

# OPEN HOUSE

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## LET THE LIGHT IN

Peel back the paint, tear down the walls, blow off the roof. Designer Sallie Golden rescues and reinvents one of Aspen's original Modernist homes.



# A Teardown Revisited

Sallie Golden rescues a Meadowood diamond in the rough

By Linda Hayes

Photography by Peter Valli



**INSIDE OUTSIDE:**  
The living, dining, kitchen, and deck spaces flow into one another



**LIGHT BOX:** Light pours into the home through large windows, bounces through the open layout, and reflects off the white walls

**T**here's a clear philosophy behind the high-end luxury homes that Sallie Golden, owner of Sallie Golden Building & Design, has been creating for private Aspen clients for nearly twenty years. "All of my houses have a reflective character," she says. "They draw from the natural light and beauty of our alpine environment."

In the case of a 40-year-old Meadowood-area home that Bill and Laura Thomas enlisted Golden to work her magic on, what she saw was the chance to honor its past. "The house had become very schizophrenic, with layers and layers of design from previous eras," she says. There was lots of heavy mahogany, ironwork, and pink granite, with mirrors everywhere. But it was designed by Aspen Modernist architects Bob Sterling—who worked with Fritz Benedict while Benedict designed the Mountain Plaza and the Gant—and Jack Wall, who is known for Buttermilk's spectacular Modernist base lodge. "There was a gem underneath," says Golden. "I thought, Modernism is such a cornerstone of Aspen's past; it would be a great loss for our town to lose this asset. Let's bring it back to life."

The owners are expats who moved from Houston to London a decade ago in support of Bill Thomas's work in the international oil business; they are part of an increasing group of global nomads buying an escape in Aspen. Golden and her team worked long-distance with them, reconcepting the house to reflect the



**LESS IS MORE:** This image, snow is no match for the heated driveway; below, the home's original exterior lines have been kept intact



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Aspen Modernist style. “It was very exciting,” Thomas says. “We originally had a more modest view of what was required, but as we began to peel back layers and things opened up, it became obvious where we wanted to go.”

With the help of local contractor (and Golden’s husband) Carlton Siemel of Constructs Inc., the primary task was to improve the flow of the space within the approximately 4,500-square-foot house, connecting it to the outdoors. “The rooms were all dark and closed in and didn’t take advantage of the views and light,” Golden says.

From the entry, the sleek open-plan living space consists of a series of “modular cubes”—living and family rooms divided by a central dining room and kitchen. Charcoal-colored slate tile floors and built-in slate countertops contrast with white walls. A wall of doors opens the space to a reclaimed-wood deck with built-in benches and a freestanding slate fireplace. The four bedrooms, including the master, are equally serene. A modern take on a

bunkroom and a large TV room occupy a lower-level space.

For the interiors, Golden partnered with Houston-based Julie Watkins Baker of Watkins Baker Design. Throughout the house, furnishings such as the leather couches and orange lounge chair from Design Within Reach reflect the clean lines of the building without compromising comfort. They’re paired with a series of black-and-white regional photographs by Berko and the owners’ collection of African masks and artifacts.

To connect the home with its natural surroundings, a front courtyard/drive was transformed from what Golden calls “a sea of concrete” to a rural respite with regional blue-black basalt-stone gravel and planters faced with cement-board walls and capped with “Pilgrim” stone. “It was a genius stroke,” says Bill, “to be able to convert an eyesore into something special that really works with the house.” While the relandscaping was extensive, Golden took care to respect the historical importance of the building’s exterior, ensuring that its integrity was left intact.

**BRING THE  
OUTDOORS IN:**  
The master  
bedroom enjoys its  
own private deck

*“As we began  
to peel back layers  
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**ROOM  
WITH A VIEW:**  
Windows  
surround the tub  
on three sides

*“The way the house flows, and the light that surrounds it from all angles, makes it a very peaceful place.”*



**COZY CORNER:**  
A large corner couch frames the media room

Attention was paid to allowing certain materials, such as slate pavers, to flow from the inside out and vice versa. Landscape designer Brian McNellis, of BMC Planning & Design in Aspen, helped further the concept with the introduction of native plants that blend with the grand aspen trees and junipers surrounding the property.

With two of their three children in college in the States, the Thomases value their home in Aspen and cherish the time they spend there. “To be able to come together as a family here and have American roots is really important to us,” says Laura. “The way the house flows, and the light that surrounds it from all angles, makes it a very peaceful place to be. It’s a happy house.”

