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Grand Scale

A Wyoming architect takes his cue from views and peaks

Photos by Roger Wade

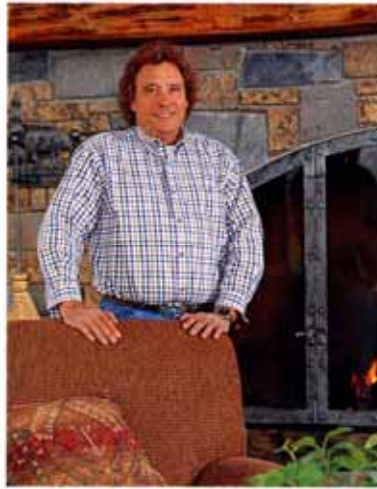
Mountains inspire majestic homes. Ones out West seem especially larger than life. Ellis Nunn has been interpreting the Mountain look for some 35 years, specializing in homes that match the vastness of their settings.

Nunn began his architectural training when he was right out of college. The Washington native had the opportunity to work for an architectural firm in Spokane that developed Switzer Basin Ski Resort, just outside of Coeur d'Alene, Idaho. That project sparked his interest in designing custom mountain homes. During the Vietnam War, Nunn served in the Air National Guard and was activated to Tinker Air Force Base, Oklahoma, designing for the Air Force. He worked part time for an architectural firm in Oklahoma City. "When given the opportunity to design a mountain home for a client and builder from Oklahoma in Jackson Hole, Wyoming, I jumped at the opportunity," he recalls, "and it all started from there."

After this first mountain home was built in 1980, his design proved so popular that he was invited to design several other homes in the same subdivision. Since some of these were spec log and timber-frame homes, which were selling as soon as they were built, Nunn decided to move his architectural business to Jackson Hole in 1985.

His firm specializes in custom log, log-accent and timber homes for a variety of clients. Around Jackson, a chic resort region, this type of customer isn't on a limited budget. This money doesn't necessarily wind up in bigger homes; sometimes it pays for more natural building materials to make houses look more at home in grand settings. Nunn freely confesses that he enjoys the opportunity to design homes for some of the most gorgeous sites in the country, almost always with unconfined views.

"My design belief is to design each home specifically to the site it is being built on to be sure that every room



Wyoming architect Ellis Nunn.

has a maximum opportunity to incorporate every view available," he explains. "Designing a home to be specific for its site is what makes the home so special. This is why the homes we design are open, flowing and have my signature multiple rooflines and windows with million-dollar views."

Nunn is mindful of not just the site, but also the tradition of the place where the home is being built. Usually the aim is sturdiness, often with a rugged edge. Nunn incorporates plenty of stone, which provides the perfect transition from

earth to home. He also favors the strategic placement of vertical logs, which mimic the trees.

It isn't just the West that fits Nunn's notion of mountain style. He recently turned his attention to the Blue Ridge and Adirondacks, subtler than the Rockies but as appealing. That doesn't mean smaller. In fact, his most recent project is an 11,000-square-foot home in southern Vermont.

Nunn insists that he feels comfortable working on projects in the 2,500-to-3,500-square-foot range. "Because I design mainly high-end log and mountain homes, I still like to be able to help out potential clients that are on a limited budget to design their dream home on a smaller scale," he says. "If I am able to help these clients out, even in a limited way, in what their budget allows, I will try as everyone should be able to have a home design they are proud of."

Here are four of Ellis Nunn's standout homes, with his explanation of each. Each is distinctive, yet they share aspects that define Nunn's style and capture the flavor of mountain architecture.

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Spanning the Hillside

This home is located in Jackson Hole, Wyoming. The challenge was to design an 11,000-square-foot home that would meet all the requirements the owners wanted and still fit in the Teton County 8,000-square-foot living area maximum. Because the owners wanted a 1,000-square-foot guesthouse as well, the Teton County maximum living area in the main house could be only 7,000 square feet. The balance of the home had to be considered “basement area,” which means the lower-level living area had to be daylight.

To have the mountain views from all of the main rooms meant designing the home at angles to nestle into the hillside building site. The large porte-cochere creates a dramatic entry for guests. When they walk up to and in the front entry, they see a full view of the Tetons.



