





**FACING SOUTH.** With the shed extension of the main house to the left and the detached studio to the right, the stark, grounded forms blend into the landscape.

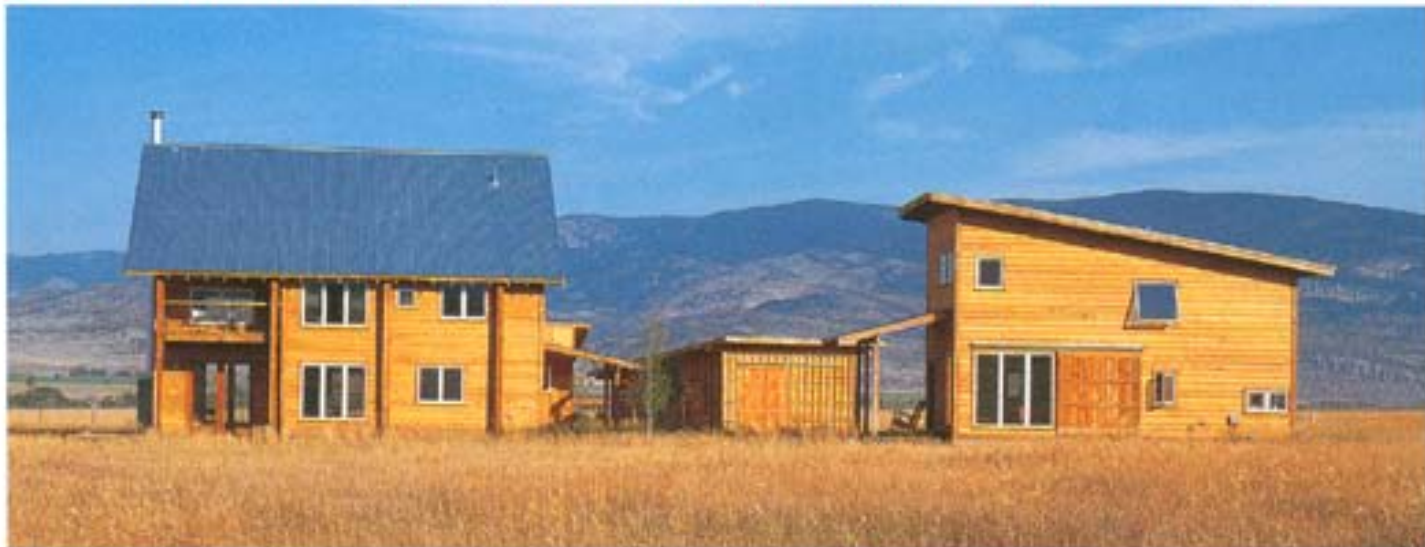
## Big Sky Trio

**AFTER LIVING IN AN IN-TOWN HOME WITH A HOUSE-BOUND OFFICE,**

photographer Audrey Hall decided she wanted to change the way she lived and worked. Moving to the wilds of Montana, Audrey opted to create a small ensemble of buildings that would separate where she worked from where she lived. Anything man-made would stand in stark counterpoint to the dynamic world of Big Sky country, with its open horizons and distant mountains, and while it would have been easy (and all too predictable) to build a faux folk art homage to the agrarian west, Audrey wanted something more.

Even though she had a clear vision of what she wanted, she knew that the built answer to her domestic needs was not an easy one, so she looked for professional help. In talking to architects Lori C. Ryker and Brett W. Nave, principals of Ryker/Nave Design, Audrey found kindred spirits, and even though her limited budget would have to include the architects' fee of 7 percent of construction costs, the results speak for themselves. Ryker/Nave did what all good designers do: They took the gist of their client's dream of domesticity and made a design that does not pander to pat pre-conceptions. This is neither a faux ranch nor a transplanted ranch

Basic materials are anything but when they're organized by an artful eye.



house, but rather a unique set of buildings that reflect the realities of the site, the client, and the budget.

### LAYOUT IN THE OUTLANDS

The three buildings, which provide separate structures for work, cars, and living, stake out their turf on a circular one-acre lot in a sea of open space. The two outbuildings (garage and studio) are set at an angle to the main house, which orients its double-height living space to accept the low winter sun and collect heat in its concrete slab floor. Not unlike a house on the water where the water view is "the front," here the sweeping southerly view of the surrounding mountains naturally orients the house away from the road on the north side.

