

THE WEST'S Best Architects

By Melissa Larsen, Ryan Lorenzo, Hayley Mitchell and Stephanie Riel

From cutting-edge contemporary abodes to rugged-but-regal residences, the West is peppered with superior design—thanks in part to these 10 top architectural firms. Read on to learn about our favorite architects making their mark in their home states—and abroad.

RKD Architects

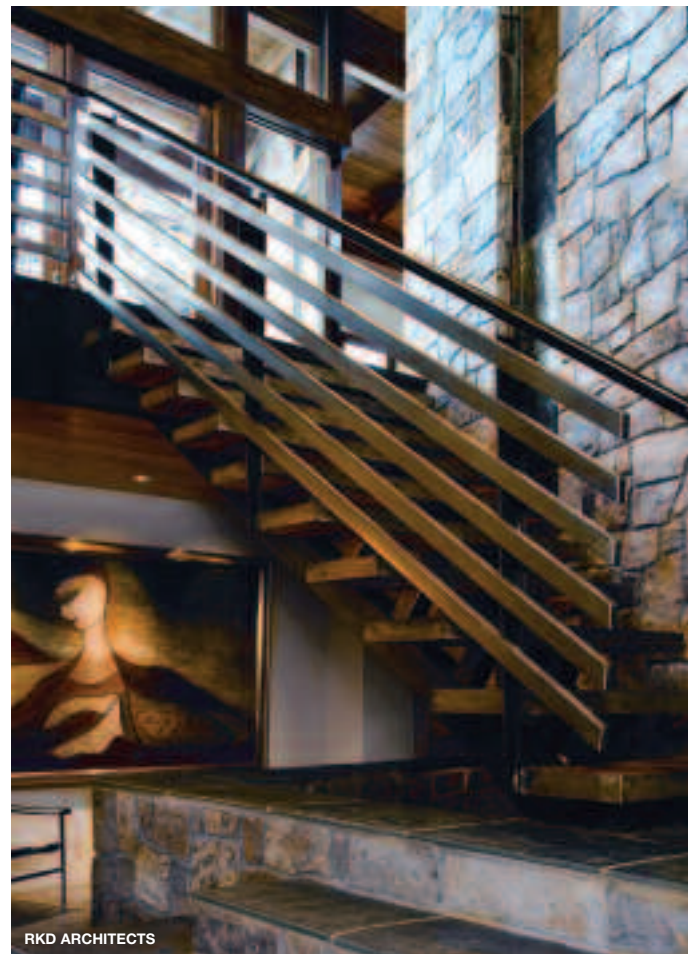
Jack Snow, who founded Colorado's RKD Architects 19 years ago with his wife Sally Rich Brainerd, isn't one for labels when it comes to his jaw-dropping designs. "I keep trying not to call it a style," he says. "The [projects] we're most proud of are sculptural. It keeps falling into categories like 'contemporary Western mountain.' I hope we don't have [a style] because each project demands something different, a different response."

One thing is for certain, though, when it comes to RKD's varied projects that span from Minnesota to Montana: each residence or commercial building acts as an extension of the landscape. For example, the Waterstone residence, located in Snow's home state, is a stunning medley of natural-inspired materials like stone, wood, patinaed copper and weathered steel. "We have been pretty lucky that we have bounced around different resort areas that tend to have spectacular sights and environments," Snow says. **866.480.3071, www.rkdarch.com. —M.L.**

HOME BASE: Edwards, Colo.

WHAT'S NEXT: Hopefully designing museums and perhaps a project or two in the Grand Canyon state. "Arizona has such awesome landscapes," he says.

BEST PART OF THE JOB: "It is a creative process—a collaborative creative process, not just within the office but with the client. We often end up being really good friends with the client. And more and more people are coming to us for what we do. We aren't trying to sell our weird architecture to clients; they already know what we do and what we can do."



