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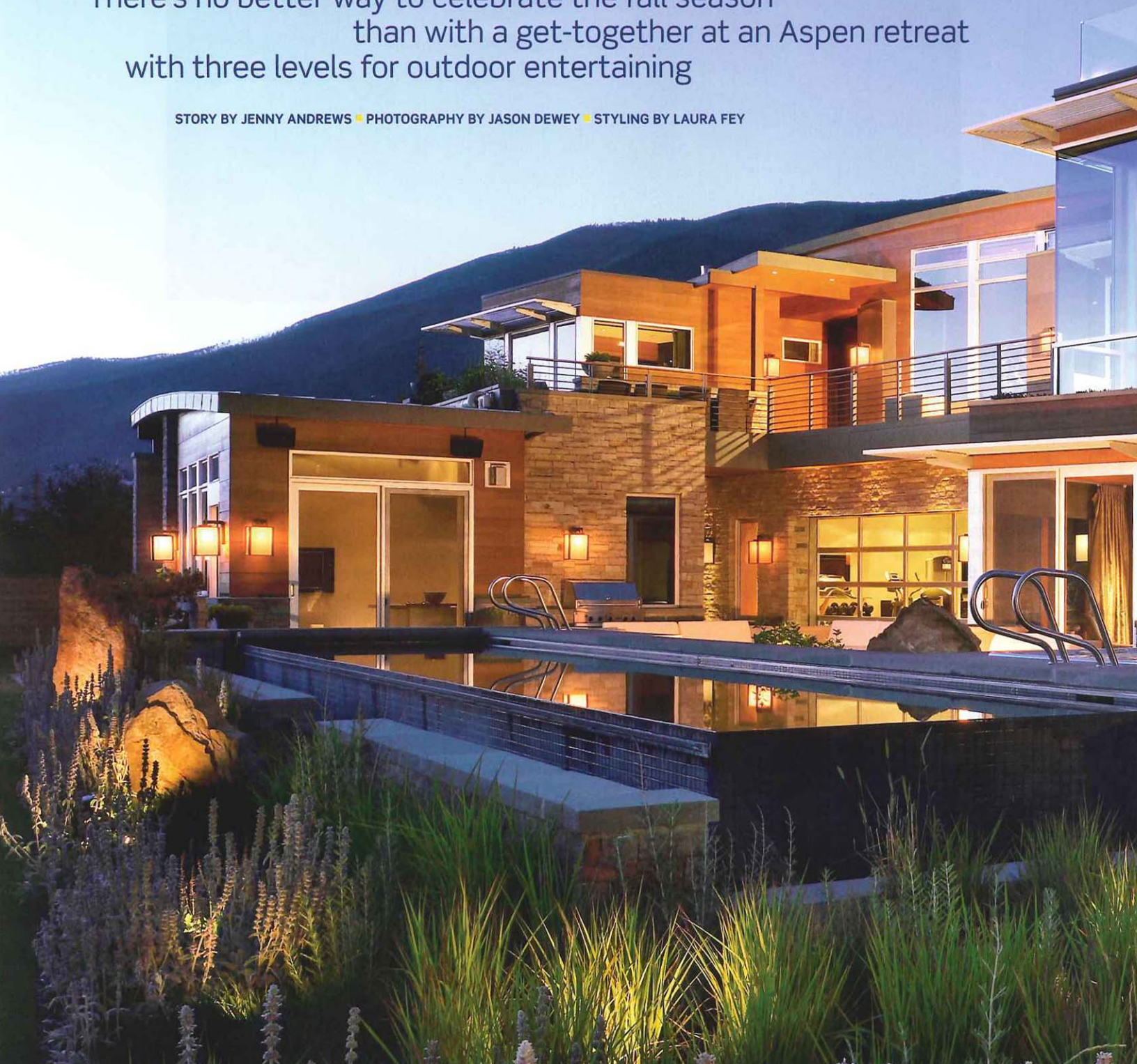
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Peak PERFORMANCE

There's no better way to celebrate the fall season
than with a get-together at an Aspen retreat
with three levels for outdoor entertaining

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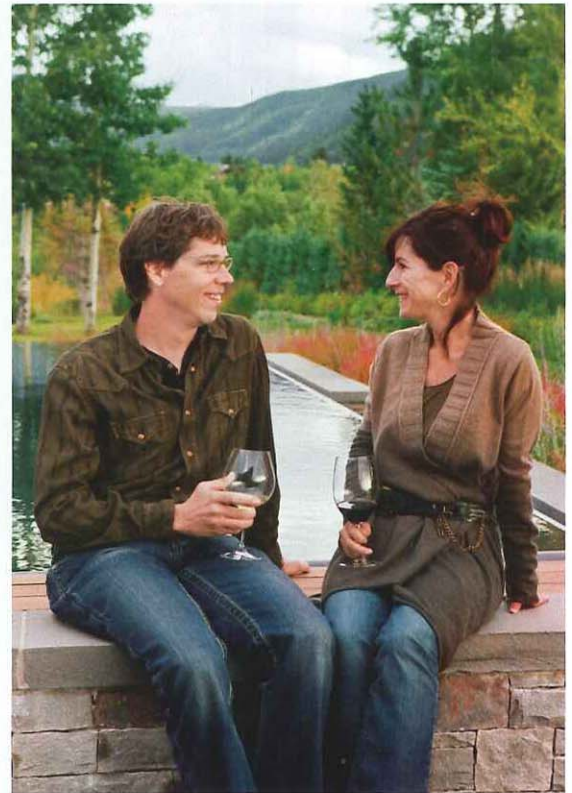
Fitting snugly against Smuggler Mountain in Aspen, this four-level (one is underground) contemporary home has plenty of outdoor entertaining options and an earthy, chic garden designed by landscape-architecture firm Bluegreen.



