

AHEAD OF THE CURVE

THE ASPEN-DENVER ARCHITECTURE FIRM OF ROWLAND + BROUGHTON IS MARKING 15 YEARS OF MINDFUL, CONTEXTUAL MODERN DESIGN.

WORDS: Jane Craig
IMAGES: Brent Moss



GREAT MINDS DON'T ALWAYS THINK ALIKE—AND THAT MAY WELL BE ONE OF THE SECRETS BEHIND THE SUCCESS OF THE ASPEN-DENVER ARCHITECTURAL FIRM ROWLAND + BROUGHTON, THIS YEAR CELEBRATING ITS 15TH YEAR OF INNOVATIVE MODERN DESIGN.

In fact, its founders, John Rowland and Sarah Broughton, believe that true collaboration—the vigorous exchange of diverse ideas between clients and architects—is the sine qua non of great design. One consistent goal: To get to the “why” of a project.

“We often say that we look for clients who mentor us as much as we mentor them,” says Rowland. “This means that at the end of a project, we have all learned from each other and grown collectively. Our clients come from all over the world. They are art collectors, design mavens, business owners. Our satisfaction comes from the collaborative journey with our clients where there is a common quest for design that is truly unique.”

Broughton, who describes Rowland and herself as “lifelong learners,” says: “We never walk into a project with a predetermined style. So part of our process is really dissecting the parameters and opportunities of a project—we call it Sherlock Holmes-ing. How do we learn constantly and get better? It comes down to collaboration with our clients and a humbleness as we go on this journey together.”

The firm’s husband-and-wife founding partners, who met in 1993 in their first design studio class at CU Boulder, were well matched from the start. Even then, Rowland says, “We pushed and influenced each other—and we shared this collaborative approach to design thinking, which was fun. So it was very natural to take the next step and start our own company together.”



MINING MODERN

Rowland + Broughton worked closely with the homeowner and the Aspen Historic Preservation Commission for the sensitive renovation of this delightful home (pictured on page 144, too), which seamlessly combines a 1982 miner's cabin with a two-story addition. Above left, a view of the sleek, modern kitchen from Valucine. Above right, a rear view. Below, the master bath features a Hastings Chelsea tub and mountain views.



Both had been interested in design since childhood. Broughton grew up in a classic 1920s Tudor in Portland, Oregon, and was, she says, “spatially aware” from a young age, drawing floor plans by the age of five. Rowland, who loved Legos as a child in Cincinnati, recalls his parents taking him to Homearama, “the latest and greatest modern houses that were being built,” and visiting construction sites to watch homes being built.

After graduation, the two worked on competing Olympic Village designs in Sydney, Australia (Broughton’s firm won), then worked for architectural firms in New York for several years before moving to Aspen in 2000. After several years at separate firms there, they decided to launch their own. “We felt that we needed to prove ourselves and create a body of work,” says Broughton, “so it was build, build, build. Our motto was slow, steady growth. We worked 16 hours a day out of our condo, and our kitchen table was our conference room. But we loved it. We still love what we do.”

David Mosteller of Skyport Development Company, for whom Rowland + Broughton has designed numerous restaurants, concurs. “They have the same passion today as the day they opened their doors,” he says. “They travel a lot and they get inspiration everywhere. Their palette is pretty much anything, and they’re very good at reading people and guiding them through the thought process in an efficient way.”

Today, the firm has 40 employees in its Aspen and Denver offices. “We say we’re one studio with two locations and a long hall,” says Broughton. Working on both residential and hospitality projects (hotels and restaurants), 80 percent of it in Colorado, the firm is proud to say that 60 percent of its clients are repeat customers.

“We have a pretty organic process,” says Broughton, “where often both John and I will be heavily involved at the beginning of a project, then one of us will be the principal all the way through. But at some firms, the principals design a project and it’s up to the team to execute it. We’re not like that. Our designs are very holistic, and everybody on the team, down to junior interns, can contribute. Our view is that the people at Rowland + Broughton bring 100 percent every day, and there are no bad ideas. We think this kind of collaboration tests conventional thinking.”

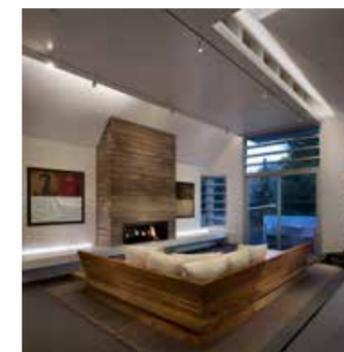
To that end, the firm has an MMM (Monday morning meeting) every week involving the architects and designers in both offices. The meetings, led by junior members of the Aspen-

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Rowland (left) and Broughton met in 1993 while both were architecture students at CU Boulder. After several years in New York City, they moved to Aspen in 2000, founding the firm several years later.



FORM HOUSE

Originally built in Aspen in the 1990s in a neo-Victorian style, this reconfigured 5,750-square-foot home maintains the original gabled forms but adds modern elements. Designed to capture the site’s 360-degree views, the house pairs modern detailing and warm materials, including reclaimed teak, on both the interior and exterior. Stacking windows and mullioned details were inspired by the artist Donald Judd, and consistent use of glass and other materials creates an inside-outside flow.