RKD ARCHITECTS

John Gilmer Architects

Most people know what they want to do for a living upon graduating college. Palm Springs architect and interior designer John Gilmer knew before the age of five, after witnessing the building of his childhood home in Tennessee. Since starting his own firm in 2003, John Gilmer Architects, he has worked from coast to coast, designing high-end homes, apartments and retail spaces for luxury clothing brands Bobby Jones and Hickey Freeman.

To inspire his incredibly versatile designs, which range from clean-lined, contemporary abodes to shingle-and-stone mountain dwellings, Gilmer says he gains insight and ideas from the past. “I have a very strong interest in historic styles and architecture,” he says. “I sit on the board of the Palm Springs Historic Sites Preservation board. I just [returned] from two weeks in Ireland doing a palladium house tour. I look to classical precedence—how, through history, people have responded to similar conditions.” With his exceptional work scattered across the continent (including Hawaii, Vancouver and Nevada), we’re confident future generations of architects will be using Gilmer as their example of excellence. 760.327.7017, www.johngilmer.com. —M.L.

HOME BASE: Palm Springs, Calif.

WHAT’S NEXT: Finishing up a three-and-a-half year residential project in North Carolina; converting a 7,000-sq.-ft. home into a reception building at a new Palm Springs resort.

DESIGN STRENGTHS: “We offer full-service architect and interior design services. My strength is that I approach each new project from the point of view from both the architect and interior designer, so I constantly [look at] how a room will be used, how rooms are furnished, what makes them livable.”

Backen Gillam Architects

California-based architects Howard Backen and James Gillam are behind some of the West’s most jaw-dropping dwellings and hospitality projects (like Esperanza Resort in Cabo San Lucas—see page 56, Solage Calistoga and Santa Monica’s Shutters on the Beach, to name a few). However, Gillam also counts a duo of wineries among his favorite undertakings. “The two major winery projects we’re proud of are the ones we did for William Harlan in Napa including the new Napa Valley Reserve, which is a wine club,” he says. “And we also [did] Dana Winery, [which has a restored ruin at the heart of it]. The sense of new and old in that project is particularly beautiful.”

Regardless of the type of project, Backen and Gillam aim to bring a sense of “transparency” to their work. “In other words, the relationship of the interior to the exterior, and the way we open and close our

buildings with large openings,” Gillam explains. Backen Gillam’s use of natural materials, like stone and wood, also draw the outdoors in—just as the firm’s award-winning designs undoubtedly draw admiring stares from passersby. 415.289.3860 (Sausalito office), 707.967.1920 (St. Helena office), www.bgarch.com. —M.L.

HOME BASE: Sausalito, Calif.; St. Helena, Calif.

WHAT’S NEXT: A winery in Tuscany; consulting on a clubhouse project in Shanghai.

FAVORITE PART OF THE JOB: “Watching your ideas become reality. It makes your job rewarding and is really the stimulus to keep going and keep experimenting.”

Hayes Studio

Growing up in the suburbs of Chicago, Cathy Hayes, principal of Hayes Studio became inspired by her neighborhood. Surrounded by architecture designed by Frank Lloyd Wright and other exceptional minds, she cultivated a childhood interest into her passion. Hayes, who has worked as an architect since the 1980’s, opened her own firm in Phoenix, Ariz. in 1992 and an interiors studio a year later.

Hayes’s goals ultimately revolve around creating “durable, beautiful design solutions that are completely unique for each client.” She makes a point to design sensitive to site and conditions, implementing green materials and building components to fit the client’s needs. “Our aesthetic [style] is rooted in creating spaces that have pleasing proportions,” Hayes says. “We use regional materials, draw from the textures and colors of the surrounding environment and stay very current with using sustainable materials and building systems.”

Hayes, who has projects throughout the West and Midwest, pulls inspiration from the people and places around her and finds that “working hard and playing often” and “resting to renew and recharge” promotes creativity. She also makes a point to travel as much as possible, exposing her senses to new and old global design, and absorbing information to tailor to her clients’ unique desires. 602.840.2553, www.hayesstudio.com. —S.R.

