



PRESERVING AND PERSEVERING

A VISION QUEST

Aspen designer Derek Skalko led a controversial plan to restore and expand a mid-century classic designed by Victor Lundy. Through public opposition and other challenges that lasted five years, he persevered — and the result is a unique and remarkable home.

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FOR developers, architectural preservation is a math problem, really. You can't save a civic treasure unless the financials add up. Acquisition plus renovation has to equal profit. Otherwise, the temptation is to tear a structure down, no matter how significant it may be, and build new.

And demolition was clearly one of the options for the 1972 Victor Lundy house in Aspen. No one disagreed that it was a modernist gem that ought to be protected, and that it was one of the few remaining examples of mid-century design in a mountain hamlet that was once known for them. But it was also, practically speaking, a small building on one of the most valuable residential lots in the country, and a bundle of money could be made by replacing it with a larger structure that maxed out the potential of the site. In Aspen's unstoppable housing market, changes to Lundy's masterpiece were seemingly inevitable.

But Lundy's legacy had an ally in designer Derek Skalko, and Skalko had a plan to save key elements of original place while transforming it into a property that could compete in the top tier of Aspen real estate. He wouldn't destroy the local icon, but grow it, putting the large part of an addition below street level to minimize its impact on the site.

That was back in 2014, the start of Skalko's five-year odyssey that included working with an investment group as the client, securing the deed, designing modifications, convincing the community of its benefits, winning government approval, and completing construction. None of it was easy.

A 20-foot-tall, automated sliding glass door on the east side of the Lundy House's great room eases the transition between interior spaces and the great outdoors of Aspen. The first-floor exterior lounge, complete with its own fireplace, was added as part of an expansion that quadrupled the size of the home.

"While the cost and square footage realities of the project were always critical to the dialogue and design process," said Skalko, principal of Aspen-based I Friday Design. "Our focus was always to create something really special."

Special meant honoring the work of an architect whose long career has embodied the soul of modernism — open plans, cutting-edge technology, stark volumes, and stripped-down notions of beauty — while always understanding and respecting regionalism, in this case, by using natural materials and maintaining ample connections to the outdoors. Lundy, who was born in 1923 and now

lives in Texas, may not be the best-known architect of the 20th century, but he mastered its best moves.

At 301 Lake Avenue in Aspen, originally a 2,076-square-foot, two-bedroom vacation house, Lundy employed all he knew and centered it around a great room that served as a living, kitchen, and dining area. The star attraction is the fireplace, a 30-foot long ode to function, recessed into a flat, brick wall that reaches 22 feet to the ceiling with no mantle. Perpendicular to that is another wall, a popped-out, floor-to-ceiling atrium with sliding glass doors that allow natural light to flood the space.



The rear wall of the original Lundy House was removed to allow a connection to the addition, which is two floors, one at ground level and one below. Nearly every room in the house opens to one of four patios. Other outdoor spaces include a sunken garden, a dining terrace, and an open roof with a bar and spa.





The Lundy House has a completely re-designed kitchen / dining area designed and built by Kevin Vesel, of veselbrand. All major appliances are seamlessly integrated into a tall elevation made of brushed and cross-sawn, fumed white oak. While the island is topped with a leathersed Capolavoro granite stone, the custom dining table is 14 feet long and structurally reinforced with an aircraft aluminum honeycombed core. "My goal was to update the look and functionality of the kitchen but maintain an organic, Colorado feel, close to the original intent," says Vesel.

In a rare engineering feat, Lundy utilized a "trampoline truss" system that holds the building's roof in place without the need for columns that could interrupt the flow of his expansive great room. Instead, eight thin, steel tensile rods — which are anchored to building's perimeter and meet in the middle of the ceiling — keep the roof aloft. The support structure, exposed on the interior, allows the top of the building a little movement when covered with snow. (Interesting side note: Hannskarl Bandel, an American-German structural engineer who worked with

Eero Saarinen on St. Louis' Gateway Arch, assisted with the engineering.) "Skalko and ownership chose to retain and update the home's key interior features — new, high-performance glass, a linear gas burner to make the fireplace practical, a rebuilt ceiling that replaced rotting wood on the underside while dropping the bottom surface just enough to install recessed lighting, something not in fashion when Lundy did his work. But there were significant modifications to the existing



structure, as well. The original kitchen, for example, which was set against a freestanding wall toward the rear of the original house, was moved and redesigned. That delicate task went to Denver-based kitchen designer Kevin Vesel. His main challenge: Design and build a kitchen that would function for one person or a catered event, all the while looking like a perfectly proportioned furniture piece that seamlessly coexists in the space without feeling like it detracts from the openness.

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In a great room that spreads more than 40 feet square, "The key word for me was volume," he says.

He responded with a full-featured contemporary kitchen and bar that opens to reveal its culinary prowess, or hides away to seamlessly blend as a proportionate piece of finely crafted furniture. Integrated into the tall fumed white oak millwork are refrigerators, pantries, open shelving, and a juicing/breakfast station for small appliances. Complementing the 20-foot-tall wall elevation is a 20-foot-long island, with a flush induction cooktop, downdraft from Miele, and an oversized sink. The leathered, granite countertop ties the earth tones and textures of the space together, and the glossy moss green lacquered front panels add a little hint of something special.

