

# ARCHITECTURAL DIGEST

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SPECIAL ISSUE

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# PRIDE OF PLACE

Interior designer Madeline Stuart and architect David Lake collaborate on an enlightened Montana retreat that settles gracefully into its pristine prairie landscape

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Modest beauty prevails at a Montana family retreat by Lake|Flato Architects and interior designer Madeline Stuart. The west-facing "sunset porch," as the homeowners call it, features reclaimed-wood armchairs custom made by Stuart. For details see Sources.





In the living room, smooth concrete walls surround a steel firebox devised by the architects. Sergio Rodrigues lounge chairs and a Michael Wilson lamp, all from JF Chen, face a free-form wood low table by Cristiano do Valle from Espasso and vintage cowhide stools from Hollywood at Home. The rosewood-and-leather sofa and Navajo-inspired rug were designed by Stuart.

IN

Frank Lloyd Wright's 1932 autobiography the master of organic architecture declared, "No house should ever be on any hill or on anything. It should be of the hill, belonging to it so hill and house could live together each the happier for the other." That sentiment is echoed by many architects and designers, especially in these ecosensitive times. For some the relationship between the built environment and the land is expressed in symbolic gestures, such as shared color palettes, branch chandeliers, or log tables. Others strive for a more profound affinity.

The Montana home created for a Los Angeles-based couple and their two children by architect David Lake of San Antonio's Lake|Flato Architects and L.A. interior designer Madeline Stuart falls into the latter category. In form, materials, and spirit the house defers to its magnificent 1,200-acre site near Bozeman, at the juncture of unspoiled prairie grasslands and the riparian valley of the Gallatin River. This is a structure that accedes to the imperatives of topography and climate—a place shaped by nature.

"Our motto for this project was 'Rough and ready,'" Lake says. "The design is seriously practical, easy to heat and cool, with nothing to paint or fret over. It's essentially a simple barn, with open living, kitchen, and dining zones bracketed by spacious porches. There's nothing precious about it."

Unlike the sprawling estates that have cropped up here in recent decades, the retreat measures a relatively modest 4,000 square feet. Sited alongside a meandering stream that feeds into a spring lake, it





**Clockwise from above left:** Vintage Lightolier pendants are paired with a custom-made walnut table and circa-1960 teak-and-leather chairs by Hans J. Wegner in the dining room. Lake | Flato designed the kitchen's cabinetry, steel hood, and island; the range and refrigerator are by Viking, and the stools are by BDDW. Furnishing the porch are a sofa, low table, and armchairs, all by Stuart.

treads lightly on the land; in fact parts of the house—namely the laundry and mechanical spaces and the bedroom wing—are tucked into the hillside, with sod roofs that have the added benefits of thermal tempering and architectural camouflage.

"We got engaged when we were fly-fishing in Montana, and we fished on our honeymoon, too," explains the wife. "This land means a lot to us."

