



“SIMPLICITY IS THE ULTIMATE SOPHISTICATION.”

THE MAN WHO SAID THAT, LEONARDO DA VINCI, KNEW A THING OR TWO ABOUT VISUAL IMPACT.

So does Peter Blank, whose last 10 years at the helm of Mile Hi Modern have made him a powerhouse in Denver’s emerging modern real estate scene. So it stands to reason that when Blank—who had previously lived in such mid-century modern enclaves as Krisana Park and Lynwood—decided to design and build his own sleek and sophisticated house in Hilltop, it would be the apotheosis of all he has learned and seen over the last decade. “My cumulative life and career in real estate—the design elements that have always subconsciously resonated with me—were a huge inspiration for this home,” Blank says. “I wanted to do the Peter Blank Mile Hi Modern version of a house: a light home anchored in raw materials, open but intimate.”

That is evident as soon as you walk up the broad, low, asymmetrical “Barcelona-style” steps toward the home’s entryway. “I absolutely love the anticipation of walking into a courtyard setting,” Blank says. “There’s a feeling of mystery when you walk toward a house where there is no intuitive sense of where the front door is.” Because of Denver’s strict building codes, a solid wall in front of the courtyard was verboten, so Blank opted for a custom, laser-cut bronze screen that feels artful and transparent but still cocoons the calm courtyard, encircled by pine trees.

Pass through the front door and you find yourself standing in a grand foyer that is “the size of a small apartment,” Blank says. “A lot of people thought I was nuts to have so much ‘wasted space’ there, but I wanted to make an immediate visual statement, with the space defined by a solid limestone wall on one side and a limestone colonnade on the other. There’s nothing pretentious or ostentatious, just a very strong architectural presence. And by the way, once people saw the finished entryway, they no longer thought I’d wasted space—they thought it was amazing.”

Despite the unencumbered freedom that the wide-open concept provides, the home also pulls you in. “You don’t feel lost in this house because somehow it embraces you,” Blank says.

Blank had several goals for the approach to his home, including to save the granddaddy oak, one of the oldest trees in Hilltop. Adds architect Brian Ojala: “The approach is tertiary, where it’s public, then semi-private in the courtyard, and then private when you step into the house. The cube, on the left side of the house, has no windows on the front; the light comes in from the south because the next-door neighbor actually created a small park there, between the two homes. We intentionally have clerestory windows over the main living space that the roof appears to float on.”

minimal masterpiece

THE HILLTOP HOME OF MILE HI MODERN’S PETER BLANK IS THE CULMINATION OF A DECADE OF EVOLUTION IN DENVER’S GROWING MODERN DESIGN COMMUNITY

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Eschewing a television in the living room, Blank focused on the open-flame asymmetrical floating hearth and fireplace. "My inspiration was from classic mid-century and international design - it was relevant then, relevant now and will be relevant 100 years from now." He balanced the open-flame with with two pre-Columbian sculptures.

In the capacious entryway, a modern limestone take on a colonnade on one side (left) is balanced by a solid limestone wall on the other. "I found a reclaimed beam (right) that in its rusticity was offset from the limestone wall," says Blank. "It's LED lit up and down, so it appears to float. To me, it's just exquisite." Adds architect Ojala: "There is an international feel to the house, a visceral approach where the materials kind of go away and you just get this feeling from the space."



That flow can be attributed to a number of decisions that Blank, working with architect Brian Ojala of Entasis Group, made during the organic design process. "I wanted a house with no visual clutter—and that meant no doors," says Blank. "When you walk through this house, you walk into vestibules. You don't see doors to the bedrooms, you don't see doors to the basement, you don't see doors to the kitchen pantry. You just walk, and every time you turn a corner there's an element of surprise."

Though every design decision was intentional and assiduously thought out, Blank wanted a feeling of disarming simplicity throughout the home, which has 2,900 square >P.80



Blank wanted the dining room to be open concept but still have its own space. On one side is Kevin Vesel's millwork; on the other is a stacked-stone limestone wall that has a lightness to it because it does not touch the perimeter wall and also disappears up into a skylight. Though Blank has always considered himself a "natural steel guy," he opted for a brass chandelier by Lindsey Adelman, which he likes for both its warmth and the fact that it balances a sculptural brass staircase at the other side of the main floor. At left is a piece of selenite that acts as a piece of freestanding sculpture.



