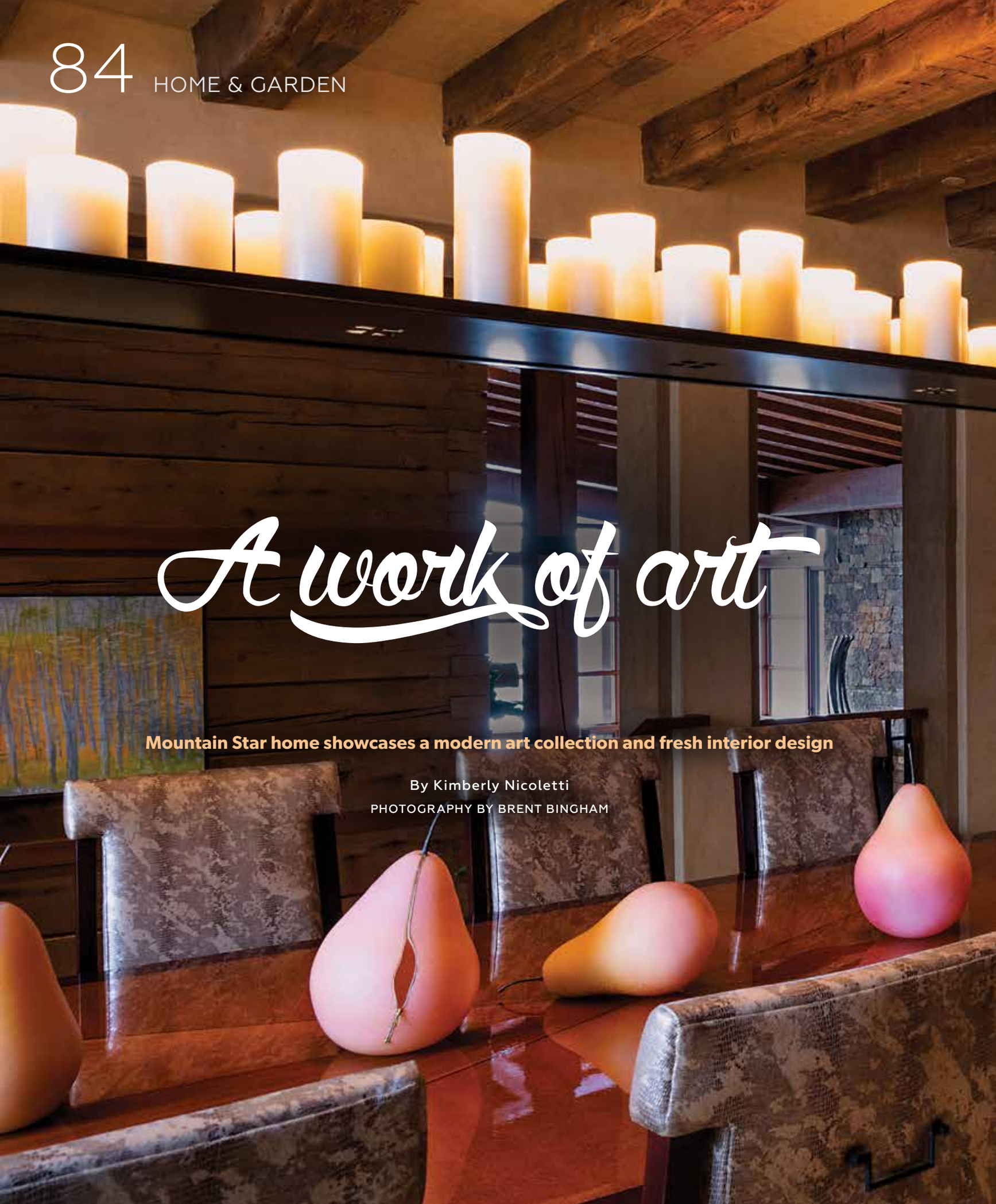


A work of art

Mountain Star home showcases a modern art collection and fresh interior design

By Kimberly Nicoletti

PHOTOGRAPHY BY BRENT BINGHAM

Thomas Chatfield's "Along the River Bed" and Stephanie Chubback's "Pear" enliven the dining room.

