

BY ALISON GWINN

PHOTOGRAPHY BY RAUL GARCIA

MADE IN THE SHADE

A plain-Jane bungalow in Sloan's Lake gets a top-to-bottom makeover. The result: an eye-popping design with a gorgeous central atrium and a facade of distinctive modern screens.



Chad Mitchell of Meridian 105 Architecture designed wooden screens surrounding this remodeled two-story Sloan's Lake house. They create privacy on the decks, help control sunlight, create a beautiful interplay of light and shadow and contribute to a feeling of visual cohesion on the front exterior when it is viewed from the street (right).





Forgettable. That's the perfect word to describe this Sloan's Lake residence—*before* it underwent a total renovation.

Today, a few other adjectives come to mind: Innovative. Envelope-pushing. One-of-a-kind.

Truth is, when Chad Mitchell, founder and chief architect at Meridian 105 Architecture, was asked to take on the design for the remodel, he was practically starting from scratch. "The original house was a very standard, unassuming, one-story, two-bedroom, one-bath house, built in the '20s or '30s of concrete block and stucco," he says.

The property owner, Brooks Ferring of Denver's Gateway Development, encouraged Mitchell to go to town. "We knew we wanted to do a single-family home," Mitchell says, "and with the zoning codes as they are, we knew that the most efficient way to increase square footage was to add a second story."

Mitchell's design of the 2,637-square-foot house is notable for two main elements: slatted exterior screens that cocoon the home and create

