



# Out of South Africa

An oversized, downtown Telluride lot combines with a homeowner's South African roots to create a true original.  
Photos by Saunders Staley/XtremeMedia.tv  
Story by Gabby Anstey McDonald

**S**tanding on the Pennsylvania bluestone patio of Steve Finger's Telluride home, beside the spring green lawn and babbling creek, I momentarily forget where I am. A quick turn of my head, however, reveals the ski area's front face and striking view of Ballard Mountain—a perspective only visible from downtown Telluride. That I briefly lost my bearings is understandable. Because while Telluride has beautifully crafted homes aplenty, a residence that offers seclusion *and* size within the historically designated—and thus heavily zoned—downtown is a rarity. But size, seclusion and a whole lot more is precisely what Tommy Hein Architects managed to attain just a block from Telluride's bustling main street. On an oversized lot adjacent to Cornet Creek, with alley access, as well as street frontage on West Columbia Avenue, the long and lean dimensions of Finger's abode, its use of space and its positioning and configuration around its natural surroundings create a downtown retreat that seems to exist all by itself, despite neighbors all around.





Skier's great room or lion's den? Fair-skinned walls, light furniture and decorative baskets give a bungalow feel to the open living area.



and attractively carved walnut banisters, but what makes it really stand out is its subtle placement off to the side, as opposed to being the focal point as is the case in so many homes of this grandeur.

Finger's strong South African accent is strikingly familiar. I'm the daughter of a South African, and, having spent ample time visiting South African relatives over the years, I find myself instantly connecting with much of the style and décor of this residence. All of the light and airy homes from my childhood, painted in delicately neutral safari colors and decorated with headed artwork and woven tapestries, have been re-created here.

But this home is truly one-of-a-kind, unlike anything you'd see on the coast in Cape Town or in a Colorado ski resort—a seamless mix

of contemporary mountain architecture with a true African flair. Warm and bright spaces add a glow to the rich and vibrant dark walnut floors. Roomy white couches mingle with thickly woven straw club chairs in the open living area. Above them, a Venetian chandelier hangs from the 22-foot vaulted ceilings bisected by walnut trusses. Creamy vanilla walls are broken up by impeccably framed, magnificent Zulu relics, and baskets the size of small children are stylishly placed as sculptures in various spaces. With numerous galleries in his family, Finger has honed his art collection for years, cultivating it into something priceless.

Each room in the residence has its own personality, starting with the elaborate beds designed by Finger's wife, Nicole, a talented artist.

This home is truly one-of-a-kind, unlike anything you'd see on the coast in Cape Town or in a Colorado ski resort—a seamless mix of contemporary mountain architecture with a true African flair.



A cook's dream come true with soapstone counters, upscale appliances and plenty of room to spread out.

“There is a certain ‘softness’ and comfort you feel throughout the house due to the sumptuous curves of the moldings and pliability of the plaster finishes.”



The long entry hallway, lined with magnificent Zulu artwork, elegantly connects the living and sleeping areas.

“It was really an amazing project to be involved with,” says Finger. “The property’s proximity to downtown and the way it intimately abuts the creek lent itself to doing something different in Telluride. We took advantage of those things to create something unique, and something that felt like home.”

Designed by Finger, Tim Hild and Tommy Hein Architects, and built by Hild’s Tandem Construction, the six-bedroom, 5,500-square-foot home was completed over a two-and-a-half-year period. The wait was well worth it, though; a meticulous level of detail went into every inch of the three-story floor plan, and Hein’s team achieved a coziness seldom seen in such a large home.

“There is a certain ‘softness’ and comfort you feel throughout the

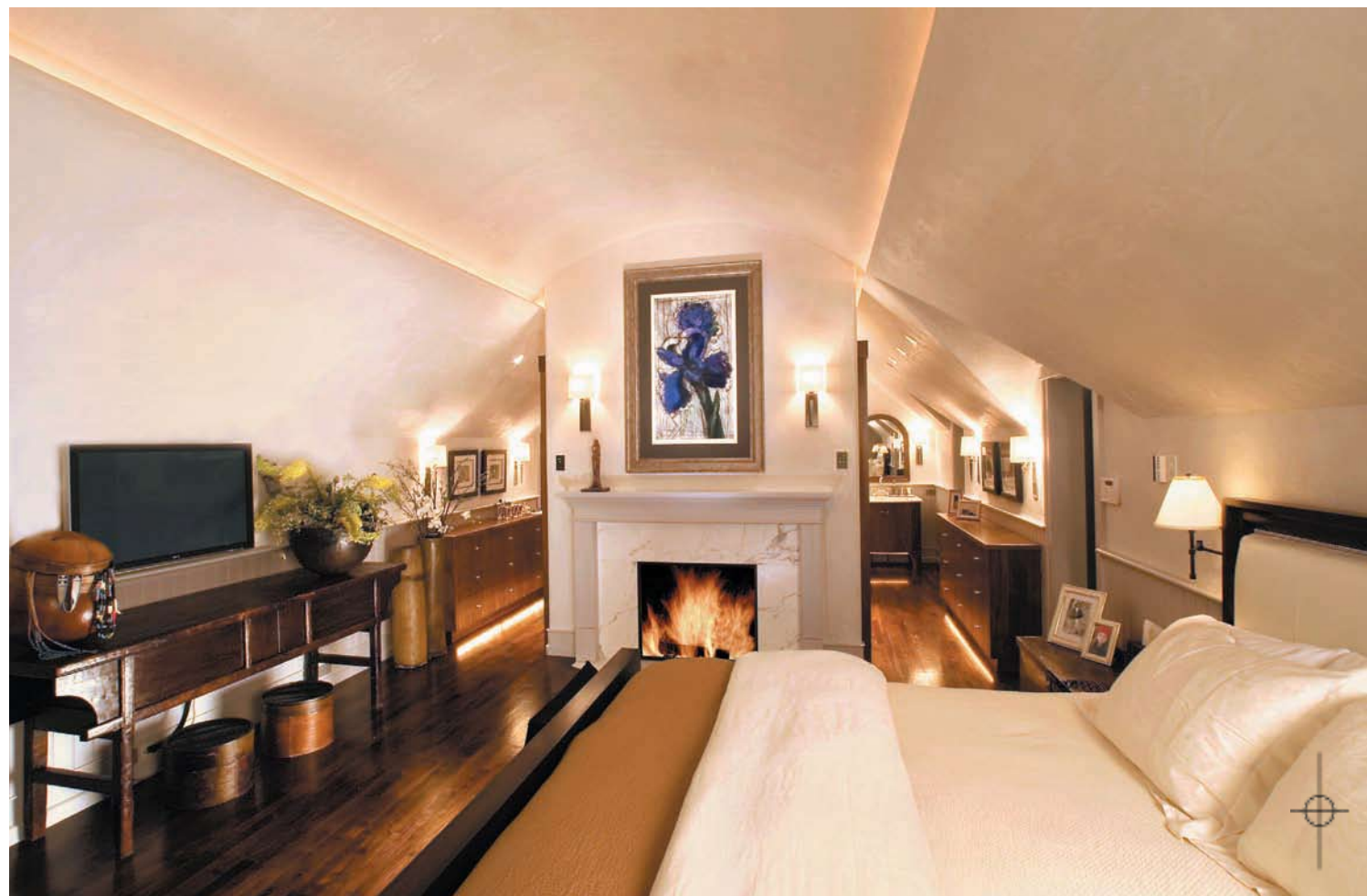
house due to the sumptuous curves of the moldings and pliability of the plaster finishes,” Hein says.

