

JACKSON HOLE & TETON VALLEY EDITION

2008

DCD | HOME

THE DESIGN, CONSTRUCTION & DECOR RESOURCE

VOL II

\$4.95 U.S.



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There really is more to designing a house than gathering glossy magazine images. There's a process that takes place and evolves to create the end product. It's getting to the end - the design process - that Jackson Hole architect Larry Berlin, and many of his clients, enjoy most of all.



BERLIN

An Architect's Guide to the Design Process

by Martha Netherton

It starts like this:

The client comes in and starts leafing through Berlin's portfolio. Kind of like the naysayer in an art exhibit, they'll say, "Nope, that's not it," and "This isn't it, either." Eventually, Berlin suggests that they're not going to find what they're looking for in his portfolio.

"Why not?" they demand.

Berlin explains: "It hasn't been designed yet."

That's when the magazine images come out, all warm and inviting. Usually there's an interior shot of a living room with a massive stone fireplace, detailed windows showcasing a panoramic view, the golden glow of lights reflected off the winter snow, massive beamed ceilings and imported fabric on the furniture.

"What about that image do you like?" Berlin inquires. After some prompting, it might boil down to the fabric on the chairs. Berlin isn't fazed. He knows there's more to the underlying desire than just fabric. Now, the process is starting to unfold.

"It's kind of trying to define what it is they really like," he says. "If you listen, you'll soon understand it's the warmth, the color, the texture or the space that they're really seeing. They're usually suggesting they want a more cozy, intimate space."

Clients are typically educated, savvy and confident about their desires. Their ideas sometimes may be far-fetched, but the ideas themselves deserve the architect's attention in order to obtain the desired result. That's when Berlin starts to brainstorm with the client to find a meeting of the minds and a workable solution that will bring the vision to life.

"The people I work with know what they want, and I don't try to convince them otherwise," Berlin says. "They like the process sometimes even more than the product, but having them happy is the coolest thing I do."

Berlin's creative muscle tends to respond more favorably to clients who like intimacy and comfort in a home designed to maximize the views. The proportion of footprint to ceiling is a reasonable height, the space is designed to be used and inviting and its occupants are the kind who will gain comfort in an exposed roof supported by the strength of columns and beams.

"What really interests me is what makes a client happy," Berlin says. "Is it the space, is it the imagery of the house, the context of the site, the light, the view, the flow of space or the color?" he asks. "Why do they like some space over another space? Why do they like some houses over other ones?"

This is how the process continues to evolve.

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Berlin will then challenge the homeowner to look beyond, literally, to the trees, and then think about how each differing view should be appropriately showcased. The whole abstract composition is what Berlin describes as “the subtle thing people enjoy when they walk through a house.”

Will the windows be centered or off-center? What size will they be? Will they follow the roof line? These are the things that define what kind of character the house will have. A “pop-and-flash” ka-boom when you enter the front door? Maybe the lot doesn’t have a view of the Grand



Teton. There are plenty of ways to frame a small grove of aspen for a picture-postcard Wyoming view.

Key to achieving the vision, Berlin notes, is the rise and fall of the sun, which determines the light. “Where is the light coming from and does it cast shadows?” Berlin questions. “Without light, you can’t define the home.”

Creating a home, shaping its character and giving it a personality that reflects the owner’s quirks, views and vision are what it’s all about. Berlin’s been at it for more than 30 years. His own home is a reflection of the ideas that have manifested during that time and reveals a unique blend of traditional and contemporary architecture that he describes as “likeable modernism.”

It’s got that warm-and-fuzzy feeling to it. Berlin likes to host parties and invite those who might fall into the “conservative” category because they’re usually surprised he was able to blend two different types of architecture so well. It’s not dark and it’s not stark.

