

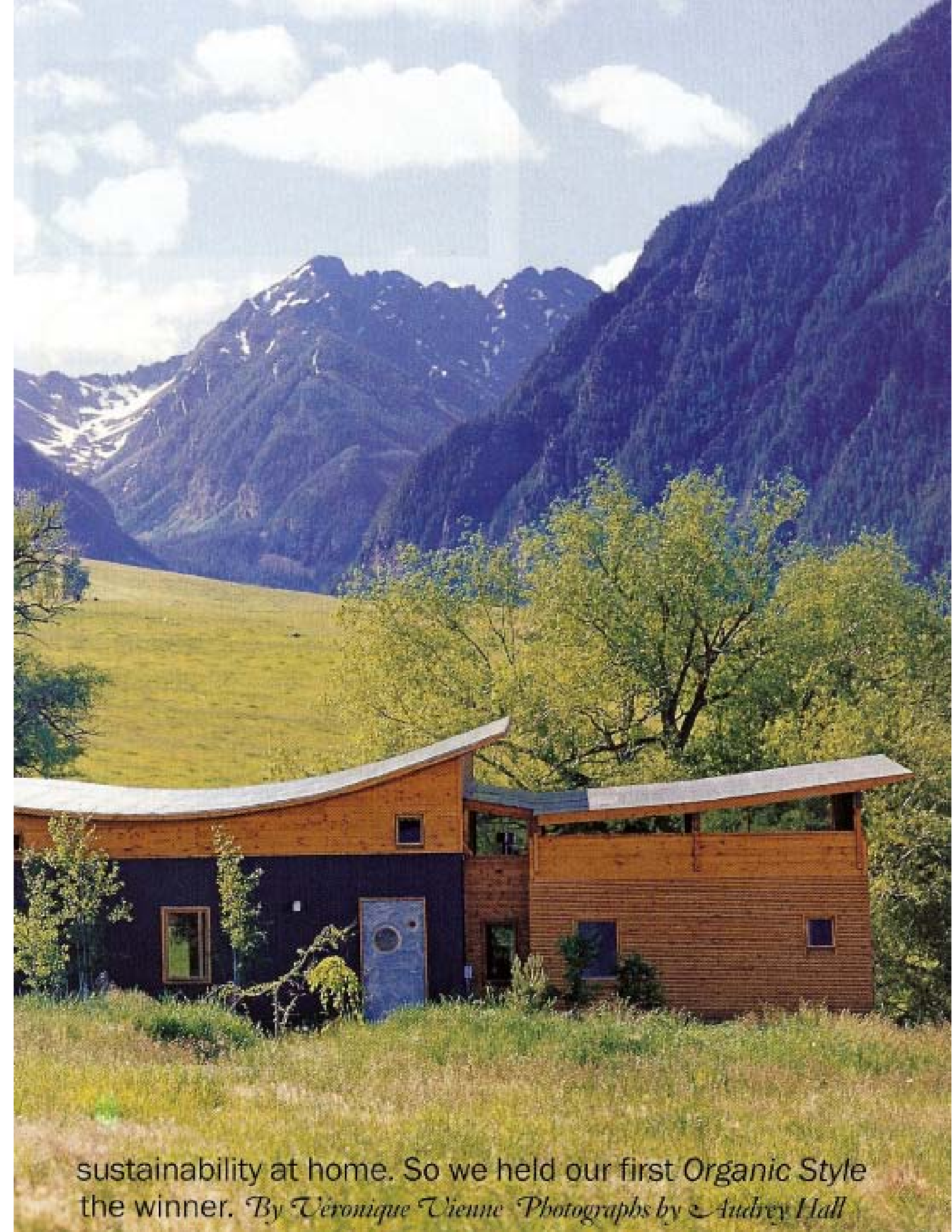
#### HOME ON THE RANGE

Set on three acres in southeastern Montana's Paradise Valley, this 2,230-square-foot house—which has been artfully tucked into the landscape—is built of locally harvested, nontoxic, and renewable materials.