When the snow starts to fall, the city of Aspen is swarmed by seasonal residents and tourists, skis in hand, eager to hit the slopes. But a lucky number of residents spend the entire year in this earthy Colorado burg, enjoying crisp springs, balmy summers and golden falls as well. And autumn is one of the best times to wrap yourself in Aspen, with the yellow foliage of the aspen trees glittering on the hill-sides (there's good reason for the town's name).

For Alain Degraeve, a native of Belgium, what started as a summer vacation in 1995 turned permanent when the alpine surroundings bewitched him into leaving his home in Miami. Having settled into his first Aspen house, he was planning a remodel when his next-door neighbor approached him and asked if he'd be interested in buying his place, and Degraeve saw a chance to make something special — from the ground up. So he tore down the second location and created an eco-friendly home complete with plenty of outdoor-living spaces on Smuggler Mountain, nestled in a natural area teeming with wildlife (a black bear routinely sleeps on the neighbors' roof). Though the property actually covers only a half-acre lot, the four-level building (one level is underground) seemingly has

Opposite: One of the goals for homeowner Alan Degraeve was to hide the parking area (which is beyond this wing of the house and the fence) and maintain a feeling of being in a secluded garden. **Right:** Landscape architect Sheri Sanzone (here chatting with husband Chris Bendon by the pool) was Bluegreen's principal designer on the project. **Below:** At ground level are the main garden, a sitting area, outdoor kitchen, fire pit, spa and swimming pool (where Degraeve often hosts pool parties for his young daughter and her friends).

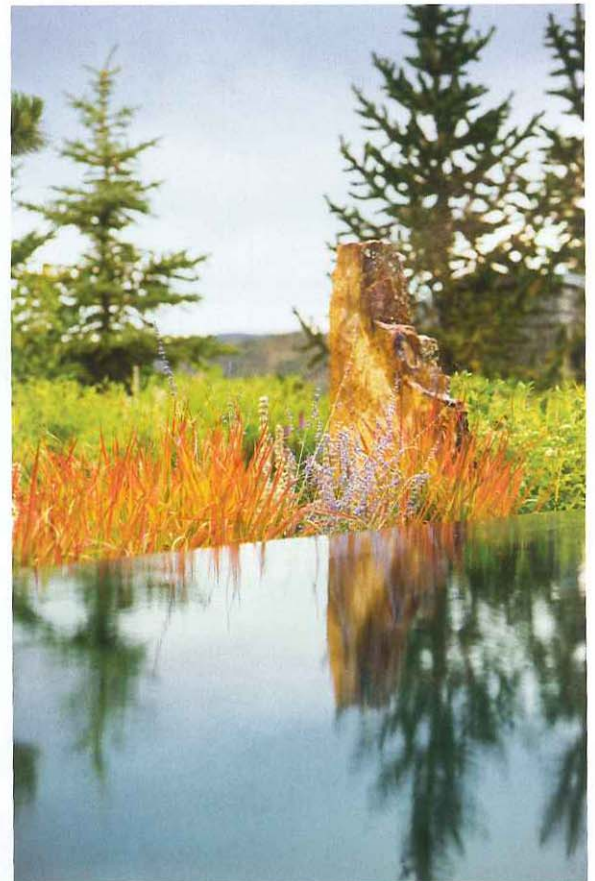




an entire mountainside for a backyard.

Degraeve's main goals were to create something contemporary with an easy flow between indoor and outdoor spaces, important for someone who loves to entertain, and with "a warm feeling all year" — a challenge in a location where snow covers the ground for eight months or more. Working with architect Bill Pollock of Zone 4 Architects (now a principal with Poss Architecture + Planning), Degraeve achieved the warmth with a savvy mix of materials, including an exterior of Spanish cedar, Oklahoma farmer's stone and aluminum, and an interior of Brazilian slate and rich-colored "noble woods" like Burmese teak, wenge and anegre from Africa, and recycled barn wood. Additionally he wanted the side of the house facing the opposite mountain to consist of banks of floor-to-ceiling sliding-glass doors to take advantage of the view and let in as much sunlight as possible, especially on winter days. The doors also allow parties to be continuous between the dining and living rooms and the decks outside.