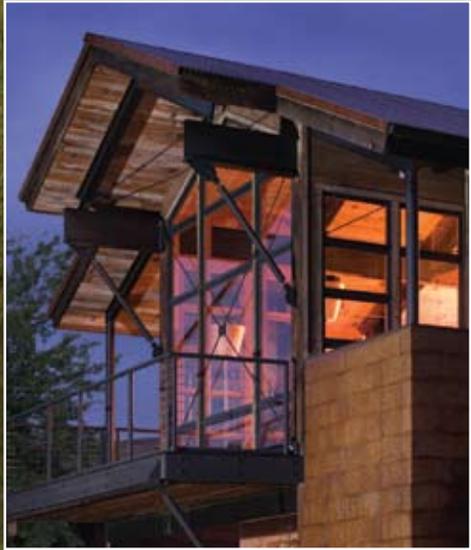
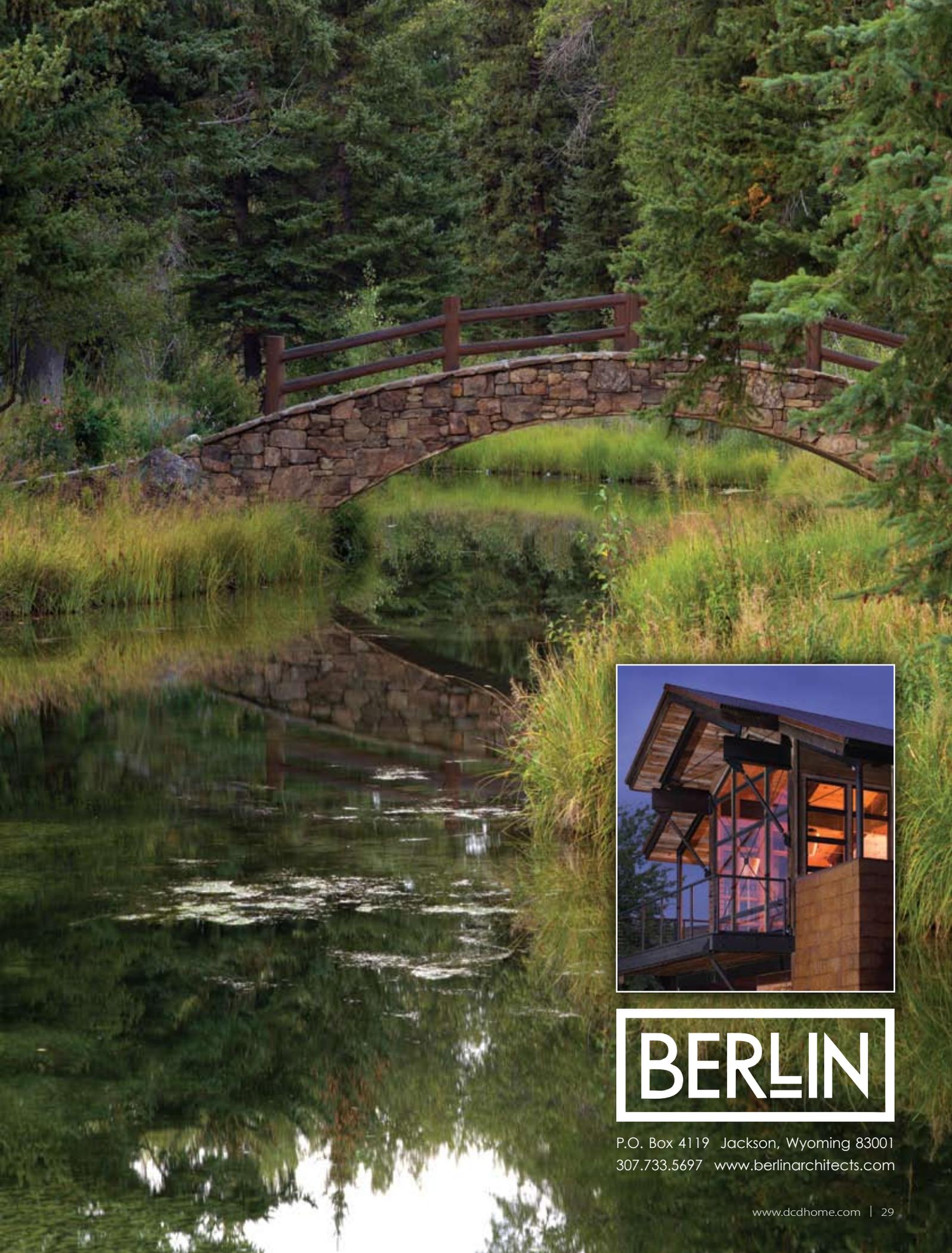


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“I think modernism has been given a bad rap,” Berlin says. “Some clients like a sense of tradition but they want clean, simple forms and a lot of clarity, you know, with gabled roofs and not the weird stuff.”

He might be onto something. He’s got people - mostly younger couples - intrigued enough that they actually stop by his home to inquire further.

Be they young or old, ostentatious or demure, Berlin will continue to focus on the design process as he sees it - looking for what it is that makes people happy in their environment.



BERLIN

P.O. Box 4119 Jackson, Wyoming 83001
307.733.5697 www.berlinarchitects.com