Above: The main house (left) is set into the hillside to disguise its size and linked to the guesthouse by a log porte-cochere.

Below: Expanses of glass set in vertical framing and horizontal log siding transform the home into a work of art.





The stud-framed home uses log elements to suggest full-log construction, but its textured walls add decorating versatility. Large windows frame the view of the Teton Mountains.

Left: Overhead, 14-inch-diameter logs dominate the kitchen. The truss work, which spans the kitchen and adjacent family area, is structural.

Far Left: Logs and stone inspire a cowboy theme in the home's office, which looks out at the Tetons. Home offices are becoming standard features of second homes, enabling homeowners to move from primary to secondary residences without interrupting their work.



At Home on the Slopes

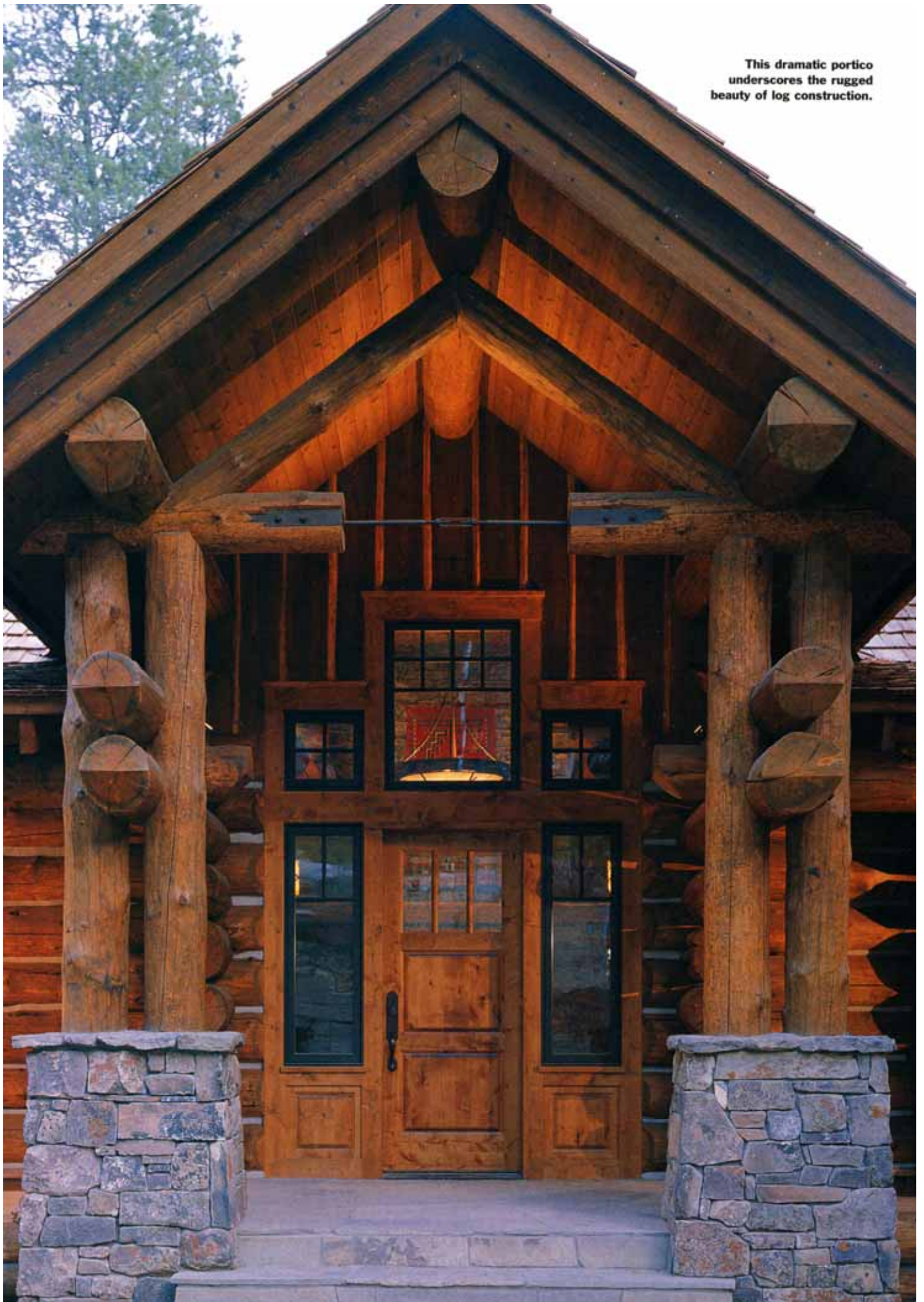
This home is located at the Jackson Hole Mountain Resort Ski Area. It is a full-log spec home that was designed to look like it was growing out of the mountain. The owner, a landscape architect himself, and our firm worked on their design challenge to create a rustic ski-in, ski-out residence that was different enough from the other homes in the area to give it a unique sales appeal to potential buyers.