HOME BASE: Phoenix, Ariz.

WHAT’S NEXT: A small community project in Phoenix, which follows models for sustainable community development. It will have a restaurant, farmers’ market, neighborhood grocery, several small homes and office space. “It’s sort of a mini-core for the neighborhood,” Hayes says.

THE PHILOSOPHY: “Believe in the gifts I have been given, believe in the gifts other people have been given and work together to create the most beautiful, functional and enriching environments we can.”



PHOTOGRAPHED BY PETER AARON AT ESTO



PHOTOGRAPHED BY ERHARD PEIFFER

BACKEN GILLAM ARCHITECTS



HAYES STUDIO

Peterson Architecture & Associates

President of Peterson Architecture & Associates, LLC., Scottsdale-based architect Erik Peterson's résumé includes gorgeous commercial buildings, stunning resorts and some of the most lavish homes in Arizona. Currently, he is designing The Ritz-Carlton Residences, Paradise Valley. Beyond Arizona and into La Quinta, Calif., he just put the finishing touches on the clubhouse at PGA West Stadium Course, the course that hosted the 2009 Bob Hope Chrysler Classic.

Sure, he carries a thick portfolio, but his style is simple: create a building that comes naturally from the surrounding environment and does not dominate the scene—a principle he learned from Frank Lloyd Wright and developed with his mentor Bing Hu. When he's not crafting eye-catching structures, he enjoys the flawless weaving of symphony, singing and dance from opera music. Similar to opera, in architecture there are many components: the client's needs, the surrounding site and the construction. "All of these pieces that come together in the creation of the architecture are the ultimate of what we do," says Peterson. "When it all comes together seamlessly and perfect, I think it's the greatest experience and greatest profession." www.peterson-architecture.com. —*R.L.*

HOME BASE: Scottsdale, Ariz.

WHAT'S NEXT: Peterson plans to create luxurious resorts and properties in Texas and throughout California, Idaho and Hawaii.

THE PHILOSOPHY: "Our goal is to make [building a home] a fun process," says Peterson. "Our clients are coming to us with the dreams they have had. We're just helping create that."

Bart Prince

When you look at Bart Prince's incredibly unique work, seen throughout California, New Mexico and other Western states, the only commonality is that every project is different. "I create individual works for individual sites and clients, so I start over each time," Prince says. Does he at least have a signature in these masterpieces of residential and commercial architecture? "Hopefully not," he says. "If, for example, someone sees a curve in one building and a curve in another, they might think 'oh, so that's what you do.' But I think what carries through the most is that each one is different from the others. I'm not interested in having a signature."

Learning from the best, Prince worked with famed American architect Bruce Goff in the 70's, and upon Goff's death in 1982, he completed Goff's Pavilion for Japanese Art at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art. Prince has fashioned homes for savvy clients who have also owned or commissioned Frank Lloyd Wright buildings in past. (His award-winning Price house in California and the Whiting residence in Idaho are examples.) "I'm certainly inspired by people

like Frank Lloyd Wright and others who have worked before me, but I'm not interested in imitating them; I'm interested in bringing that type of energy to what I'm doing." 505.256.1961, www.bartprince.com. —*H.M.*

HOME BASE: Albuquerque, N.M.

WHAT'S NEXT: A private residential compound in Colorado that will include a series of buildings for multiple families.

CLIENT RELATIONSHIP: "I'm trying to solve their problem. If they come in and say 'we need something that expresses our life,' that's what I'm interested in doing. You're doing something that [the client] would do themselves if they were able to, if they were architects."

Lamoureux Architect Incorporated

In the last 21 years, Vancouver's Lamoureux Architect Incorporated has designed more than 50 of the West's most creative custom abodes. After completing his master's degree at Harvard University, Brad Lamoureux founded his firm in 1987, and the Canadian company's projects have since popped up in Quebec, Maui and everywhere in between.