The main house harbors a virtually independent first-floor guest living space with two bedrooms and a bath. This guest wing borders the totally open living/dining area, with the common areas of the house set within an exposed timber frame. This timber structure combines the front door and stair to form an entry with a Big Sky view straight through a two-story slot of space. Half of the second floor of the main living space is a master suite, with a bathroom directly over the kitchen; the other half is given over to the double-height space for the stair and living area below.

While the residence (by far the largest part of this 2,600-sq.-ft. ensemble) has a variety of subtle and dramatic elaborations upon



**FACING EAST.** The trio of buildings (house left, garage center, studio right) is carefully laid out in an open meadow with rolling hills behind, all set within the grand sweep of Big Sky country. [top]

**MAIN ENTRY.** The three forms of gable, shed, and stoop roof all come together at the point of entry, while the garage (right) helps create a courtyard that frames the façade, enabling the necessary scale change from "Big Sky" to "home." [above]

**KITCHEN AND DINING.** The furniture mimics the stark simplicity of the home's structure, which is all on display. Natural light highlights the two-part harmony between wood surfaces and white walls. [facing page]





#### MATERIAL CHOICE

### Shadow Play



IN CREATING THIS TRIO OF BUILDINGS, Ryker/Nave Design used basic materials to create simple shapes that both catch light and, more distinctively, provide shadow. Cutting one eave line of the dominant gable roof form at a slightly rakish angle (rather than paralleling the wall that is below it) protects the wall from sun and rain but also displays a human touch. By recessing one corner of the gable roof, providing large overhangs for all the buildings, and mounting the 2x4 framing of the garage on the outside of the walls, an ever-changing world of shadow and plane is created in this land of crisp sunlight.



#### SITE FLOOR PLAN

Two oblong boxes (the garage and studio) flank the front-door side of the home. The "true" front faces south and opens out to the dramatic views of the mountains beyond.

the classic wood architecture of the Wild West, the garage and the studio are simple buildings fashioned of stark shapes and materials—with a couple of tweaks. Most of the roofs are straightforward gables or sheds, but one eave is cut at an angle, and the shed roof that covers the guest bedroom wing is extended beyond the side of its parent building, creating a corner for the detached rooflet at the entry to nestle into. One corner of the main house is carefully recessed to form a covered porch facing the southerly view and the morning sun. The main building combines stick framing and a post-and-beam cage of wood supporting the main portion of the house. This grid of wood is literally "slipped" so that the home's walls are held away from the timber frame (see the sidebar on p. 166).

The trio of buildings have some common themes. All roofing is sheet metal, all exterior siding is local wood left natural (and often knotty), and all interior structure is exposed. The stairs are a simple straight run, and all ground-level floors are poured concrete slab on grade. Similarly, windows are all standard units, though they are arranged in a variety of ways, from random to ganged to centered.

It is in the sophisticated reinterpretation of everyday materials and techniques that designs such as this find a spark of life. A

<b>Location:</b>	Livingston, Montana
<b>Year Built:</b>	2002
<b>Architect:</b>	Ryker/Nave Design
<b>Finished Heated Space:</b>	1,850 sq. ft. (house), 750 sq. ft. (studio)
<b>Costs:</b>	Project Budget—\$285,000 Site Development—\$13,000 Design Fee—\$20,000





● ● ● FIREPLACE WINDOW WALL. Big planes of glass and a simple, isolated fireplace are both framed and surrounded by the timber structure, while the concrete floor is polished to give a real sense of grounded texture.

## A powerful context needs a visually strong house.



### Separated by Design

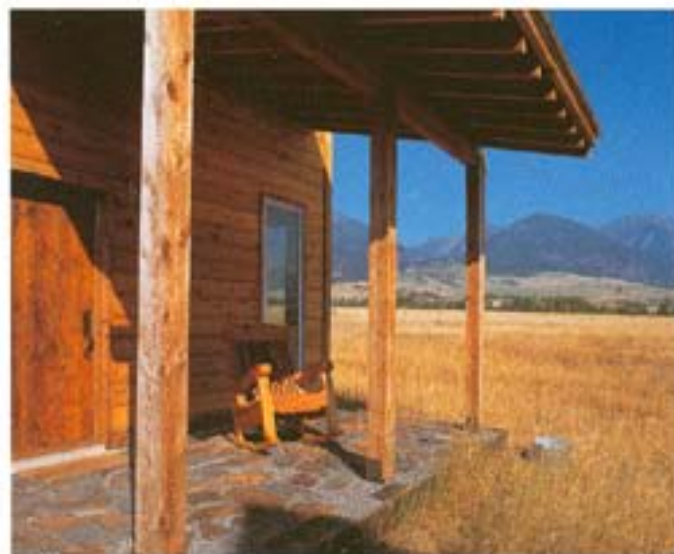
**THIS HOUSE HAS A UNIQUE APPROACH** to post-and-beam framing, using a structural skeleton to support stick-frame walls and roof. Normally, post-and-beam structures utilize “SIPS” panels—a sandwich of plywood or flakeboard outside surfaces with a solid injected-foam core—that are directly mounted to the outside of a cage of timbers. The SIPS system prevents condensation problems that occur when you stick-frame between the post-and-beam frame as there is no way to provide a vapor barrier without hiding the post-and-beam structure. In this house, the stick-built walls do not sit between the openings of the frame but are set away from it, either outside or inside the grid of posts and beams. Not only does this leave the structure exposed, but it’s also cheaper to stick-frame a skin rather than use SIPS panels.