# Sweet Valley High

We wanted to know how you—our readers—combine style and House Contest. This green and gorgeous Montana retreat is



sustainability at home. So we held our first *Organic Style*  
the winner. *By Veronique Vieune Photographs by Audrey Hall*



Our award winner, a house designed and built by Ryker/Nave Design in Livingston, Montana, was the unanimous favorite among our panel of six expert judges, who loved the simple, healthy materials; the modest size; and the way the house fits seamlessly into the spectacular setting. To see more entries from the contest and to learn about our judges, go to [OrganicStyle.com](http://OrganicStyle.com).

Stritten by the snow-covered peaks of the Rockies, Lori Ryker and Brett Nave packed their bags 10 years ago and moved to Livingston, Montana (elevation: 4,503 feet), to establish an architectural practice. Lori, who completed her doctorate at Harvard, and Brett, who earned his degree at Auburn University, picked this region north of Yellowstone National Park for its wilderness and sheer beauty. And that beauty has been as much a source of inspiration for the residential and commercial buildings they create as has their passion for energy conservation and environmental preservation.

Recently they created a house for client Donna Greenberg that was directly influenced by the grandeur of the nearby Gallatin National Forest and Absaroka Range. Lori and Brett came up with the low profile and serpentine eaves of the structure after "looking at the surrounding hills and how they come together. We wanted the house to fold into the landscape," explains Lori, a quiet blonde with a piercing gaze. "We like houses that have a sway to them, where the walls lean and the roofs pitch in," adds Brett,

who is similarly soft-spoken and modest. "The shape of our houses is more what *feels* right."

The couple—partners in life as well as in work—employ 11 architects, many of whom studied with Lori, a full-time professor at Montana State University's School of Architecture in Bozeman. Although they have built a number of eco-friendly houses across the country, the bulk of their work can be found in and around Livingston, a deceptively small town (population 6,800) that, in addition to the local population of ranchers and miners, attracts gentleman farmers, fly-fishing enthusiasts, and Los Angeles refugees in search of a more serene lifestyle. Completed this year, the Greenberg residence is unusual for the region, not only because of its relatively modest size but also because its owner, Donna, 74, is refreshingly unconventional in her approach to life. To explain to her architects what she

#### MATERIAL MATTERS

Clockwise from above left: Donna's dog Cash welcomes guests; the galvanized metal front door contrasts with the corrugated metal siding, painted a deep green-black to match the spruce- and Douglas fir-covered hills. The western end of the house, which contains the guest room and a two-story screened porch, is framed in locally harvested Douglas fir. The floor plan reveals the simplicity of the scheme: The living, dining, and kitchen area is flanked by bedrooms. Bookcases separate the living area from Donna's office.

BOUWIST FIRST-COLORED CHAIRS, A STUDIO ORANGE WOOL PILLOW AND INTERIORS TROPIC 'DOWN HIDE' FELT PILLOW ON LEONARDO-PIRETTI CHAIR, AND HOUSEY ORNAMENTAL CUSHIONS. SHECHUP, 408-548-8838; DRISDALE CAS-BEWE TURTLEBACK AND PURVIS LEATHER SLEEPING BAGS, 503-233-4011; SHING RIMS, UNIQUE CARPETS, 800-547-8208.

#### ROOM WITH A VIEW

A wall of windows and doors behind the pink-plaster fireplace lets the sun shine in. The pool, which Donna uses daily, is edged with pebbles from the nearby Yellowstone River. A chemical-free ionizing system, rather than chlorine, keeps the water clean. The ceiling is sheathed in raw Douglas fir. The tree-trunk column, its bark intact, was harvested locally.



#### SOFTNESS AND LIGHT

A high band of windows in the round master bedroom admits light and views, but preserves privacy without curtains. The walls here in the silo (and throughout the house) are covered in Venetian plaster, a toxin-free mix of lime, marble dust, and natural pigments that eliminates the need for paint. The soft texture makes an ideal backdrop for art, including the Chinese textile above the bed.



#### SURFACE DETAILS

In the kitchen, the practical butcher-block countertop has been finished with nontoxic linseed oil and wax. The cabinet doors are faced with durable galvanized metal. Concrete counters inlaid with chips of recycled colored glass surround the range. In the master bathroom, the creamy marble sink sits on a slab of salvaged Douglas fir.



had in mind for the roof of her house, for instance, this pert and petite grandmother grabbed a chair with one hand and climbed on top of it. "Watch!" she ordered, waving a tissue in the air. She dropped it and it floated to the ground, billowing gracefully on the way down.