While the locales of his work are varied, so are the design styles. "The work in my office is as diverse as our clients and the milieu that we build in," Lamoureux says. "We bridge the space between our clients' desires and the action needed to achieve those desires. This means that for our office, style is not prescriptive." Lamoureux's favorite project happens to be one he is currently working on: a home in the foothills near Calgary, Alberta. "The form and character of this project is entirely shaped by an understanding of the climate and nature of this very special place," he says.

Apart from climate and nature, which encouraged his aforementioned design, Lamoureux cites history, travel and books—on all subjects—as his inspirations. "Inspirational sources are everywhere if one's eyes are wide open, and there is a willingness to explore and take chances in the creative process with clients and the possibilities that architecture can present." 604.925.5170, www.lamoureuxarchitect.ca. —*M.L.*

HOME BASE: West Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada

WHAT'S NEXT: A residential project in Whistler for London-based clients. "I feel that these clients will allow us to realize, perhaps, our very best project to date on an absolutely amazing mountain property."

CHILDHOOD MEMORY: "My first hundred structures were created with Lego and Kenner. I graduated to backyard tree house structures with real wood and nails after that. After reading an article about the architect Arthur Erickson when I was 15 years old, I can remember deciding that architecture would be my life's work."



PHOTOGRAPHED BY PAM SINGLETON

PETERSON ARCHITECTURE & ASSOCIATES



PHOTOGRAPH AT FAR RIGHT BY KEVIN MILLER PHOTOGRAPHY

BART PRINCE



LAMOUREUX ARCHITECT INCORPORATED

Reid Smith Architects

As a teenager in Jackson Hole, Wyo., Reid Smith's outlook on houses changed: "I had this realization," he says. "I saw buildings not as functional structures, but as something that created an emotional response." What prompted this insight? A family friend had just finished building his parent's home.

After working on his carpentry skills with the company that built his family's home, Smith opened his own firm in 2003, Reid Smith Architects. Since then, Smith's projects, which range from Western contemporary residences to more rugged, reclaimed structures, have popped up in developments that have graced the pages of *Estates West Magazine*, including Yellowstone Club. "In Montana, where most of our work is, there is almost too much to take advantage of," Smith says. "How do you prioritize what you want to see? The sites, views and environments here are what really inspire some of my initial thoughts and layouts."

Smith is so passionate about scenery, in fact, that his design wish list includes a modern, minimalistic guest house so "simple that it's more about the landscape than structure." 406.587.2597, www.reidsmitharchitects.com. —*M.L.*

HOME BASE: Bozeman, Mont.

WHAT'S NEXT: A Western contemporary residence in Moonlight Basin; a LEED-certified commercial building that is "creating a lot of excitement in the area."

FAVORITE PROJECT: "The Ledges. I love the materials we are using out west, and the ruggedness of mountain architecture: the timbers, stone and natural woods. This [lot] has simplicity in design and contemporary elements. It doesn't compete too much with the landscape and takes advantage of the views."

Stuart Silk Architects

Though many people are just now discovering the importance of "going green," Seattle-based architect Stuart Silk, of Stuart Silk Architects, has been a proponent of eco-friendly design since he was a grad student. "I focused a lot on green architecture, sustainability and energy conservation," Silk says. "I have always had an active interest. We are trying to meld high-level design with sustainability—that is very much a mission of ours. It is really part of the culture of the firm." In fact, Silk created one of the first residences, named Grand Ridge, to be rated five stars by the King/Snohomish County Built Green program. (His planet-friendly projects can be found along the West Coast, from California to Washington, while his other architectural work peppers such diverse areas as China, Canada and Hawaii.)

Prior, though, to even learning the term "green design," it was Silk's parents who instilled in him a fondness for architecture. His mother was a fine arts aficionado while his father worked as a photojournalist. "He had an artistic gene, and I think that I inherited that gene," says Silk, who founded his firm more than 25 years ago. After flipping through his expansive project portfolio, we'd have to agree. 206.728.9500, www.stuartsilk.com. —*M.L.*

HOME BASE: Seattle, Wash.

