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ANCIENT MATERIALS LEND  
THEIR HISTORY & RUGGED  
BEAUTY TO THIS RUSTIC  
RETREAT IN BRECKENRIDGE.  
CYNDIA ZWAHLEN REPORTS.  
PHOTOGRAPHED BY  
MATTHEW LEE KRANE



# rooted in time

Crafted of 100-year-old reclaimed pine, ancient moss-covered boulders and juniper trees gnarled with age, this home in Breckenridge appears as rooted in time as the mountainside on which it is planted. "Creating myths is an important function of architecture," says the homeowner and architectural designer Suzanne Allen-Guerra, of Allen-Guerra Design-Build Inc. in Breckenridge. "With this house, we strove to create the myth of time."


Allen-Guerra hand-picked the rustic materials, many reclaimed from older structures, to lend a sense of history, as well as a rugged beauty, to this newly built, five-level retreat on Mt. Baldy. The result of her careful efforts, and those of the builder, her husband and business partner, Ethan Guerra, is a timeless classic, a rustic and luxurious alpine

retreat that looks more Old World than new.

Craggy rocks and boulders, each hand-placed, are strewn around the exterior of the 4,200-square-foot home to look as if they had fallen off the building over time. The pair used the same technique inside, cementing rocks and boulders collected from New Mexico ranchlands to the base of wood pillars and the living room fireplace. The look of old plaster was achieved on interior walls by mixing sand with the drywall. The walls were then painted with a golden brown faux finish meant to give the look of having been patched and repaired over time. In the kitchen, a hand-crafted juniper handle seems to have grown out of the wood frontpiece on the Sub-Zero refrigerator.

"This house is all about the details," says Allen-Guerra. Her attention to detail and her





Amber tones and natural textures create a sense of timeless serenity in the entry hall. Allen-Guerra designed the branching pine-cone motif of the stained glass created by Theodore Ellison Designs of Oakland, Calif. Opposite: Crafted from a fire-killed juniper tree thousands of years old, this hall table adds a mellow, aged beauty to the entry.





The soaring windows, which are placed to let natural light flood in from the west and south, are custom made by Sierra Pacific Windows. Built-in soffits hide the unseen window shades when they are not in use. The reclaimed wood used for the window trim, the exposed double beams and the massive hand-crafted furniture add history to this rustic, luxurious space.





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philosophy of design are steeped in her study of the early 20th-century architecture of Mary Colter. Colter designed many of the Southwestern-inspired buildings in the Grand Canyon National Park and left as an architectural legacy the National Park Service Rustic Style, which emphasizes the natural beauty of organic materials.

“Her structures have a timeless quality, and that’s what I have begun to strive for in my architecture,” says Allen-Guerra, whose Breckenridge home is her third project. Allen-Guerra achieves a timeless quality in her own projects through a combination of material and custom work, much of which she and her husband did themselves.

On the exterior of the frame structure clad in half-logs, for example, Allen-Guerra hand-placed cedar shingles in accent areas in a flowing organic pattern. The wood pieces are interspersed with copper shingles that have already begun to take on the patina of age. Even the stain on the cedar window trim was specially formulated to look old. Allen-Guerra worked with Trindl Decorating West of Evergreen, which came up with dozens of samples before creating just the look she wanted. “A lot of the finishes people are putting on log and cedar exteriors are glossy. We wanted ours to look like it had been there for 10, 20 or 100 years,” says Allen-Guerra.

In the entryway, two stained glass windows designed by Allen-Guerra flank the arched oak door and filter soft light onto the Colorado flagstone floor. The tall glass panels feature a design of pine tree branches that appear to grow out of the sides of the front door “tree.”

The wood used on the interior trim is cut from Douglas fir pylons that once supported the Great Salt Lake train trestle, which was recently dismantled. After being essentially pickled in saltwater for a





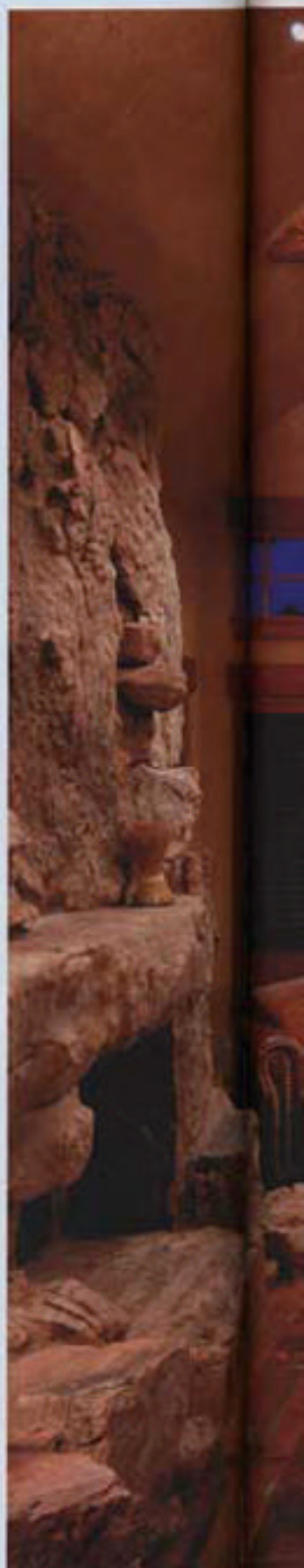
century, the salvaged wood was further distressed by Guerra, the builder, who torched then wire-brushed each piece.