A former Malibu resident with Hollywood connections who has lived in Montana for 15 years, she came to Lori and Brett with definite ideas: the particular curve of her roofline, a master bedroom in a grain silo, and the centerpiece of her daily fitness routine, a lap pool, right in her living room. She challenged them to design a seamless structure incorporating these idiosyncratic elements. "The outer form of the house is the consequence of its interior, not the other way around," Lori says, adding that she and Brett spend as much time talking with clients to understand their needs and wishes as they do sitting at the drawing board.

The outcome of all those conversations is always a unique design solution. Lori and Brett approached the Greenberg project with their client's specifications in mind and with the goal of using local materials when possible, incorporating energy efficiency, and considering the environmental impact of all of their choices. At first, Donna had wanted a contemporary house in harmony with its spectacular setting. What she got is a lot more—a personal sanctum nestled in a spot with breathtaking views, and a home that interacts with its environment. "You have to think of your eco-friendly house as a functional thing," Lori says. "You cannot just lock the door and go away. We don't look at it as maintenance but as participation. There is a certain attentiveness involved in owning a sustainable home."

Donna's house, for example, was conceived as a heat-collecting as well as self-ventilating structure. The bungalow takes advantage of the winter sun through large, south-facing windows and French doors. Concrete floors act as a "heat sink," soaking up the sun's warmth and sending it back into the structure. Additional heating is provided by an energy-efficient radiant system under the floors: Warm water circulates through tubing, which heats the concrete and, subsequently, the air. In summer, by opening strategically placed windows high on the northern facade, Donna allows warm air to escape, which keeps the house cool without the need for air-conditioning.

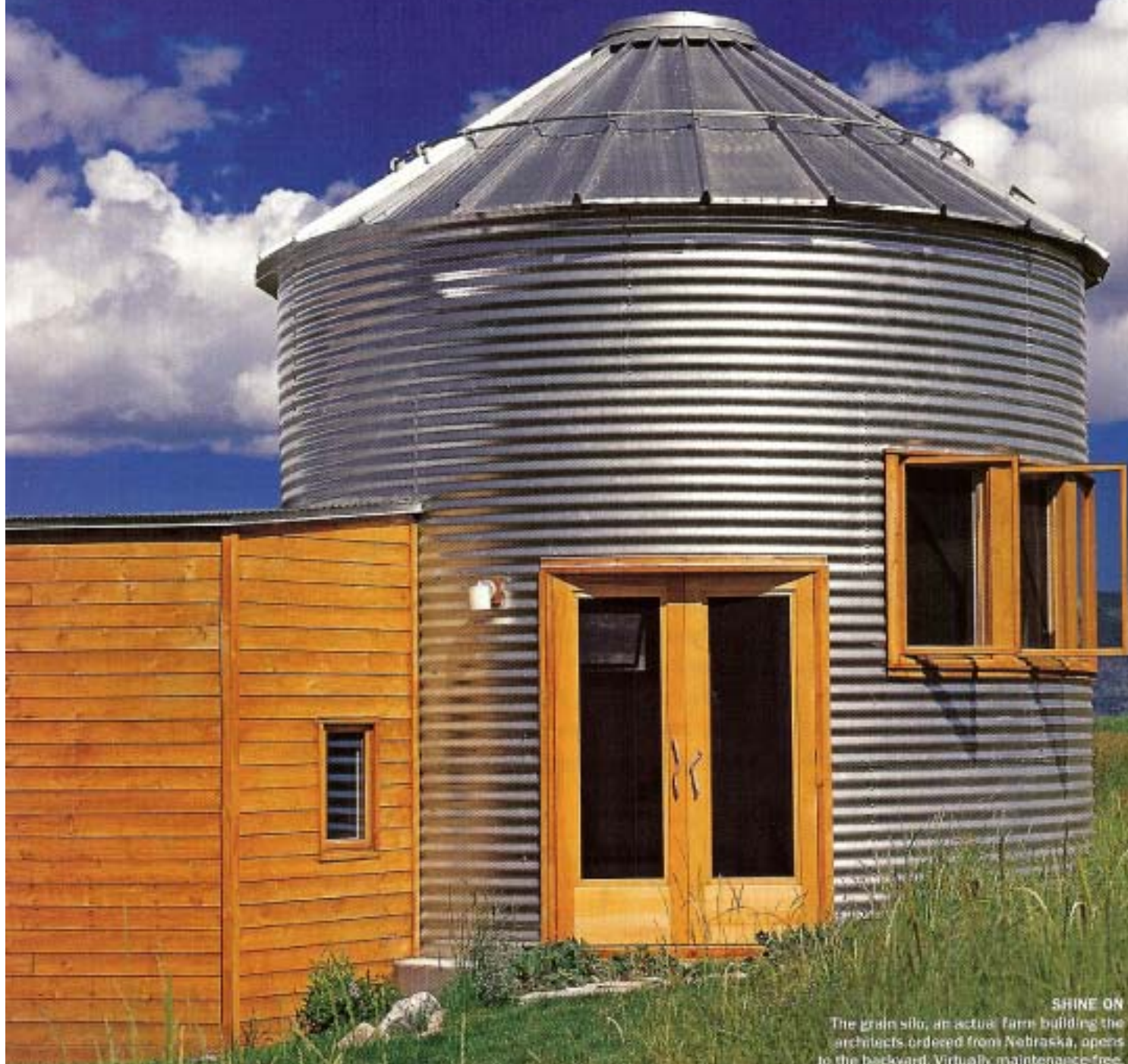
The exterior of the house is clad in a combination of renewable and easy-to-care-for raw materials: locally milled Douglas fir and metal roofing and siding. The glittering silo,