“THEY ARE VERY CREATIVE. THEY THINK ABOUT UTILIZING THE SPACE AS IT EXISTS IN THE ENVIRONMENT AND THEN TRYING TO BUILD SOMETHING TIMELESS.” —CLIENT BLAINE WESNER



photo: Adam Larkey

Denver team, hooked up via audio and video, have either a practical focus (going through the nuts-and-bolts progress of projects on the table) or an inspirational one (which may entail anything from watching a TED Talk or a “Sixty Minutes” episode to discussing discoveries on a recent trip abroad).

As Rowland + Broughton has evolved, so has modern architecture in Colorado. “When we arrived in Aspen, there were only a few architects seriously practicing modern architecture,” says Rowland. “There was a strong influence of the mountain lodge style, then a shift to a more refined mountain modern style. Now we are seeing a huge acceptance of modernism, which we believe is an outgrowth of online design sites as well as magazines such as Dwell, Metropolis and Wallpaper. But it pains us to see new buildings that completely disregard their surroundings—we call it the UFO phenomenon.”

For Rowland + Broughton, environment is always key to the process. “We want our designs to respond

MATSUHISA

In order to remain true to the Japanese culture, Rowland+Broughton collaborated with Nobu Matsuhisa and the ownership team for the design of Matsuhsa Denver in Cherry Creek. The muted natural palette of reclaimed Indonesian teak unifies the design of the floor, many walls, the ceilings and the bar. The textural façade of the bar emulates a flowing river, and the sloped acoustic ceiling is reminiscent of the Rocky Mountains.

to their context and celebrate the sense of place,” Rowland says. “We embrace a concept-driven approach to design that is influenced by local culture, environment, climate change, history, technology, all of which challenges our clients to view ‘place’ in a more enlightened way.”

Part of that sense of place involves the state we live in. “Even our modern work feels comfortable and very warm,” says Broughton, “which goes back to the Colorado environment. We like to use natural wood because it feels good. It’s grounding and speaks to our environment. We also have amazing blue skies and 300 days of sunshine a year, but it’s really important to use that sunlight properly and balance the light from all directions.”

And always, the status quo is anathema. “We often reflect on the quote from Wayne Gretzky, ‘Don’t skate to where the puck is now, skate to where it’s going to be,’” says >P.145

SOPRIS RANCH

Situated beneath a significant cottonwood tree in Carbondale, Colorado, Sopris Ranch is a modern translation of historic Colorado agricultural architecture. The organization style, called a “breezeway cabin,” connects kitchen, dining, living and sleeping areas under a single extended roof form, which also unifies indoor and outdoor spaces.

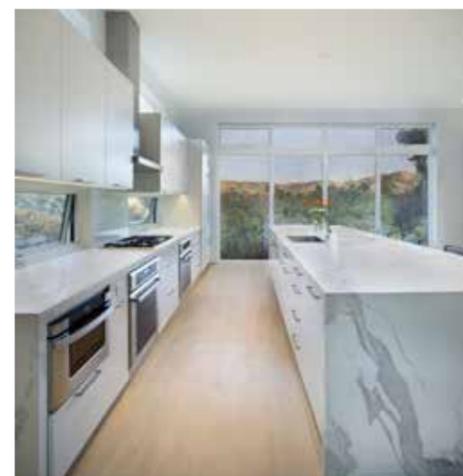


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VICTORIAN SQUARE

Victorian Square celebrates the dynamic spirit of downtown Aspen's rich history. A lapped brick façade at the base grounds the building to the site; a single mass inspired by the local surroundings cantilevers over the edge. Timeless architectural details respect the craftsmanship of the past, while sleek, fresh lines speak to modern technology and design.



Rowland, who says a restlessness permeates the firm's design process. “We prepare for the future with our processes. We also always talk in the studio about what value we are bringing to the table.”

“Nothing is cookie cutter with their designs,” Mosteller says. “I've seen many, many homes and buildings that they've done. You look at what they did at three hotels in Aspen—the Little Nell, the St. Regis and the Jerome—and they're all so different. And now they're going to do the W hotel in Aspen. They've come in with unique designs for all of them.”

Blaine Wesner, for whom Rowland & Broughton has done a residential remodel, a rebuild and recently a new build in Aspen, says: “They are very creative. They think about utilizing the space as it exists in its environment, and then trying to build something timeless. One problem I've had with other modern architects is that sometimes you get things that are interesting at the moment but won't likely stand the test of time. That's never a concern with Sarah and John. It's also nice to have architects who are really listening and trying to get to an outcome that is timeless in the architectural sense but also serves the immediate needs of the client.”

And it's axiomatic that their designs are inspired by influences far and wide. “They are well informed. Not all architects are as attuned to what's happening globally, but both Sarah and John are students of the game, and teachers of the game,” says Wesner. “They travel extensively and see projects and materials in all parts of the world, so they bring a truly globally informed perspective to Colorado.”

For Rowland and Broughton themselves, there's a deep satisfaction in the process. “I think we both honestly believe that through good design, we can make the world a better place,” says Broughton. “And that's what drives us; that's what we feel is our obligation.” ■

BLACK MAGIC

Nestled in the woods, yet offering magnificent views, this Aspen home's black metal, corrugated skin makes a bold statement. The upper level's open floor plan, which includes expansive glass walls, gives a feel of penthouse living in a mountain environment. The home's clean lines and interior palette align with the natural surroundings. Neolith Estuario countertops are paired with a white back-painted glass backsplash.