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words by BLAIR BAKER

BUILDING DREAMS

JLF ARCHITECTS AND DESIGNING FOR A SENSE OF PLACE

ABOVE: The Creamery, JLF's first project, a cabin that had to be conversant with its surroundings.

PHOTOGRAPHY: COURTESY OF AUDREY HALL



PHOTOGRAPHY: COURTESY OF LUCY CALL

Founded in 1979, JLF Architects had humble beginnings—an origin story of resourcefulness and a pitch-perfect sense of place. Based in Bozeman, Montana, Jackson Hole, Wyoming, and Park City, Utah, the firm’s first project was a cabin. And their initial challenge? To match a new-build cabin to the existing log structures on the ranch, which had been homesteaded nearly a century earlier. Seeing

beyond the dilapidation and ruin, the team took inspiration and materials from those original structures to bridge the gap between past and future. In *Foundations*, a book about the breadth and depth of JLF’s work, an explanation of that first project reads, “Reclaiming the wood and rebuilding it into a new form kindled a movement in American architecture. Harnessing not only the beauty of

the materials but also the pioneering spirit that settled the West within the framework of a building was an uncommon practice at the time.”

Since that first cabin, JLF has become renowned for the way that their projects are at home in their environs. This has been guided by an absolute and unflinching commitment to the right materials for the right spaces, to authenticity in all forms and textures, and to the experience of a space. A fundamental belief guiding their projects is that



great architecture is rooted in a specific place, incorporating the natural environment in design. A home that is built for Jackson Hole should not be able to be dropped into another town—the environment is just as vital to the home as the foundation and the framing. Large windows make the vistas a focal point in the homes while natural materials such as stone and wood bring the outdoors and indoors seamlessly together. JLF architects believe that “the most sustainable thing we can do is design a house that will still be here in 100 years, a place where people can gather for generations to come. NATURE IS PERFECT. So, when we design a house, looking to regionality, craft, and belonging are key to our approach so that the dwelling won’t be a scar on the landscape,

but instead will act as something that honors it.”

One of JLF’s Park City, Utah, projects perfectly marries the authenticity of place with a modern sensibility. The home features a bright cerulean blue, woven with walnut panels, the knotted wood adding texture and dimension to the expansive kitchen. The cerulean wave feels like water flowing through the kitchen, mirroring an outdoor water feature with floating steps and cascading fountains.

If given full control, there is no doubt that JLF would create an incredible home, but collaboration exists at the foundation of every project. **First and foremost**





is the collaboration with their clients. “This is your dream house, not ours...” their site proclaims. A home is a place, especially after this past year, where we spend ample time and creating a space that is equally beautiful and practical is the ideal.

Throughout the design process they ask, listen, and learn, constantly willing to adjust, to ensure that the final project is perfect. When looking at their portfolio, it is easy to see the personal touches in each project.

The Park City home is a result of

such a collaboration. The way the home echos its environs through form and material; the way that inside living flows naturally to the outside and vice versa, no matter the season; and the ripples, waves, and pools of “water” that run throughout the home. This defining detail is at once playful and respectful of the natural landscape surrounding the home. The blue also nicely highlights the family’s art collection.

The home, though sizeable in scope, is repleat with smaller, welcoming spaces. The front door is a vignette that invites people to the







home with a dramatic pop of color, natural elements, glass that allows for a view straight through to the back part of the house. A first impression that charms with the promise of more. Other details that feel inspired by the surroundings? The staggered stone along with windows. This staggering recalls the way a mountain reaches toward the sky while also grounding the home and those who experience it, in, you guessed it, the mountains. 

CHECK IT OUT

Foundations: Houses by JLF Architects, a book that celebrates the over 40 years of architecture and design. With photographs by Audrey Hall and writing by Seabring Davis, this book offers insight into the intentionality that goes into each JLF project. *To be published in April by Rizzoli.*