Furnishing a home is a creative act, one that blends functionality with a variety of inspiring textures, colors and designs. While art is always an essential aspect of interior design, Peter and Judy Copses took their Mountain Star residence to new heights through contemporary interior design, as well as a collection of more than 100 pieces of art, many of which they commissioned for specific rooms.

An artful approach

While living in Los Angeles for nearly 34 years, the Copses delved into its modern art scene, meeting California artists and collecting abstract art.

"There are never enough walls for art — that's my theory," Judy Copses says.

But when they purchased their Mountain Star home in 2009 (and eventually moved here full time in 2020), they had to adapt their art collection, transitioning to less abstract and more landscape scenes. Bright white walls in L.A. provided a blank canvas for fine art. Here, dark wood and stone interior walls accommodate some of their modern California art, but other pieces just don't work with the mountain-style aesthetic. So they hired Nancy Sweeney, owner of Sweeney Co. Art Advisors in Minturn, to help identify suitable art.

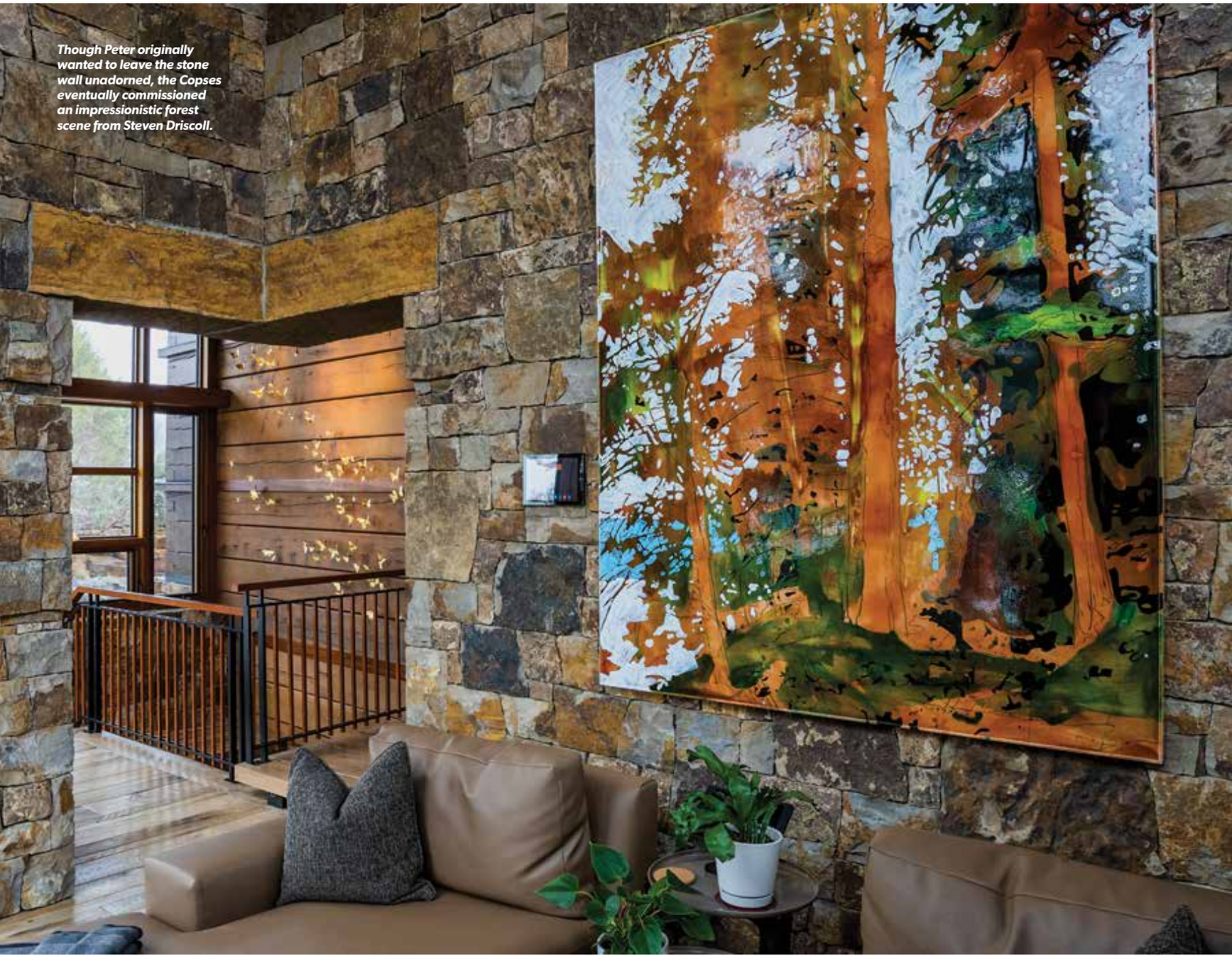
"They bought pieces they love, and we placed them accordingly," Sweeney says.