"My idea for the kitchen was to have it open to the living room, which is on trend," says Blank. "But I went a step further: When I envisioned sitting in the living room with friends having cocktails, I didn't want to look over at the kitchen and see appliances and the mechanics of the kitchen. I wanted an art wall, behind which all of the things like the refrigerator and the pantry are hidden. I was told it could not be done, but we did it and the living room has maintained its design integrity." The ultra-sleek kitchen cabinets are made of white rift oak, with Caesarstone countertops.

"I WAS INFLUENCED BY MID-CENTURY DESIGN. I WANTED CONTINUITY OF MATERIALS—WHITE RIFT OAK & NATURAL LIMESTONE—AND ARCHITECTURAL STRENGTH WITH CLERESTORY WINDOWS, CANTILEVERING STRUCTURES AND BROAD ROOF LINES." —PETER BLANK



Blank created a seamless indoor-outdoor experience by using disappearing glass doors that lead out to a backyard of terraces and shade sails.

feet on the main floor and an additional 2,900 square feet in the basement. “I was influenced by mid-century design,” says Blank, “I wanted continuity of materials—white rift oak & natural limestone—and architectural strength with clerestory windows, cantilevering structures and broad roof lines.” Adds Ojala: “Everything was honest about this house. Everything. There was a very limited material palette, but we focused on texture throughout. The retaining walls are a split-face stone, and then we have the millwork (by Kevin Vesel of Vesel Brand) and the oak floors. That’s essentially it. And every single turn, every detail, has a purpose.”

They also aimed for a feeling of lightness. To that end, “Everything in this house floats and is underlit,” says Blank. “In the kitchen, nothing touches the floor. The televisions appear to float in custom-designed wall cavities. In the dining room, the limestone wall doesn’t touch any other wall, and it disappears up into a skylight. It’s such a strong structural wall, and yet it seems disconnected from everything around it. You just look at it in amazement. Even the bathtubs and sinks seem to float.

“I also chose to have no baseboards, so stone goes to wood in every application, and the limestone is all from the same quarry so it’s identical everywhere, though it can look different because of how the light hits it.”

In a nod to International Design, the limestone is dry stacked inside and out. “I did not want to see any grout,” Blank says. “The beauty of the dry stacked stone is that it has a Roman/Greco aesthetic—and stands the test of time.”

Though Blank was integrally involved in every decision, he is



The custom staircase that connects the main floor to the basement level was designed by Blank to also appear to be floating. “I didn’t want to see a big ugly riser supporting the stairs, so every tread floats off of the walls.” He chose a brass custom railing to play off of the Lindsey Adelman chandelier in the dining room. “Everything feels right,” he says. “Your eye is not arrested anywhere. Everything just has this natural organic flow to it.”



Blank’s house was one of the first Denver clients for Boffi, the Italian design firm that opened a showroom in the city last fall. “Peter chose a system called Antibes that has an elm finish and is very versatile,” says Ann Hofmeister of Solesdi Boffi. “What made this project unusual is that he didn’t want any lighting in the closets, because his house is so amazing the dining room skylight wraps over into the closet.”

“THIS HOUSE IS REALLY A TESTAMENT TO MODERN ARCHITECTURE IN COLORADO, AND THE PEOPLE WHO WORKED ON IT. EVERYONE NEEDED EVERYONE. PETER AND I DIDN’T HAVE THE INTELLECTUAL CAPACITY TO BUILD A HOUSE LIKE THIS 10 YEARS AGO. IT NEEDED THE PEOPLE WE HAVE FORMED RELATIONSHIPS WITH OVER THE LAST DECADE— THE HOMES I’VE BUILT AND THE HOMES HE HAS SOLD.”

— ARCHITECT BRIAN OJALA

In the master bath, an air-jetted soaking tub from Americh sits next to a sculpture from Blank’s private collection. Because the walls do not meet in the corner, and the dining room is on the other side, Blank, who has frequent dinner parties, jokes that if he wants to have a nice soak in the middle of a meal, he can do so, simply asking a guest to pass a cocktail through the sliver of an opening.

the first to say that it took a village to make this house a reality. In addition to architect Ojala, the team comprises a who’s who of Denver’s design community, including Kevin Vesel of Vesel Brand, who did all of the home’s custom millwork; Old Greenwich Builders; Italian firm Boffi, which designed and installed all of the closets; and Harrison Home Systems, which made it a “smart” home.