panel slides to be both a wall and a door separating the shed wing from the main body of the house. The partition for the lofty second-floor master bedroom is a virtual adaptation of corn-crib architecture (wood slats with cut openings complete with rotating shutters). By taking wood and basic joinery techniques and letting them be tweaked in full view turns predictable into poignant.

### KEEPING THE ART AFFORDABLE

The house was built for just over \$100 per square foot, which for a home of this carefully intricate and quirky design is inexpensive even in Montana. Using off-the-shelf materials and a layout devoid of angles and curves helped keep costs down, as did the fact that Audrey installed the insulation and radiant-floor heating herself and did all of the painting and staining in the house.

The dual role of Ryker/Nave as designer *and* builder also helped to control costs. The norm is to have a separate builder and architect who look over each other’s shoulders and play off each other. In this case, Ryker/Nave followed the owner’s basic specs for everything, but fine-tuned those material desires as necessary throughout the design and building of the project. A side benefit of this dual role was that construction started three months after the design was initiated, as all bidding was in-house





●●● VIEW FROM THE PORCH. French doors open wide to reveal the majesty of the distant mountains.

**STUDIO PORCH.** Facing south, this spare overhang has a deep cantilever above and bare-bones columns below. Used as temporary full-time housing while the main house was being built, this tiny structure sat dwarfed by the mountains, sky, and prairie that surround it. [facing page]



**In the Words of** ●●●

**homeowner Audrey Hall**

"The design and building process has been a continual dialogue between the architect/builders and me. Philosophical discussions about environmentally responsible design, brainstorming ideas about making the project affordable, conversations about 'cookie-cutter architecture,' and a prominent awareness of fixtures and materials have all been at the forefront of the entire project. Through our discussions, I've discovered that unique, intriguing, and beautiful ideas stem from a shared vision and collaborative efforts."

and most of the detailing was done during construction, telescoping the time it usually takes to design such a carefully crafted building.

### **BUILDING IN PHASES**

Another element that helped make this project affordable is relatively unique compared with the other examples in this book. Building three separate structures allowed for an easy construction schedule as the studio/cottage was built first and served as the temporary residence (and workplace) of the owner, thus allowing the construction of the main building to occur without a killer deadline. In almost every circumstance, the more time available for construction, the less money is spent, as haste literally makes waste when building a home. Taking the time to fine-tune specifications and reality-check on-paper designs with preferences revealed on-site prevents the sort of changes during construction that usually cost dearly. A side benefit was that the joy of construction could be viewed up close and personal by Audrey without having to live in a construction site during the messy, complicated, and often brutally informal exercise of building.

Audrey left her town-bound Victorian house and tiny bedroom office to find a new future in this wild country. Without the thoughtful collaboration between herself and Ryker/Nave Design she might simply have opted for a larger version of what she left behind. This is the typical result when stock plans are applied to a unique life. In taking the risk of partnership with her designer/builders to create her most prominent (and intimate) possession, Audrey found her way home.



●●● **SHELF SCREEN.** The shelving unit bridges the gap between the rough-hewn timber-frame structure and the slab stair, partially screening the living room from the hallway.



**BEDROOM IN A BOX.** Overtly agrarian in its origins, gapped wood sheathing combines with thick flooring in the master bedroom suite to create a building within a building. Raw steel railings and structural fittings counterpoint this wood sculpture. [left]

**OPENINGS IN THE WALL.** Patterned after corn-crib construction, pivoting wall panels and gapped boards reveal the wonderful contrast between sapwood and heartwood. [below left]

**STAIRWAY TO BEDROOM.** The open stair and its metal railing artfully combine with the built-in bookcases, which are constructed of the exact same materials, lending a sense of lightness and sprightly ascendance to the second-floor master bedroom suite. [below ]