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## House with Organic Style 2006

Does your new house or renovation combine style and sustainability? If so, tell us about it! For information on next year's House with Organic Style award, go to [OrganicStyle.com/housecontest](http://OrganicStyle.com/housecontest).

“It’s really important to blur  
that boundary between the  
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**SHINE ON**

The grain silo, an actual farm building the architects ordered from Nebraska, opens to the backyard. Virtually maintenance-free, the corrugated steel cladding echoes the horizontal lines of the wood siding. Sealed with oil, the wood also needs little care.

## Sweet Valley High

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at the eastern end of the structure, is connected to the main part of the house by a woodshed-like passageway that contains the master bath, including a spacious steam shower. On the western side, a two-story screened porch with glorious mountain views serves as an indoor-outdoor living room. "It's really important to blur that boundary between the inside and the outside," Brett says. "The house isn't a box you hide in."

And to be sure, pass through the galvanized-metal front door and you step inside a sun-drenched loftlike space whose wavy ceiling mimics the vaulting mountain skyline. With its polished concrete floor and walls covered in soft plaster, the interior is an open landscape. Here you see monumental bookcases on wheels; there, a boxy fireplace, comfortable

chairs arranged around it like sculptures. At one end of the living area, the kitchen—splashed with lime-green plaster—is as playful as the inside of a toy store, while at the opposite end, the exercise pool unfurls like a carpet.

The master bedroom in the silo is a domed sanctuary with small windows that selectively frame the landscape and direct slanted rays of sunlight on the curved plaster walls. For Lori and Brett, shade is as precious and as beautiful a resource as daylight, and partial views are as compelling as vistas. They advise clients not to skimp on windows that open and close—slender or wide, tall or short, vertical or horizontal. A smaller house with plenty of operational windows will feel more spacious than a larger one with fewer openings, they say.

In their spare time, Lori and Brett explore the margins of sustainable construction. They are building their

own house about five miles outside Livingston as a laboratory where they can test the latest eco-friendly building materials and try out novel ideas such as a vegetable, fruit, and flowering plant garden in the kitchen; a salvaged-redwood tub in the bath; and a roof pitched this way and that way to accommodate a rainwater-reuse system. Lori has also just finished a book, *Off the Grid: Modern Homes + Alternative Energy*, which explores 10 houses that are both beautiful and extremely energy efficient.

Ultimately, their house, like Donna's, will be as much a part of the landscape as the indigenous grassland, shivering willows, and bespangled dogwood they plan to grow along the creek with drainage collected from their roof. In their minds, green architecture and organic gardening are alike—they are both about cultivating the beauty of the natural world. 🌱