Peter and Judy had each grown up in Toronto, Canada, so Sweeney introduced them to Canadian artists who reflect the mountains.

One, Steven Driscoll, coincidentally also hails from Toronto. Equally inspired by the unlikely combination of French post-impressionist artist Eugéne Henri Paul Gauguin and GoPro camera capabilities, his paintings fuse tradition with technology, resulting in contemporary, energetic and luminescent reflections of the natural world. The last painting the couple purchased from Driscoll was

"We never stop tinkering — we always have a project going. We have a lot of fun doing it. It's a bit of a hobby, especially the art part."

In the bedroom, the artwork seems to bring the forest inside. Judy's office, right, includes the couple's 430-book collection as well as another Stephen Driscoll painting, "Leaf Study in Purple."



Though Peter originally wanted to leave the stone wall unadorned, the Copses eventually commissioned an impressionistic forest scene from Steven Driscoll.

his "What a Site to See." Judy already felt an affinity with the artist, and his 2021 depiction of the iconic Hudson's Bay Company blanket and barn spoke to her. However, his original stood vertically, and they needed a horizontal 48" x 96" version of it, so they commissioned Driscoll to expand his painting to fit the wall in their downstairs game room.

"Once we latch onto an artist, we tend to want more than one piece," Peter says about Driscoll and others.

One of Driscoll's 30" x 40" pieces hangs prominently on the kitchen area's fireplace, depicting the golden and orange tones of fall foliage. In Judy's office, a 60" x 60" work, "Leaf Study in Purple," pops with color, complementing the blues, reds, greens and golds in the couple's 430-book collection, which features limited editions and classics from Juniper Books in Boulder. A smaller, quieter 13" x 18" painting welcomes guests in the entry bathroom with its pastel pink and purple blooms emerging from a soft green background. A somewhat moody 24" x 30" tree trunk against a rollicking river flanked with greenery stands in the lower entry stairwell, adjacent to a commissioned black walnut 50-inch sculpture by Jeremy Holmes. Yet another commissioned Driscoll urethane painting measuring 76" x 60" stands out on the stone wall of the reading room, accenting earthy rust tones while at the same time offering a breath of fresh air with its white-toned background.

"It's very nature-based and almost pops a window into the rock façade because the opposite side is all windows," Sweeney says of the latter work.

One of the first pieces of art guests see when they walk in is a commissioned 90-inch tall Corten steel sculpture by German artist Herbert Mehler. While it acts as a dramatic punctuation at the end of the corridor, its roots, so to speak, reach deeper, through Judy's German ancestry, which also inspires their art collection.