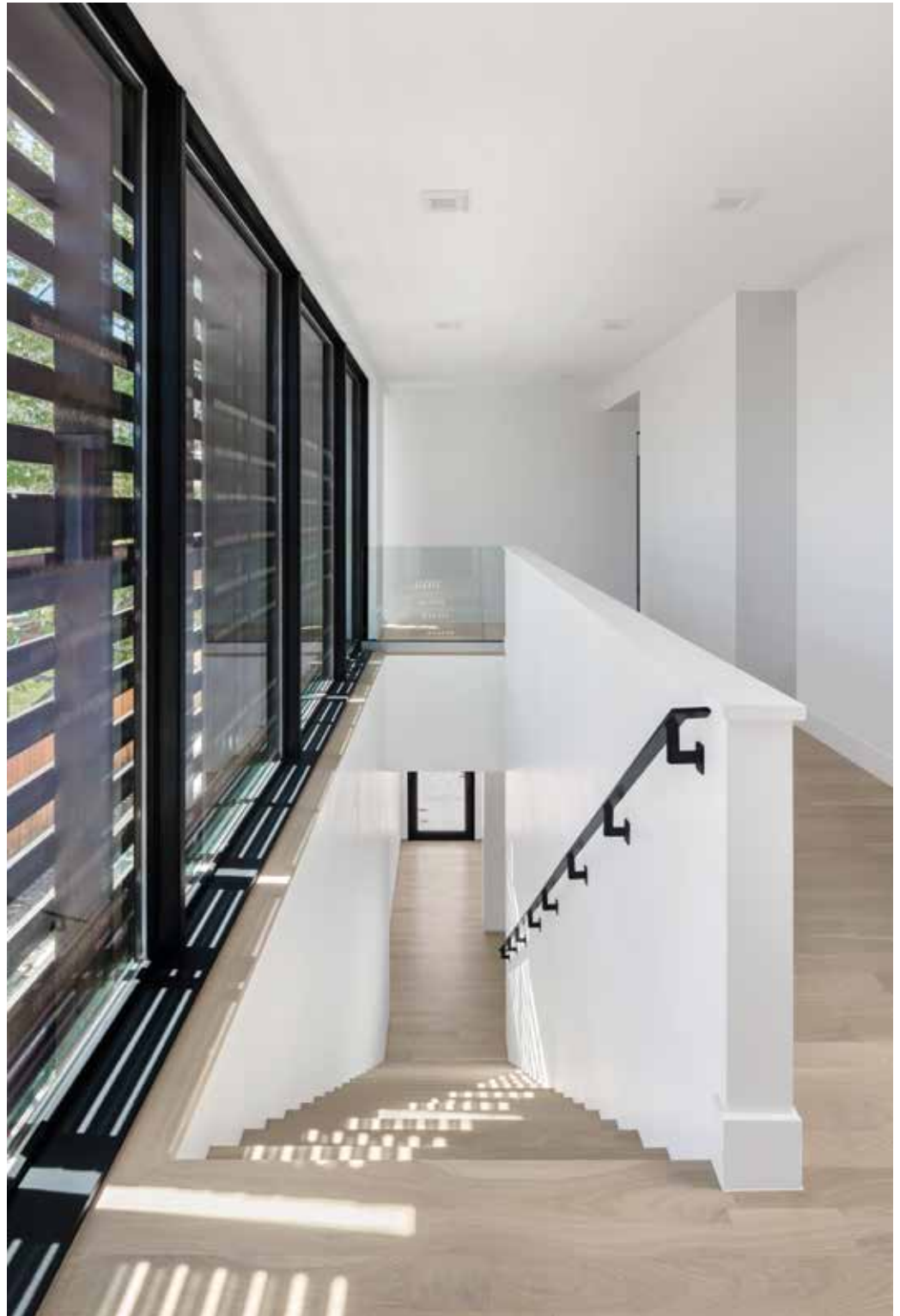


Mitchell placed the open kitchen at the center of the first floor and designed a central atrium that creates views up to the sky. An angled wall (visible at left) and openings in the roof create beautiful criss-crossing shafts of light that can be seen from numerous places in the home. The sleek cabinets are from Denver's Kabi (kabi.net) and the wood floors are from Denver's Images Flooring (imagesflooring.com).

hidden porches, and a sunny atrium that runs from the first-floor kitchen up to the roof.

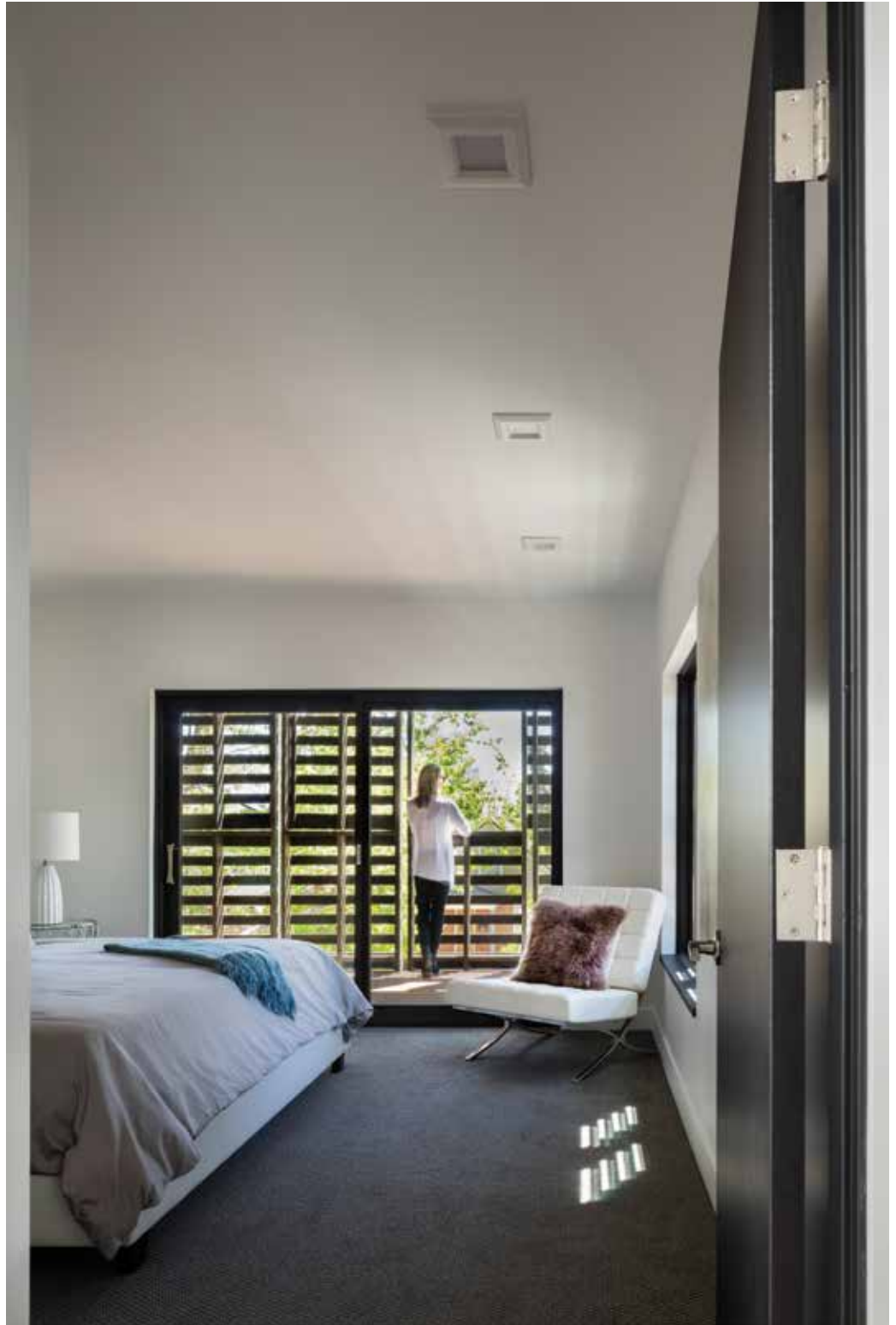
The screens, which have earned the home the nickname "The Pallet House," serve two purposes, the award-winning architect says: "They create privacy, especially on the front porch, and they provide shade. You also get a really nice quality of light on the interior side of the screens." The screens, most of which are stationary with a few that are movable on the front facade, are made of cedar with an unusual coating of a Swedish product called pine tar (no relation to the substance used illegally to get a better grip on baseball bats). "It smells like a campfire and has been around for hundreds of years," Mitchell says. "The Vikings used to use it on their boats to preserve the wood."