It has many handcrafted log features, such as logs that are lightly peeled with their bases intact to give the illusion of growing out of the floor to the ceiling. This home has six fireplaces that are Wyoming dry-stack moss rock, as well as an apres-ski room area above the garage that acts as a separate guest master suite area. It includes a small living area, bedroom, fireplace, kitchen-bar area and game table.



Multiple rooflines and stone piers supporting log columns help this home conform to the landscape. Its rambling look is intended to convey the impression that the home was originally a small cabin that has been added onto over the years.

This dramatic portico underscores the rugged beauty of log construction.



Right: In the great room, the interior log wall butts against a stone extension, which creates the effect of having been an exterior wall of the smaller core cabin that was broken through to accommodate an addition.

Below: Inside the main entry, lightly peeled log posts feature the trunk flare of the original trees, enhancing the rustic flavor.





Home on the Range

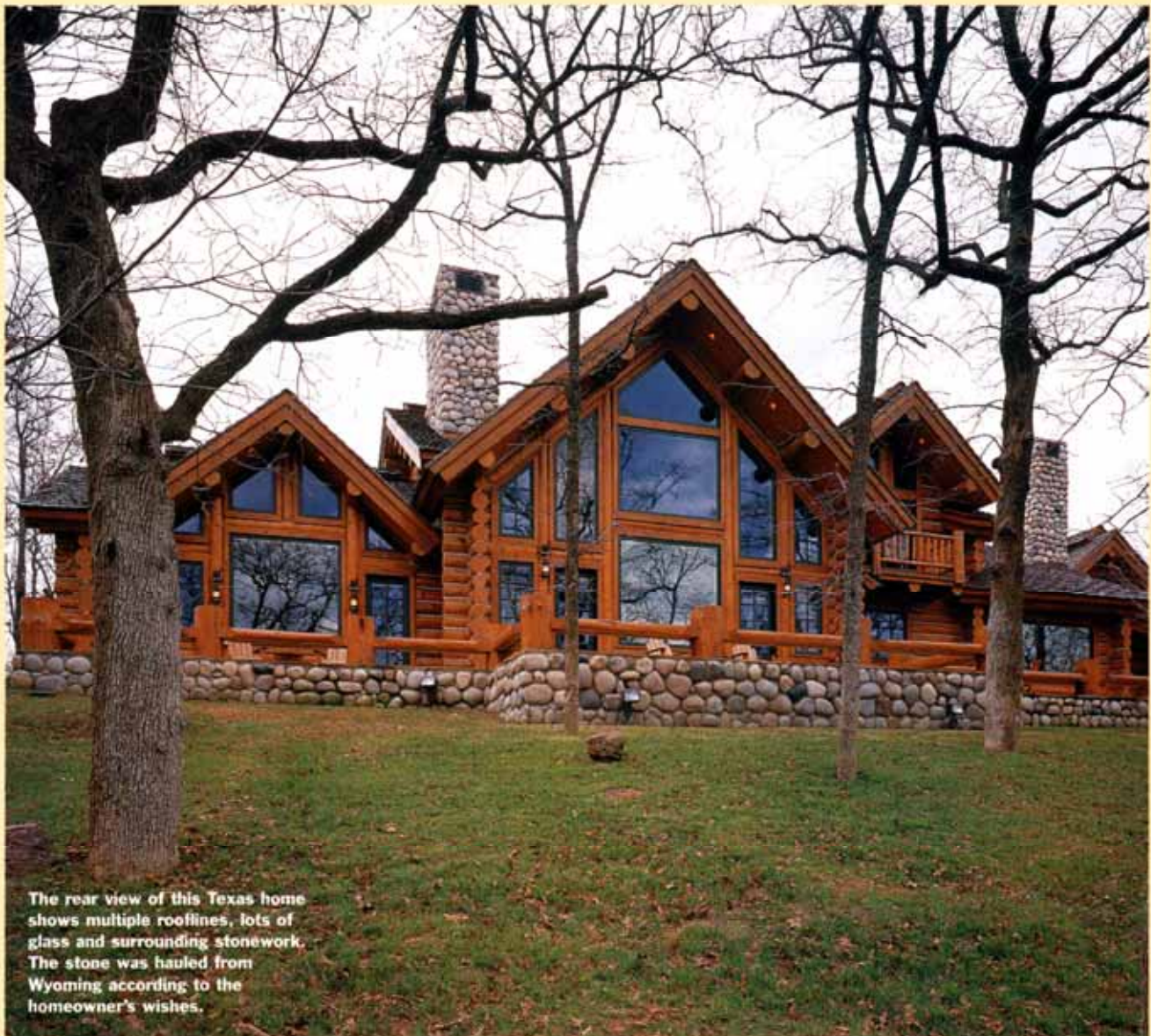
This is a 7,000-square-foot, full-log home outside Dallas, Texas. One design challenge was being able to locate the home on a 200-acre site on top of a hill overlooking Lake Texoma and not disturb much vegetation or trees in order to keep the actual house location as remote as possible.