Additionally, the two bedrooms that were located behind that wall, in the very rear of the house, were demolished, creating a starting point for the addition, which would grow the house to 9,597 square feet.

Those alterations were enough to generate opposition in Aspen, where the development fell under the microscope of everyone from preservationists to NIMBY neighbors to public officials concerned about its impact on the street.

"This project was incredibly contentious with the community," says Skalko, the face of the redevelopment — and the punching bag for everyone who had an issue with it.

With fortitude, he won them all over.

To be fair, Skalko and the 301 Lake development team did have leverage: They could have simply torn down the place and built yet another oversized Aspen mansion. The house had no historic preservation protection, and local rules allowed both its demolition and a replacement dwelling with as much as 9,000 square feet above ground. That underlying truth was, no doubt, in the air throughout the approval process and forced naysayers to the negotiating



table. But it wasn't the primary tactic Skalko used to put his ideas forward. Instead, he argued with design.

What the investors understood was that preserving Lundy's original design was actually something they could market, an amenity that set their property apart from its MLS competitors. If the project could be done with sensitivity, it would be good for the community and good for business.

The team added a second architect into the fold, Chad Oppenheim, of Miami-based Oppenheim Architecture, who brought vast design experience as well as a national reputation to the project. Oppenheim and Skalko fine-tuned

a renovation scheme that called for disrupting only one wall of Lundy's original brick box where a two-level addition — one story above grade, one below — could be positioned.

The addition's 4,954-square-foot ground level holds a master suite with a bedroom and a study, each with its own fireplace and expanse of windows. The rooms are loaded with high-end touches such as custom furniture and shelving, window treatments that recess behind walls so they disappear when open, and a television that drops down from the ceiling.

The lower level includes new construction as well as the excavation of ground below the existing

The Lundy House has two distinct sections: the original structure, built in 1972, and the addition, completed this year. But they share similar qualities, including a minimalist, modern sensibility and plenty of light, due to sizable windows and skylights throughout. In all, the house has five bedroom suites and six full baths, plus two half baths.





A master bedroom suite was added to the first floor of the Lundy House and has two fireplaces and a television that drops from the ceiling. The house is currently for sale, custom furniture included. The master bathroom mirror is located above the sinks along a bank of windows, which ensures privacy but still lets in plenty of sunshine.



structure, bringing it to 5,003 square feet. That's ample accommodation for four bedrooms, four bathrooms, a bar, media room, gym, and a spa with a Japanese soaking tub and steam room.

Best of all, the basement has plenty of light. That's due to a key feature of the renovation, a triangular, open-air courtyard, complete with outdoor fireplace, that's submerged to sit even with the lower-level rooms. That gives the house an additional, very private patio, and brings sunshine to the interior rooms via sliding glass doors.

The addition does interrupt Lundy's original plan; what once was basically a square is now a long "L," taking its lead from the triangular shape of the lot. Hardcore preservationists may take issue with that.

But the architects took cues from Lundy wherever they could. The

addition retains the stripped-down feel that defines the house. For example, there are no baseboards; instead the walls stop a half-inch above the floors creating a delicate detail. In some ways, they may have improved upon his work. They added a garage, missing from the original; created luxury lounges off the atrium and on the roof; and installed new insulation and glass. The enlarged house, while four times bigger, uses about the same amount of energy. And, by moving the bedrooms to the new wing, they actually expanded the original great room, making it even grander, not to mention brighter thanks to the addition of a second clerestory window on the room's rebuilt rear wall.

Still, it may be Vesel's newly created dining table that steals the show. At 14 feet long with a span of 10 feet between the hand-patinaed machined steel legs, the table, which seats 10 comfortably, is

The master bedroom suite has its own den, which could also be used as another bedroom. High-performance glass windows connect the house to its natural surroundings but maintain comfortable temperatures inside year-round. The study has a built-in desk and shelving and is equipped with a full-service wet bar.



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fabricated with an aircraft aluminum honeycombed core, and integrated flush legs. "We are always engineering creative solutions that allow us to push the design boundaries for our clients" says Vesel.

For Skalko, the high-tech yet low-key approach was crucial to protecting Lundy's vision. "Our interventions, while advancing Victor's design, were meant keep the home viable for the way people live today, and hopefully for many decades to come."

That was his whole mission, in a way — preserving modern architecture while persevering from a business and community perspective.

"We had lofty goals and expectations in the beginning," Skalko says. "And five years later, I believe our team collaboration achieved something extraordinary." ■

PROJECT CREDITS

ARCHITECTURE AND INTERIOR DESIGN:

I Friday Design
Oppenheim Architects
Studio B Interiors

LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE:

Blugreen

STRUCTURAL ENGINEERS:

JJR Structural

KITCHEN DESIGN & MILLWORK:

veselbrand

ART & FURNISHINGS:

Robyn Scott Interiors

GENERAL CONTRACTOR:

Kaegbein Fine Home Building

MEP CONSULTING ENGINEERS:

Resource Engineering Group

While the enhanced Lundy House is largely underground, nearly every room on the lower level connects to the outside via a triangular patio built below grade. The lower level interior includes an area for lounging and entertaining, complete with its own bar. There's also a fitness area, steam room, massage room, and a large Japanese soaking tub. The sunken garden has a built-in snowmelt system that keeps it available for use even in winter.