Those pallets automatically create a very private outdoor space on the home's front exterior. "I grew up in the South, where everyone hangs out on the porch, so we tried to make a great front porch where people would want to sit, but that's also functional, so no one is getting a blast of sunlight in their face," Mitchell says. "The screens on the front of this house move so you can customize them. If it's windy, you can close them. In the afternoon, you can open them. And it's an 8-foot-deep porch, with plenty of room for furniture. We think it's a very inviting statement for the front of the house, the way it faces the sidewalk. It's not a fortress. The house makes a contribution to the streetscape, which is important."





The house, which was completed last spring, received the prestigious American Institute of Architects Denver 2017 Award of Excellence. Though the home, at just over 2,600 square feet, is not unusually large, the dramatic central stairway (opposite) and the vertical volume created by the central atrium make it feel airy and spacious.



The master bedroom (above) and bath (opposite) get the best of both worlds: an unbeatable indoor-outdoor feel, as well as a sense of privacy and seclusion.

To break up the volume on the exterior, and make the entire two-story house look cohesive (as opposed to a “pop top,” where the second story can look definitively, and often awkwardly, separated from the bottom floor), Mitchell designed in horizontal and vertical bars across the front.

“We wanted to take the geometry of the house and bring it all the way to the ground,” he says. “We made those elements out of Vero Venetian plaster, a product made of limestone that has been used in Italy forever. It’s more sustainable and more durable than stucco because it doesn’t crack as easily. And once it’s applied, it leaves a surface that is as shiny and smooth as metal.”

Adds Brad Liber, owner of Caliber Construction, the builder on this project, “That was the first time we’d ever used that product, and a lot of architects around the city came to see it because it was so unusual.”

Meridian 105 also hardscaped the front of the property to add to the geometric effect. “Before, it was just a sloped surface that was not functional,” Mitchell says. “We created these little grassy platforms to elevate the front from the sidewalk and also create a solid base for the house to sit on.”

Inside, Mitchell organized everything around a central atrium, which extends at an angle from the rooftop down through the kitchen, adding vertical volume and creating striking shadows visible from the bottom floor up. “On the first floor, everything circulates around the kitchen, including the entry, the living room, the dining room and everything else,” he says. “It just assumes that people use this space in a more contemporary way,



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—Brad Liber, owner, Caliber Construction

where the kitchen is the hub of entertaining.”

For Liber, that atrium was a memorable challenge. “Normally, you yell at a framer all day long to build a straight and plum wall, and then all of a sudden he gets to build one on an angle,” he says. “It was great to be able to be challenged by that—and a lot of fun.”

Mitchell, who is also known for his designs of Avanti Food and Beverage (another remodel of an existing building); the Tejon 35 Mixed-Use Development, an apartment building at Tejon Street and 35th Av-





enue, which was a 2016 American Institute of Architects Award of Excellence winner; and the “Shift Top House,” another home remodel in LoHi notable for its floating roof, likes to add unusual materials and out-of-the-box elements to his creations.

“Chad draws amazing stuff, and Brooks was interested in implementing that to a T,” Liber says. “It’s not often that you get to build an architect’s vision in its entirety. It’s fun to create something a little artsy and not have to bring it back down to a standard design. This house really has ultra-unique features, and it’s masculine in a lot of ways, and that’s why it stands out.”

That’s also what helped the home, which was completed last spring, win an AIA Award of Excellence in 2017. “I’ve heard that the house has generated a lot of conversation,” Mitchell says. “Some people love it and some people hate it. But I don’t necessarily consider that a bad thing. I mean, if you appeal to everybody, you’re probably doing something that’s pretty watered down.” **DLM**



Architect Mitchell chose a Venetian plaster (opposite) for the non-pallet parts of the exterior; the material, made of limestone, has been around forever and leaves a surface that is ultra-smooth and shiny. For the home’s backyard (above) as well as the front yard, Mitchell designed rectilinear landscaping to reinforce the bold lines of the house. Bottom left, the home before its remodel.



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