When they initially saw German-American Wolf Kahn's paintings in

L.A., they admired his style. He blends realism and a formal discipline of color field to produce rich, expressive pieces. His golden aspens, which are more realistic than much of the abstract art the Copses collect, enrich the living area corridor, outside the dining room.

"We wanted one of his paintings for a long time but never found one that worked until now," Peter says. "It brings the outside in (through its) impressionistic forest scene."

Though, Peter admits, his wife had to "twist my arm, because the wall was so well done that hanging art on it seemed sacrilegious, but Judy usually wins."

"When you find that right piece, every time you walk by that piece, you remember that effort of acquiring that piece, and it just gives you that much more enjoyment," Judy says.

German artist Harald Schmitz-Schmelzer's cast acrylic works fuse painting, sculpture and science. He pours his paint into a mold, layering acrylics and mixed media in an array of three-dimensional color, which change with the light and angles from which viewers approach it. His "91 Farhen" lights up Judy's office.

"The stripes almost look like they're neon or illuminated, but they're not," Sweeney says.

Overall, the home blends art oriented toward the Colorado lifestyle with modern art that shows well in both California and Colorado, such as Neil Harrison's modern "Landscape 5 (Science)," which is more indictive of their L.A. collection. Within those two themes, a variety of sculptures add artistic dimension.

A commissioned Paul Villinksi butterfly sculpture, made of aluminum wire, upcycled beer cans, brass and gold leaf, bring an uplifting feeling to the master stairwell's wood-trimmed wall.

"The beauty that interests me most comes through the struggle to bring things from a place of loss, poverty, despair, into a new life — to insist on the possibility of transformation," Villinski writes in his artist statement. "Metamorphosing littered beer cans into flocks of butterflies mirrors the act of transformation and rebirth that butterflies symbolize across all cultures."

Rod Mireau's 41" x 36" x 4.5" "Tilted Chords" add intrigue to the kitchen seating area. Through wood and metal, Mireau strikes a balance "between the organic and the geometric while playing with gravity and scale," as the Canadian artist's bio aptly describes.

Hand-blown glass pears by Stephanie Chubbuck adorn the dining room table; her figurative fruit blends imagery inspired from