Also, finding a builder in Texas who could construct a log home of this magnitude took a lot of guidance from both our firm and Custom Log Homes, which was able to send a log builder to help on site during the critical stages. The contractor from Texas who was chosen to build the home actually spent two days in Jackson Hole with our staff to go out to the job sites where we had log homes under construction to

show him how this type of log construction is done, as well as technical details of building with logs that he would encounter.

The owner himself is in the construction business and became very involved in the actual construction of the home. It was his adamant request in the kitchen to have the complete cooking area surrounded with stone on all sides to give it a very custom look. He had seen one of our other homes in Jackson Hole with this design element. Even though it was a bit of a challenge for the contractor, it came out beautifully.

The great room is my favorite. It looks like you are in an actual lodge, complete with antler chandeliers, bear, moose and canoes hanging from the wall.



The rear view of this Texas home shows multiple rooflines, lots of glass and surrounding stonework. The stone was hauled from Wyoming according to the homeowner's wishes.

The scale of the great room suggests that of a Western lodge. A massive antler chandelier fills the overhead volume, which results from the tall log walls and supporting posts.





Left: The kitchen cooking area, surrounded with stone and featuring a tile backsplash, stands in contrast to the preponderance of wood: the log walls and beams, floors and cabinets.

Below: The large-scale fireplace grounds the room, keeping the high ceiling from dominating attention. Ample glass opens up the surrounding views.



The Fishing Comes Easy



This 5,800-square-foot home is located in a ranch subdivision in Wyoming. The home gives you the illusion of being a full-log home, with its log siding and full-log roof system, but in fact it is conventional construction. My firm was one of the first in the Jackson Hole area to use this concept, which has been a huge success.

The biggest design challenge was trying to incorporate all the bedrooms, bathrooms, formal dining room, family room, great room and bar area that the owners wanted to have into a house under 6,000 square feet. It took many meetings and design changes to accomplish this, but the result was great. Since the owner is an avid fly-fisherman, it was also necessary that the house be located within the building envelope allowed close enough to the water where he could walk out his back door and fish in the Snake River tributaries.

Above: The multilevel roof works in concert with the home's low profile. Being located next to water was crucial for the homeowner, who is an avid fisherman.

Right: The entry is designed to look through the living room to snow-capped peaks beyond. The portico roof echoes the roof projection above it.



The open great room uses big-log elements overhead, including a full-log roof system.