WHAT'S NEXT: Working on nine villas in Shanghai. "We're blessed to have a number of interesting projects in interesting locations."

DESIGN STYLE: "Style is a result of a bunch of factors. The first factor is client-driven—what is the client interested in? The second factor is location, whether it is in a city or out in the country. [The third factor is] environmental concerns and, finally, budget. All those factors meld together and push us toward a certain direction and become a style for that particular project."

Sorensen Architects

While it isn't unusual for most little boys to construct forts and create Lego towers, for Malibu architect Chris Sorensen, owner and principal of Sorensen Architects, this was a sign of things to come. "Ever since I was a little kid, I was building forts and tree houses, and I'd rearrange the furniture in my room every month," he says. "I built tents in my room and [played with] Lincoln logs and Legos."

Sorensen's first jobs as a teen even included working at a hardware store and for a framing contractor—all of which helped him on the road to his current career. Perhaps his most impressive résumé excerpt, though, is his internship with famed Arcosanti architect, Paulo Soleri.

With his eight-year-old firm, Sorensen has constructed dwellings (in his striking "Zen minimalist" style) throughout California's most lush locales, including Malibu, Beverly Hills and Hollywood. Other signatures of Sorensen's design: the use of eco-conscious materials and a sensitivity to the surrounding environment. "It is a passion of mine to revolutionize the way we live on the planet earth," he says. 310.456.1860, www.sorensenarchitects.com. —*M.L.*

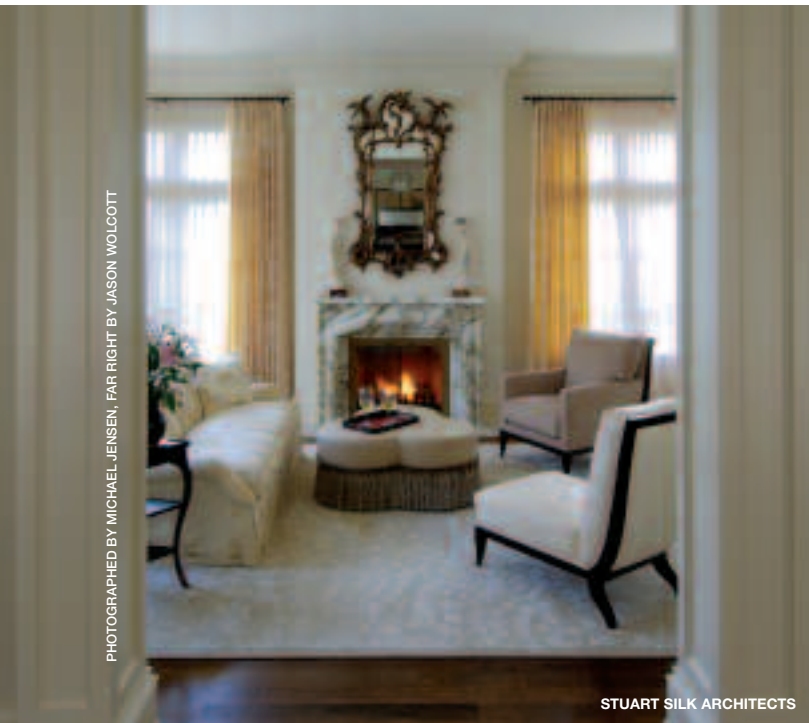
HOME BASE: Malibu, Calif.

WHAT'S NEXT: Designing and building his own home in Topanga, Calif.

IMPORTANCE OF GREEN DESIGN: "It is important to work with the earth and nature: less energy, less money, healthier spaces, less impact on the earth." **EW**



REID SMITH ARCHITECTS



PHOTOGRAPHED BY MICHAEL JENSEN, FAR RIGHT BY JASON WOLCOTT

STUART SILK ARCHITECTS



SORENSEN ARCHITECTS