For the outdoor spaces, Degraeve turned to principal Sheri Sanzone of the Aspen-based landscape architecture firm Bluegreen, which has a penchant for gardens with a modernist vibe and blending nature, design and local culture. Degraeve, who Sanzone says revels in the design/build process (Degraeve served as the general contractor for the whole project — house and garden), had a very specific want list, including a pool, spas, places to lounge and entertain, a play area for his daughter, and plants that were water-wise and very clean looking ("not frou-frou"). The pool needed to be more than just functional; Degraeve



Above: Starting the party with hors d'oeuvres from the grill, Degraeve (in black) chats with Ryan Hardy, executive chef at The Little Nell, a noted Aspen ski resort and restaurant. **Right:** Though functional for swimming, the pool is also an anchoring water feature in the garden, with a smooth reflective surface and a waterfall on one side. **Opposite:** Sectional chaises from Dedon are positioned beside the pool and in front of the guest wing, which doubles as a pool house. On the adjacent hillside, aspens and Western serviceberry show off their fall colors.





wanted it also to serve as a garden/architectural element. Hence it was raised above ground, faced with farmer's stone and lined with dark tiles, reflecting the surrounding landscape like a mirror (at least when Degraeve's young daughter isn't having a pool party).

For the plantings, Sanzone's goals were wild but controlled, low maintenance (a Bluegreen mantra), a limited palette but with high visual interest (paying special attention to the fall show) and groupings that were readable from two stories up. Since the architecture has such distinctive forms, Sanzone felt the beds should keep to clean geometry, and within the boundaries she wove together masses of lamb's ears, Russian sage, purple salvia, 'Kobold' blazing star, 'Moonbeam' coreopsis, sedums, blue fescue and 'Shenandoah' switch grass for contrasts and counterpoints of silver, purple, yellow and red. Hedging of yellow twig dogwood, conifers and aspens keeps all eyes on nearby Aspen Mountain and away from the neighbors down below. And where the surrounding hillside had suffered some damage from construction, Bluegreen replanted with native trees like Western serviceberry (*Amelanchier alnifolia*) and Rocky Mountain white oak (*Quercus gambelii*) and a native-grass seed mix.

Degraeve and Sanzone are also committed to being green, and both the garden and house have numerous sustainable elements, right down to the studs: a green roof, drought-tolerant plants, solar panels, recycled/reconstructed wood (termed "dimensional lumber") and ultra-efficient glass. The city of Aspen even used the

Opposite: The dining terrace on the second story overlooks the main garden and adjoins the living spaces inside the house, creating an easy indoor-outdoor flow for entertaining. For simplicity and impact even from two stories up, Sanzone used perennials like red switch grass, lamb's ears, salvia and Russian sage planted in mass and repeated. **Right:** A centerpiece of succulents in a black trough picks up the colors of the garden and the surrounding landscape. **Below:** One thing that drew Degraeve to the location was the spectacular view, with Aspen Mountain across the valley.





project as an example of how a big home can be built in an eco-friendly manner. In Aspen, even before a house is built, an energy-use calculation has to be approved by the city. Says Degraeve, “You have to jump through a lot of hoops.”

The end result, according to Degraeve, “functions really well,” pointing out: “It works just as well for a couple as for 15 people, and parties can accommodate 200 to 300 comfortably. As a multilevel house, with so many areas for people to feel comfortable in, you can fill it up as you need to.” And he has proven his point many times over, hosting charity events, dinners, children’s parties and functions for the annual Food & Wine Classic in Aspen. Tonight’s cozy gathering of friends (including Sanzone and her husband, Chris Bendon) is just another example — moving from wine and appetizers on the lower deck, to dinner on the next level and spiced cider by the fire pits. And with Aspen famous as a foodie town, who better to man the kitchen than Ryan Hardy, executive chef at The Little Nell.

“It’s totally an entertaining space in the city,” says Degraeve, “but it feels like it’s farther away, out in the country.” The smart positioning of the triple decks gives a hemispherical view (Degraeve likens it to a fishbowl), unimpeded by nearby houses or parked cars, which are left outside the gate. All you see is sky and pine-covered peaks, and if you look closely, the gondola lift working its way uphill. One of the best moments, says Degraeve, is to relax on the topmost deck, off the master bedroom, and watch fireworks flash and glimmer from across the valley. Perched in this aerie, looking out from the project that he says once consumed his thoughts 24 hours a day, it’s easy to see the rewards of year-round living in Aspen. 🍷

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Above: A fire pit on the uppermost terrace keeps away the autumn chill. **Right:** For an after-dinner cup of spiced cider, guests gather around a second fire pit on the ground level. **Opposite:** One of Degraeve’s favorite moments is sitting on the top terrace and watching the fireworks display on Aspen Mountain. As a full-time resident of this popular seasonal destination, Degraeve enjoys the region in all its seasons, from balmy springs to the snow-covered peaks of winter.

