compact pass-through window connects the dining room with a bar built behind the fireplace. **OPPOSITE:** Tractor Barstools from Design Within Reach line up along the 15-foot-long granite kitchen island. Two stainless-steel Faber Cylindra Isola hoods make a strong vertical statement against the long horizontals of the island and countertop. The appliances, all from Wolf, ably handle large parties and barbecues, and the pass-through window by Loewen opens completely to the adjacent deck. »





**ABOVE:** The guest bedroom is a quiet retreat with killer views. A Wyatt bed upholstered in gray leather from Room & Board faces the corner windows, and a Thatch rug from Design Within Reach lies underfoot. **LEFT:** Downstairs, the limestone steam room was designed to be “airy and spa-like,” says Kovel; its windows are covered with frosted film for privacy, and the lighting can change color depending on users’ whims. **OPPOSITE:** “The apex of the roof, the flooring, and the hot tub all orient themselves to the head of the valley, following the river,” says Kovel. The custom tub by Diamond Spas, cantilevered dramatically over the site, is easily accessed from both master suites. ✱