**SOURCES**

- Creative Director: **Sallie Golden of Sallie Golden Building & Design, Aspen**
- Contractor: **Carlton Siemel of Constructs Inc., Aspen**
- Interior Designer: **Julie Watkins Baker of Watkins Baker Design, Houston, Texas**
- Exterior Landscape Design: **Brian McNellis, Principal, ASLA AICP, of BMC Planning & Design, Aspen**



**SLUMBER PARTY:**  
Three double beds sleep large parties in the basement bedroom

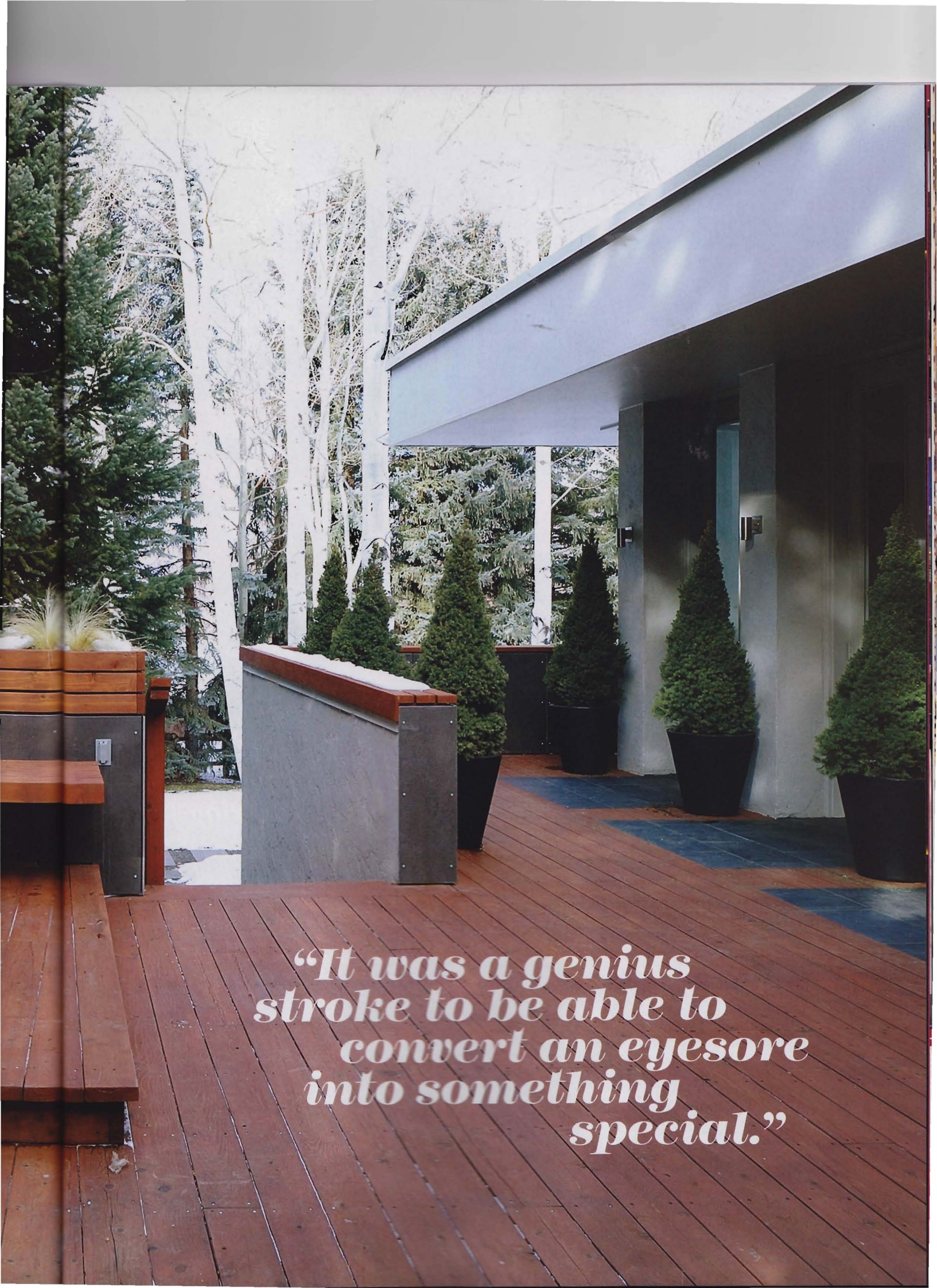
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**EARTH, WIND, FIRE:**  
Wooden benches surround a gas firepit on the deck.





*“It was a genius stroke to be able to convert an eyesore into something special.”*