

The Beauty of Imperfection

The newly handcrafted Tipple House, filled with century-old character, pays homage to Crested Butte, Colorado's mining heritage



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Architecture: Sunlit Architecture

Interior Design: Interiors with Oohs & Aahs

Construction: Marr Corp. Construction

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You might say builder/contractor Corbin Marr goes to extreme lengths to get the perfect, or rather, imperfect, materials for his custom homes. After purchasing a dilapidated miner's bunkhouse at the Gold Links Mine near Ohio City, Colorado, he sent his crew to camp out at the remote location for a month while they painstakingly dismantled the bunkhouse and categorized every piece of wood. The building yielded some 35,000 board feet of 1-inch- and 2-inch-thick boards that had been milled on site more than a century ago. "We knew from the beginning we wanted old materials for the Tipple House," says Marr. "That's really what we're best at: building new and creating old character and charm."

Marr collaborated with architect Jennifer Hartman of Sunlit Architecture and Crested Butte Mountain Resort co-owner Diane Mueller (Marr and Hartman had just completed transforming a barn into a house for the Muellers) on the extraordinary house, which reflects the rich mining traditions of the area as well as high standards for sustainable development.

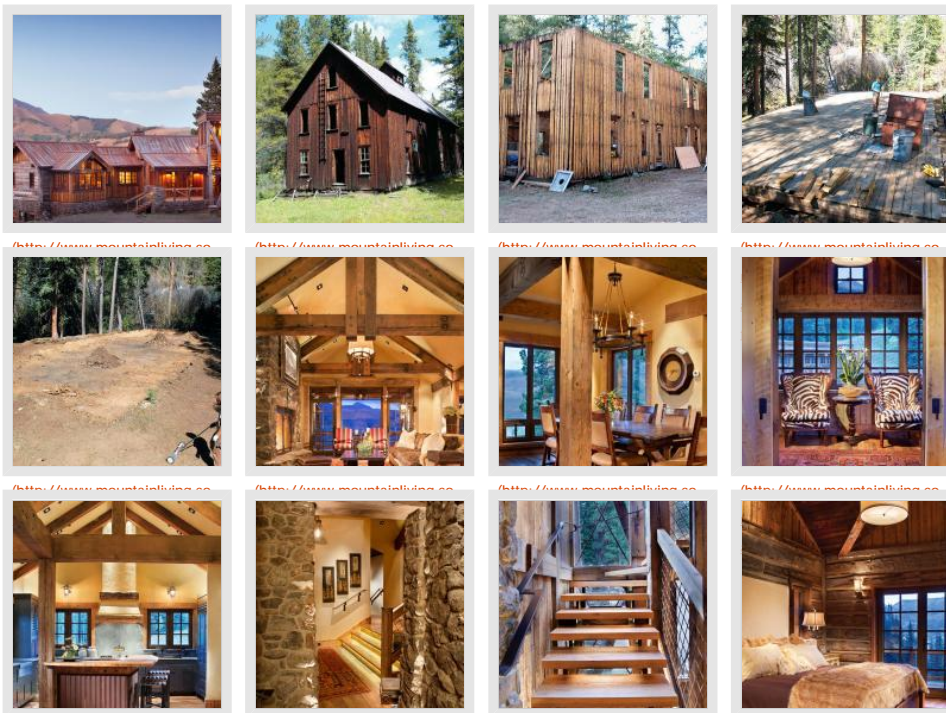
The story and the bones of the Tipple House begin with inspiration from three buildings that might have been found on the land years ago. The namesake tipple, a mining structure that would tip coal from mining cars into larger rail cars, is reinterpreted in timber, glass and steel as the cornerstone of the house. It envelops the interior staircase and offers an observatory on top with 360-degree views of mountains and forests. The master bedroom, which is separated from the main structure by a hallway and different materials palette, is crafted to look like a miner's log cabin. What might have been a storage or animal shed 100 years ago is now a

garage; the stone structure is built into the hillside with plans for a sod roof planted with wildflowers. "We designed a concept that honors our history without trying to replicate it. And then we let the materials add to the story," says Hartman.

Marr used every part of the old bunkhouse as well as 125 tons of gold-flecked granite gathered at the mine site. The native spruce and pine boards were used as is-holes, cracks, twists and all-for interior and exterior siding, doors, wainscoting and window trim. Marr and his craftspeople used challenging antique joinery methods and cuts for authenticity. The foundation and fireplace stones are stacked in historic patterns. And the rusty bunkhouse metal roof, now sealed, is used as a design element on ceilings, walls and cabinets. "The key was not to alter the material but to let it speak, to let it be what it is. That's the character. We just helped it along into a new place," Marr says. "The old materials are all about the beauty of imperfection."

Although the Tipple House looks like an old miner's cabin, what lies beneath is state-of-the-art. "We have hidden a lot of the modern things," Marr says. "The finest, most cutting-edge technology is embedded in these walls: wiring, lighting and sound systems." And, notes Hartman, "It is one of the greenest houses in the valley."

Mueller, who describes Crested Butte as a place with a colorful, expressive small-town spirit, says, "Every community has its heart and soul, where the roots are and what people value. This house helps articulate what we value in Crested Butte."



Reclaiming Character

Although reclaimed materials are often more expensive than new ones (owing to high demand and limited supply), there is nothing new that can match the unique appeal of timeworn patina and history.

Incorporating reclaimed materials into your mountain home is relatively easy to do when you're building from scratch. In this case, Marr and Hartman suggest using reclaimed wood for structural elements—think beams and trusses—and also as flooring and highlights such as wainscoting, chair rails, trim or even an address sign. Select old materials with colors and

textures that blend with new materials and layer reclaimed materials with new ones to add depth and richness. For instance, place an old wood mantel on a freshly quarried rock fireplace.

If you're improving on an existing space, it's still possible to add reclaimed materials to the mix. Group vintage items together to create a theme, such as reclaimed tile, a sink basin and wainscot in a powder room. To add authenticity, Marr and Hartman recommend doing some research to find old photographs—perhaps historic shots taken near your home's site—that you can copy and frame. Marr searched the Colorado Historical Society's database and found a historic photo of the Gold Links Mine and Mill; a large framed version now hangs in the Tipple House.

Marr acknowledges that the process of using reclaimed materials can be daunting: "This stuff is basically junk," he says. "You need to train your eye to catch the character. Look for color, texture, signs of life (carvings, bullet holes, etc.), spirit and history. What does the piece say to you?"

Mountain-Friendly Sustainability

The Tipple House is an outstanding example of environmentally responsible building, from the extensive reuse of century-old materials to the high-tech infrastructure. Here are some ways the team showed its commitment to the environment and sustainability:

- Engineered lumber for framing: Laminated Veneer Lumber (LVL) is a strong, stable and renewable resource that comes from young, fast-growing, managed forests
- Hybrid insulation system of recycled denim and spray foam
- Reclaimed wood, metal and stone building materials
- Low-voltage lighting
- Heat recovery ventilators for healthy air exchanges
- Efficient radiant in-floor heating
- Passive solar gain
- Natural materials such as American Clay pigmented plaster on the walls and a hand-rubbed beeswax finish on the wood
- Heavy-duty, energy-efficient windows
- ENERGY STAR-rated appliances
- Use of local materials and craftspeople
- Ski-in/ski-out location

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