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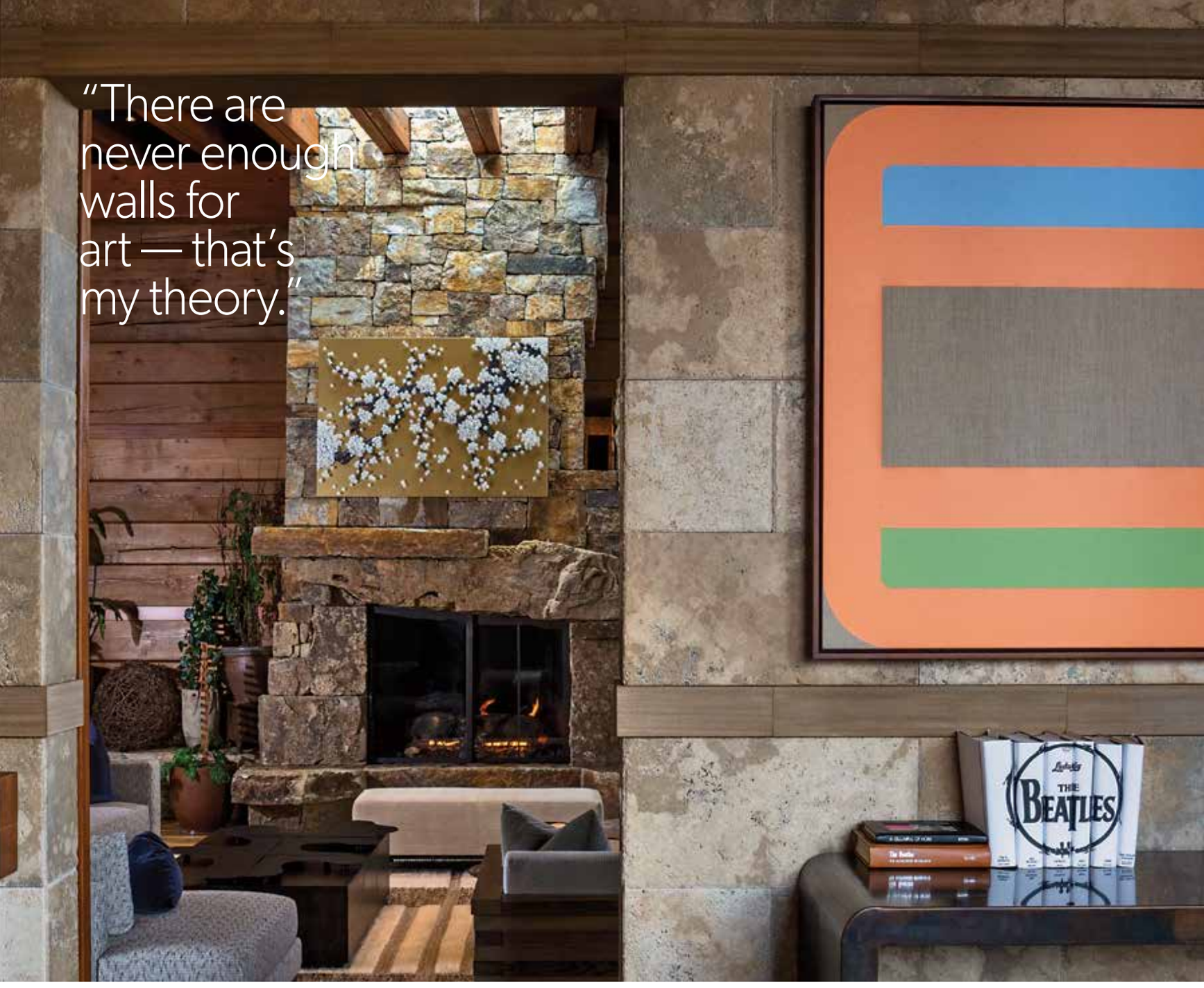

Dutch "Vanitas" still-life paintings and figure sculptures. She employs both organic and industrial materials, such as sutures, zippers or hardware, to illustrate her fascination with "the rough edges and parts of human nature, human physicality and human conditions." The gold she layers into her glass generates a depth of color and "skin-like" effect. Her objective: "to both seduce the viewer and to elicit recognition of corporeal and emotional conditions that are affective, unsettling, erotic, humorous or a combination of these things."

Painted recycled paper by Kimberly Hart mimics logs (albeit, with a colorful front) at the base of the kitchen area fireplace, adding a whimsical note to a traditional Colorado necessity.

Brad Howe's smaller steel olive green abstract in the fitness room engages the imagination, just as the artist intended.

"Encountering strangeness stretches and expands our self-image and seeds the rich potential for our collective conversations," Howe writes in his artist statement.

In the downstairs rec room, Guy Dill's bronze, "Observatory," stands 26 inches high, while Bill Thompson's "Offshoot," a green urethane on polyurethane abstract adds a similar dimension outside the spa bathroom. Lighter green hand-blown glass shapes by Greg Fidler and an acrylic sculpture by David Ryan gracing the downstairs complement the color scheme.

Four hand-blown Blenko Glass sculptures feature the family-owned company's exquisite color, imaginative designs and skilled craftsmanship in the master bathroom in the form of an olive green mushroom, two tangerine mushrooms and a wheat glass container. The dining room credenza showcases John Lewis' "Winged Vessel with White Gold" glass sculpture, as well as Melanie Leppla's brown glass "Cairns."