“Peter and I worked together from start to finish on this house, and it was all about purity of form—the essence of space, light and material,” says Ojala. “We stripped off all of the unnecessary

components to leave the pure essentials.”

The design process was also unusually organic, with decisions being made or revised as the house was actually going up. “It was not like we said, ‘Okay, the design is all done. Here you go, builder,’ ” says Ojala. “It was ongoing napkin sketches. Peter and I would go to the site every day and say, ‘Okay, we got the shell built. How do we infill these walls? How will the millwork terminate? How does the fireplace wall look?’ It was hand sketch, hand sketch, hand sketch, always going to the next level, the next level, the next level. I probably

have 500 sketches after the project was submitted for permit. It was a living process.”

The process was also “exceptionally organic and collaborative,” says Cress Carter of Old Greenwich Builders. “At the time we built this house, the structure was probably as complex as any house we’ve ever done. Just look at how the roof cantilevers where there is no support and the wide open spaces with glass. Peter had a hand in everything—he’s excellent at interacting with creative people.”

That included some of the best craftspeople in town. “Peter had such a strong vision—he’s really a genius when it comes to the interior palette—but it wouldn’t have been successful without all the local craftsmen,” adds Ojala.

Chief among them was Kevin Vesel, who did all of the millwork, whose color he describes as “warm driftwood.” It was a challenge, but that is something Vesel is used to. “We do a lot of things on every project that have not been done before,” he says. “I bring in ideas from all over the world—I see what’s cutting edge with different vendors and different materials—but Peter’s input was extremely valuable and really showed up in the final product, which is not only unique but outstanding in terms of quality and finish. He’s a much better interior designer than most interior designers I know.”

Entering into the powder room vestibule, you see a hand-cast aluminum vessel and artwork by Blank himself, both sitting in front of a wavy “psychedelic” mirror from Porcelanosa.





Finally, Harrison Home Systems made the beautiful house smart, too. “This house was not only design-focused but technology-forward,” says George Harrison. “Peter has the ability to control everything from a single app on his phone through a home automation system called Savant; he can do it remotely or with voice control. He also has new Lutron palladium keypads, which are very clean keypads; they are unique in Colorado and can control shades and dim lights to accentuate the home’s unbelievable architecture.”

Modern, yes. Cutting edge, of course. But to Blank, the essence of the home echoes what Leonardo said all those centuries ago. “The house is classic but open, and it embraces art in all its forms. The simplicity of it is its brilliance.” ■



Blank had originally intended not to finish the basement but then inspiration struck. “I realized it could be spectacular, too.” The polished concrete floors are offset by cone-tied concrete walls, and Blank brought Kevin Vesel’s millwork down to this floor to provide continuity from above. “You know that something visual has changed when you walk down here, but it still has that connection,” he says. On the far wall is a work by New Orleans artist David Harouni.



The all-inclusive gym from Boffi (above) provides a full-body workout, which Blank chose so he would not have to fill the room with weights and other equipment. In both the gym and the entertainment room (previous page), he collaborated with artist Jeff Klapperich of New York to create the dimensional black-and-white nudes. The steam room downstairs (right) is Blank’s favorite indulgence in the house; it’s piped with peppermint, eucalyptus and lavender, and provides a “total immersive wet experience.” The shower is wrapped in white Carrera tile from Decorative Materials.



PROJECT CREDITS

Architecture
Brian Ojala - Entasis Group

Builder
Old Greenwich Builders

Lighting Design
Kate Cullen

Technology
Harrison Home Systems

Closets
Boffi / Solesdi

Gym
Boffi / Solesdi

Ledge & Honed Limestone
Materials Marketing

Bathroom Tile
Decorative Materials

Millwork/Paneling
Vesel Brand

Slab Quartz / Tile Installation
Brekhus Tile & Stone

Appliances
Thermador & Dacor

Powder Room Tile
Porcelanosa

Landscape
Elevate By Design

LED Lighting
Fusion Lighting