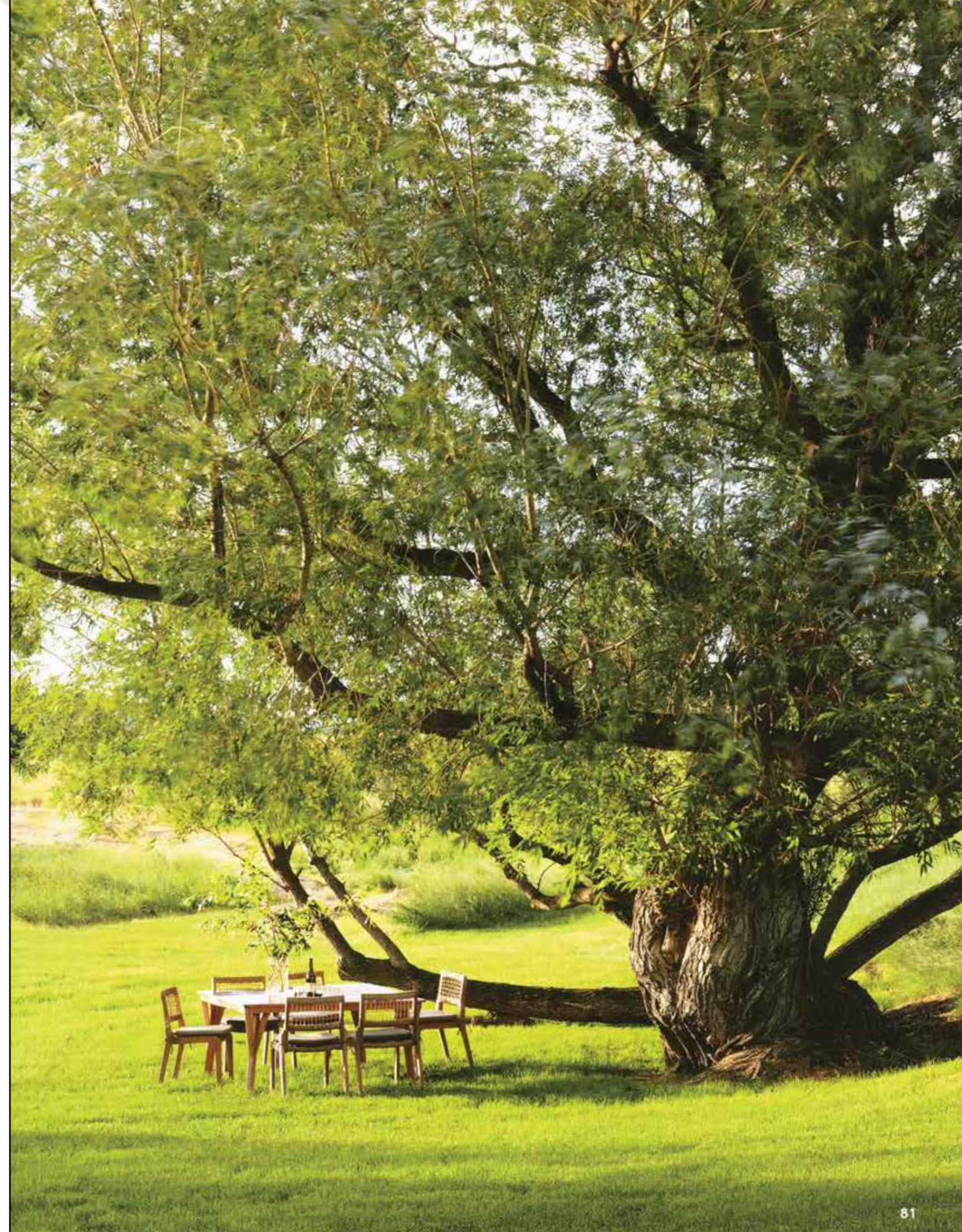
The narrow spectrum of construction materials was selected by the Lake | Flato team for maximum durability and appropriateness with the prairie surroundings. (At the clients' request the dwelling remains largely hidden from the county road.) Board-formed, poured-in-place concrete retaining walls are joined by polished-concrete floors, Douglas-fir plywood millwork, and a visible superstructure of steel. Sliding glass doors as well as screen doors wrap the perimeter, allowing permeable connections between indoors and out that bolster the familial experience of living in nature. In the winter months massive rolling gates of weathered steel close up parts of the

structure and work in tandem with the sod roofs to provide much-needed insulation.

"The sun is relentless in the summer, and the winters are pretty brutal," Lake says. "We designed the house to adapt to the weather—you feel comfortable and sheltered from the elements but never cut off."

Stuart's decorative scheme, one that includes an array of classic midcentury

furnishings by Hans J. Wegner, Verner Panton, Eero Saarinen, and others, would hardly seem to adhere to the rough-and-ready dictum. But she insists that pedigree and practicality are not incompatible. "The first things we bought were the Sergio Rodrigues leather lounge chairs, which set the tone for the whole house," she says. "They're gutsy, handsome, and incredibly







**Clockwise from top left:** The master suite's custom-made platform bed has a woven-leather headboard. A vintage Mathieu Matégot bench in the master bath; the shower fittings are by Waterworks, and the floor tile is by Solistone. Another view of the master bath, whose mirror and double vanity were designed by Lake|Flato.

locally of reclaimed barn wood. Nevertheless, Stuart's cultivated interiors would still not qualify as most people's idea of rustic.

"A lot of the choices are unusual for this part of the country," she admits. "But that doesn't mean the design is less true to the spirit of the place than the predictable plaids-and-antlers type of decorating. This is a hardworking house. The mudroom actually gets muddy."

Unlike the expansive communal areas, the bedroom wing, linked to the main structure by way of a loggia, feels a bit cloistered under its sod roof. Consistent with the overall architecture, the sleeping

quarters are rugged compositions of concrete and timber framing, softened by vintage Moroccan rugs and pony-skin carpets. Both of the children's bedrooms are outfitted with bunks to accommodate guests, of which there are many.

"This is a summer camp for our family and friends. The bedrooms didn't need to be big, because we basically spend all our time outdoors," says the wife, who is an avid equestrian as well as a fisherman. "That's what drove the design. We thought, Why not make the entire house a kind of porch? All the rooms flow into one another, and everything flows outside. We've got dogs, kids, dirty cowboy boots here—it's heaven." □



Playing with contrast on the porch, Stuart juxtaposed a stone-top table with a pair of midcentury Italian rope-and-walnut folding stools from Lawson-Fenning. The sofa has seat and back cushions of a Great Outdoors fabric by Holly Hunt; the vintage floor lamp is from JF Chen.





In a quiet corner of the porch, where sliding doors bridge inside and out, vintage rope chairs from the Collection encircle an ebonized wood table. **Opposite:** A magisterial willow shelters a teak table and chairs.



Sliding glass doors and slot windows keep the master bedroom feeling close to nature. The curtains are made of linen; the leather armchair, from Galerie Half, is a circa-1961 design by Arne Norell, and the carpet is a pieced cowhide from Lawson-Fenning.