Among the many sculptures in the home, California artist Eric Johnson's 83" x 24" "Continuous Column" commission stands out in the kids'

Neil Harrison's "Landscape 5 (Science)" hangs over the fireplace in the background. In the foreground is a commissioned work from Ran Hwang, circa 2014.

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television room. It's one of the couple's most recent purchases, in which they became very involved. They visited Johnson in his studio to talk about the commissioned piece and see how he constructed it. They chose it for its fun qualities, which feature various layers of colorful resin that brighten up the room. In the same room, Australian artist Tim Edwards' translucent gold and gray-lined vessels take a modern, light and playful approach to abstract bottles.

"They changed the whole look of the room," Peter says.

But the most dramatic sculptures sit outside the home in the form of clouds, pinecones and bighorn sheep.

When the Copses first owned their mountain home, they flew in and out of Denver International Airport, admiring "Cloudscape," cloud sculptures perched atop steel towers (reminiscent of the oil well and utility towers and water pumps scattered across the state) on Peña Boulevard.

"We thought they were great, but I guess we were the only ones who thought they were great (there), because they moved them outside the Children's Museum of Denver," Peter says, somewhat jokingly. ("Cloudscape" was a temporary installation near the airport.)

The Copses commissioned cloud artist Christopher Lavery for their own 4- to 7-foot "Cloudscape," which now illuminates the yard and lends ambiance outside their bedroom at night.

When the Copses decided driving from L.A. to Vail was nearly as easy as flying, huge, rusted metal sculptures of animals in Las Vegas caught their eye. Now, four Corten steel bighorn sheep, ranging from 3.5 feet to 6 feet tall from PS Metals, "graze" in their backyard.

Three massive pinecones by Floyd Elzinga escort guests along the left side of the driveway. Judy had picked up a postcard of the pinecones at a Toronto art show in 2008, thinking, "If I ever get a house (in Colorado), I want these," she says.

In the game room, Steven Driscoll's "What a Site to See" includes a red barn and a depiction of the iconic Hudson's Bay Company blanket.

"Artwork on walls or sculptures actually create life in your home. They add a new dimension," Judy says. "If you don't have any art, it's just flat; there's no life in the house. Art brings out the personality of the house. It adds life to a room, and it brings joy to the people who look at it."

Peter agrees, emphasizing how sculptures especially enliven a home.

"We have a pretty good batting average (with our art collection)," he says. "There's almost nothing we've bought that we've regretted. We ask ourselves, 'Could we look at that for 25 years?' If the answer is 'yes,' then we get it."

Sweeney believes art tells stories, transforms spaces and facilitates meaningful and memorable experiences, and that's definitely true in the Copses' home.

"The style is unique to them and reflects who they are," Sweeney says. "It's very personal. It was carefully selected because the pieces speak to them. It's been a slowly evolving collection, and they've been intimately involved in the process, with the artists and with the customization."

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In the lower entry stairwell sits a black walnut, 50" sculpture by Jeremy Holmes, and another painting by Steven Driscoll, "Opening."

The process of furnishing

So far, the Copses have spent 14 years sourcing artwork for their 10,000-square-foot home, but they've also spent years gradually replacing furnishings, room by room.

The house attracted them due to its accessibility to skiing "without being in the thick of it," Peter says. They appreciated the structure, the "bones" of the home, and just needed to make it their own when it came to replacing predominantly Asian- and country-style furnishings with more modern, and customized Italian-designed, sofas, chairs and tables.

"The architecture was very interesting, very well thought-out and well-located in terms of views," Peter Copses says. "The home had a lot of potential. We just put our own stamp on it."

They began with the most lived-in rooms: the family room, master bedroom, great room, their three sons' (who are now grown) bedrooms and the game room. With Greenauer Design Group's help, they gradually removed heavier, traditional mountain furnishings and added a mountain-modern feel.

"What's so remarkable about the house is that it's 20 years old, and it still feels so relevant with its enduring design," Sweeney says. "Melissa Greenauer has made some wonderful changes on how the house lives, all through the furniture."

