

LITTLE HOUSE IN THE VALLEY

A durable materials palette helps the house withstand Mazama's harsh weather, while expanses of windows offer a seamless connection to the outdoors.



A contemporary ski cabin shines bright in Mazama.

By Angela Cabotaje

Alpine meadows bristle with scrub brush and pine for miles, yielding eventually to the Okanogan and its thick carpet of trees. Sun bakes the land one season; snow grips it the next. On the horizon, the Cascades peak and plunge in a commanding, jagged display. This is Mazama—a remote town tucked in the north corner of the Methow Valley—and it's here where Anne Theisen, her husband, Adam, and their two children have built a home. The family lives most of the year in a 1920s Ballard Tudor but regularly treks across the mountains to ski, bike, and hike the valley's wilds. "We'd always been looking for a place over here," Adam says, "because we loved it." →

In December 2011, a five-acre lot unexpectedly went up for sale, and they pounced. The first person they called was friend and architect Tim Hammer. That evening, over dinner, the couple and the Cast Architecture principal chatted about what it would take to build a vacation home on the site. By spring 2012, the crew was breaking ground.

"Our original vision was everyone's vision: a little bit crazy because you don't really know what you want," Adam says. "[Hammer] found out what we wanted, not what we said we wanted."

What they wanted, it turns out, was a base camp for year-round adventure. The active young family needed a home with great flow between indoors and out, while other essentials included enough space to comfortably fit up to two families (they often vacation with friends) and a minimal-maintenance, ultradurable design (something "totally bomb proof," Hammer quips).

Though the house is admittedly a smidge shy of bomb proof, it's built to withstand the valley's harsh freeze-thaw cycle. Weathered Cor-Ten steel wraps around the exterior, while a protective concrete stem wall shields



(Top) Owner Anne Theisen picked out the industrial screw-top bar stools and contemporary chandelier as counterparts to the home's steel walls and concrete floors.

(Bottom) When they're not outside, the kids spend most of their time holed up in the bunk room. Winthrop-based Woras Woodworking built all the casework out of durable maple Europly.



the base from snowdrifts. Even the windows, which are framed in aluminum instead of water-damage-prone wood, were chosen with the weather in mind.

"There's basically zero exposed wood on the exterior of the house," Hammer says. "Part of it is durability, but another advantage is that it's good for being in a region that's known for fires."

Interior materials follow the same no-maintenance decree. Hot-rolled steel and impact-resistant fiber cement swathe the walls instead of the usual drywall, which is susceptible to dings and scuff marks. Poured-concrete floors brave everything from boots to bikes, while heavy-duty composite aluminum ceiling panels in high-gloss white never need to be painted.

In the bedrooms, custom built-ins make the most of every square inch. Modern platform beds preserve precious floor space by tucking drawers underneath, while bunks for the kids mimic a ship's berth, complete with porthole cutouts and a storage shelf at the foot of each bed.

For the hub of the home, where everyone congregates in the evening, Hammer laid out an open great room to facilitate easy entertaining. Conversation flows between the kitchen and the living area, where a sectional and wood-burning stove create a cozy hangout. A long dining table on wheels can be rolled out to the covered patio for an alfresco meal. And, since the entire point of this vacation home is to get out, sliding glass doors on opposite sides of the great room make for a quick escape.

"When we're here, even in the winter, we're outside a lot," Adam says. "The kids are biking or skiing or playing in the river. The house really makes it easy to get out." And as for how the homeowners plan to thank Hammer—it's safe to say that the architect has been invited to visit. ♦

Resources

- Architecture** Cast Architecture, 206-256-9886; castarchitecture.com
- Contractor** Lost River Construction, 509-322-4115; losriverconstruction.com
- Casework** Woras Woodworking, 509-429-9412; woraswoodworking.com
- Steelwork** Alpine Welding, 509-997-4766
- Dining table** Joe Burmeister, 206-850-4687

- Concrete** Five Star Concrete, 509-997-9364
- Structural Engineering** Stoney Point Engineering, 425-644-9500; stoneypointengineering.com
- Landscaping** Windy Valley Landscaping, 509-773-1090; windyvalleylandscaping.com