Recycled wood also shows up in new and beautiful reincarnations in the wood floors and beams of the home. The floors are oak planks reclaimed from a mill in Wisconsin. Their aged mottling and patterns of dark and light add a lustrous warmth and original personality to the home's floors. The beams overhead are from British Columbia. They were logged by Sitka Log Homes, which uses helicopters to harvest standing dead trees. Allen-Guerra requested that the cedar trees be cut as close to the ground as possible to take advantage of the flared ends natural to the trees' growth habit. Those dramatic flares now lend their flair to the exposed beams and pillars that support the home.

In the living room, the presence of the dark beams is balanced by the massive fireplace

of moss rock and the gleaming, heavy leather chairs that Allen-Guerra also designed. The home's theme of rustic elegance is also evident in the copper-based lamps, many of which are from Mica Lamp Co., used in the living room and throughout the residence. The lamps spill warm pools of light onto the oversized wood side tables and wall pillars, evoking a candlelit feel.

Copper lamps also appear in the kitchen. A trio is suspended over the wood kitchen bar, lighting its tongue-oil finish and highlighting the gnarled juniper base. The bar was crafted by furniture artisan Andy Sanchez, who has a permit to reclaim ancient juniper trees, some more than 2,000 years old, from fire-damaged lands in Arizona. "We went down to his shop in New Mexico and actually picked out the slab we wanted for the bar," says Allen-Guerra. ➤





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Moose rock from New Mexico ranchlands was used to craft the living room's large and distinctive fireplace. The mantelpiece alone weighs more than a ton. It took six workmen three days to install the piece and its two supporting boulders. Opposite: Organic textures in the kitchen include recycled copper from Mexico used for the panel behind the stove, the hood and under the bar.



According to Allen-Guerra, the kitchen, which is usually home to shiny metal and glass appliances and fixtures, was the most challenging room in which to achieve the rustic, timeless look. She horrified the cabinetmaker when she asked him to wire-brush the surfaces of the gorgeous cherry cabinets he made for the kitchen. "He does fine, polished, just perfect furniture," says Allen-Guerra. "It almost killed him to build these cabinets."

She also surprised the workmen at Montrose's Acme Plating by sending them the chrome sink fixtures to be plated with an antique-looking copper film. They were more familiar with motorcycle parts than plumbing fixtures, she says. The result of both unconventional efforts, though, is an inviting space that—while large enough for a crowd of friends to keep the cook company—feels intimate and cozy, perfectly in synch with the organic feel of the rest of the home.

The organic look appears in a whimsical form in the stairway to an upper level that Guerra built with a subcontractor. Here actual juniper branches he gathered serve as the railing support. They seem to have sprouted from the open stair treads that are crafted of lodgepole pine. Upstairs, the master bedroom is a sunlit aerie that looks through soaring windows over the tree-tops to the ski area to the west. The massive bed, custom-built by Sanchez, is aligned with Red Mountain, visible over the foot board to the south. Allen-Guerra set the head of the king-size bed into a shallow recess and piled it with imported golden and cream-colored linens to soften the masculine feel and large scale. Leather and silk accent pillows in plum and terracotta echo the earth tones of the room's reclaimed wood floors and the South American hacienda-style leather-and-wood chairs from Bramble Co.

The careful mix of rustic materials with exquisite design details throughout the mountainside home has resulted in an original piece of design art, rich with real and implied history. The magical effect is that of a home well-rooted in the past, yet fully able to wrap its occupants in the latest in luxuriously organic beauty.



The organic shapes of juniper branches and pine logs lend character to an interior staircase. Opposite: Allen-Guerra's attention to detail is evident in her hand-placed cedar shingles, the natural flares of the cedar tree she chose as a support on the home's exterior and in the graceful curve of the interior steps.





MICHAKA PELLIOTT



## DESIGN DETAILS

### ARCHITECTURE AND INTERIOR DESIGN

Architectural and interior designer Suzanne Allen-Guerra is deeply interested in the timeless potential of architecture and how to create the illusion of nature through the choice of construction materials. "In all of our projects we are recycling different materials—we specify green or sustainable materials," she says.

**Suzanne Allen-Guerra**

Allen-Guerra Design-Build Inc.  
Breckenridge, (970) 453-7002

### BUILDER

The builder, Ethan Guerra, worked closely with Suzanne Allen-Guerra, the designer of the home and its interior, his wife and business partner. The daughter of a general contractor, Allen-Guerra is committed to the design-build concept, which includes contractors in the design process from the beginning of the project. "When you do that, the results are fantastic," says Allen-Guerra. "The contractor comes up with great ideas or may see something that will be a construction issue," which can be a cost saver. "The fun part of design-build is you don't have to specify everything up front," says the designer, who favors recycled and reclaimed materials. "Sometimes you don't find something till the day before you're going to install it."

**Ethan Guerra**

Allen-Guerra Design-Build Inc.  
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For more details, see Resources on page 143. ■■