Bringing in Italian furniture designs resulted in more expansive views — and feelings of spaciousness.

Greenauer describes the great room as "the biggest statement area." A unique sectional with peg and joint stacked oak that forms a variety of shapes based on conversational and entertainment needs, acts like a moldable sculpture. Puzzle-like stacking tables also create a dynamic space for entertaining multiple guests.

"It's warm and functional and fits the scale of the space," she says.

The sofa and tables are just one of the many items the Copses probably wouldn't have discovered if it weren't for Greenauer.

"Designers go to design shows and see what's out there — you just can't see it all yourself. They have access to (extensive) lighting, materials and styles," Judy says, adding how she also appreciates the "creative partnerships" they developed with Greenauer and Sweeney.

In the bedroom they added an upholstered headboard and a television that pops up from the foot of the bed. Wooden side tables trimmed with metal now provide plenty of areas to plug in devices, and a daybed with a chair and ottoman, along with laser-cut hide-on-hair rugs from Kyle Bunting, add to the room's relaxed feel.

"The room looks twice as big," Peter says.

Greenauer installed an Italian closet line, Sangiacomo, with shelves and drawers, which illuminate when pulled out, for shoes, jewelry, belts and other accessories.

"It's a beautiful, elevated space to get dressed in," she says.

Greenauer also added a lounge area off the master bedroom, with two chaise lounges.

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The home's pool has both indoor and outdoor areas, and is a beautiful place to enjoy the unique personality of Mountain Star.

"It's a great space to take in nature, read a book or have quiet time," she says.

As they renovated each room, beginning in 2016, they kept certain furnishings, so that everything looked cohesive throughout the years.

"Pulling room by room worked out great because you can really dive into the detail of each space," Greenauer says. "It's an interesting way to work, but I see the beauty in taking it room by room (as opposed to the entire house) because it caused less disruption for them."

Greenauer weaved similar materials and textures into each space so the "old worked with the new," she says. "Every room connects to the next with leather, stone and metals."

In a former art studio, which they turned into another bedroom, themes from other renovated bedrooms carry through, such as mahogany-trimmed furniture. Yet, they kept the Shanghai-style chairs original to the home. As they moved closer to completing the entire house, they began to remove more of the Asian-themed furnishings.

Judy's office transformed from a cowboy theme with tooled leather, red tones and large furniture to darker wood, functional shelving, a television unit, a desk and plenty of art, similar to her L.A. space.

In the boys' lounge, Greenauer brought in a U-shaped sofa, which allows for stretching out and various types of seating and positions, as well as functional, "floating" pieces of furniture that can act as a bench or table. Lighting by Sebastian Herkner, who aims to "create a volume, or even a balloon full with light," provides warmth and offers dimmable mood or task lighting.

"It's a place to gravitate to," Greenauer says. "The sofas are super comfortable for conversations, lounging and gaming. It's very well-appointed. It's functional, but it's also timeless."

The game room and adjacent wine room benefited from an artistic carpet with dimensional cut pile, reupholstered game chairs and carved barstools.

Outdoors, landscapers replaced thirsty, traditional lawn with wild grass and more drought-tolerant plants.

The Copses haven't tackled the kitchen yet.

"That will be our next project, and it will be the most disruptive," Peter says. "You really have to think through how you're going to use it and the traffic flows and what goes where. Right now, the kitchen has all the right elements, but they're not in the right place."

"We renovate a lot. There's never a year that goes by that we haven't done something. With all those years of experience, we know what we're looking for and what works," Judy says.

And, after years of working with Sweeney and Greenauer, who are also assisting with the Copses' L.A. properties, the process has become a well-oiled machine, which is good because, as Peter puts it:

"We never stop tinkering — we always have a project going. We have a lot of fun doing it. It's a bit of a hobby, especially the art part." VVM