Finger gives particular kudos to Brad Parkinson, a local artisan/woodworker, who hand-built every bit of furniture and cabinetry on site.

“Brad is fantastic,” says Finger. “His work is definitely the glue that shapes and holds this house together, giving it such an unusual and lovely sense of character and charm.”

Greeted by Finger at the front door, I step into a lofty and lengthy entry hallway that extends southward through the great room and kitchen. Rooms break off on either side, with a stairway on the west leading to the upper level. The stairway impresses with its wide stance





The cozy and intimate master suite (which includes the master bath, below) boasts a unique and functional layout, exquisite details and sounds of the creek.

One guest room has a playfully patterned wrought-iron canopy. The children's rooms, both on the ground floor, feature a Red Baron-style aviator bunk bed (for Max, age 4) and a cottage flower garden bed with window box footboard (for Sam, age 8). Bedrooms all have private baths adorned with Ann Sacks tile, and vanities crafted by Parkinson, a tasteful mix of marble and walnut, each subtly different from the next. As for Nicole's artists studio, it has dark concrete floors and receives ample natural light, opening directly to the patio through its own private entrance.

It's a warm, clear day during my visit, and the spacious living area is lit up by large panes of glass and French doors, open to the patio to allow for a beachy fusion of indoor-outdoor spaces. Yet for those abundant cold mountain days, a 5-foot soapstone fireplace stands regally against the northeastern wall, its cool steel blue shade complemented by the kitchen's soapstone countertops at the southern end of the room. Finger points out the Holly Hunt light fixtures throughout the home, electric valances on the windows, and the fact that the entire house is LightTouch-wired and media-integrated.

As with most family homes, the sanctuary is the master bedroom, which has sounds of the creek seeping through its windows. It is a practical and unpretentious 16 by 34 feet, with a creative design that



The southeast-facing patio allows for a sense of privacy virtually unheard-of in downtown Telluride.

lacks any wasted space. The bedroom and bathroom circulate openly, linked via two short hallways that ingeniously serve as his/hers closets with efficiently placed walnut built-ins. In the bathroom, his/hers nickel sinks flank a freestanding tub, and the entry to the glass-enclosed rain shower is paved by an elegant marble slab. As with the other bedrooms, the master is on the north side of the home and positioned to the east to take advantage of the majestic views of Ajax Peak and Bear Creek. Alternatively, common areas are on the southern side, but also face east for the views.

"The architecture was designed as two buildings, north for sleeping, south for living," says Hein, who credits his team—Pam Goguen (lighting design) and Robin Miller (interior design of the baths/kitchen)—for the layout's further intricacies.

Outside, the home pays homage to its surroundings, clinging to Telluride's Victorian theme with a modern grip. Antique brick encases the north side with Pennsylvania bluestone dominating the south. The two are joined by wood siding painted cheerfully in yellow and red with copper rain gutters lining the

shingled roof. A built-in grill, hot tub, two-car garage and impeccable landscaping—with giant clay pots lining the south entrance—round out the exterior. And, of course, that sunny, southeast-facing patio right on the creek.

"We preserved and added substantial native vegetation along both sides of the creek to enhance the owners' enjoyment of the water element," says Hein.

Landscape design and implementation was handled by landscape architect Larry Scanlon, owner of the Telluride Landscape Company and Scanlon Design.

"I told Larry to just go for it, and I knew I'd love whatever he did," says Finger. "He's that good."

It's no surprise that both Nicole and Steve Finger have degrees in fine art; their home is nothing short of a true masterpiece. The amount of detail and caliber of exceptional taste resonate through the home, extending right down to the unbelievably lush and exotic orchid centerpiece on the dining room table, a display one would only suspect was silk since this is 8,750-foot Colorado, rather than the African tropics. ■