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MINDING THE STORE

An 1880s commercial building in Basalt, Colorado, takes on new life as a contemporary loft-like residence for an interior designer, a builder and some of their favorite collections

photography by Matthew Millman/text by Mindy Pantiel

Interior designer Michaela Dunsdon of ID Interiors and her partner, builder David A. Borkenhagen, transformed the first floor of an 1880s brick structure (opposite) into a light-filled residence in Basalt, Colorado. The pair decorated the space with objects collected over years of traveling the West. A painting by Borkenhagen hangs in the study (below).





INTERIOR DESIGNER AND

second-generation Coloradoan Michael Dunsdon remembers when Basalt, Colorado, was "pretty much just a wide spot in the road, a place you went through to get to somewhere else." That was years before a four-lane highway shortened the travel time between the old railroad town and its glamorous neighbor, Aspen. That was also before the *New York Times* ran a story lauding Basalt as a hip and relatively affordable destination, drawing "New Yorkers who don't want to bump into people from their apartment buildings." The population has been spiraling upward ever since.

But it wasn't the buzz that brought Dunsdon, of ID Interiors, and her partner, David A. Borkenhagen, a retired builder, back to her roots: It was a more than one-hundred-year-old brick building with knot-free maple floors on which, Dunsdon serendipitously learned, her mother had danced as a young woman. "Everyone in the valley wanted that building," notes Dunsdon about the 1880s structure that she says did time as a meeting lodge, a post office and a general store. "The upstairs had been rehabbed as a condo, but the rest was an empty shell full of potential," she adds.

If the building had a drawback, it was a claustrophobic setting. Located smack in the middle of what locals refer to as Old Town, the edifice was surrounded by houses, and the first floor was totally devoid of vistas of Mount Sopris, the area's most notable peak. Dunsdon and Borkenhagen wisely snapped up the adjacent fifty-by-two-hundred-foot vacant lot in order to create their own views as well as erect a new three-car garage with a guest suite above.

The duo began by cleaning out their would-be home, filling Dumpsters until a blank canvas emerged. After thirty-two years together and five house collaborations, they had their own way of doing things that, for this project, included submitting renovation plans to the building department after the renovation. "It helps to have a rapport with the inspector," says Borkenhagen. "I told him, 'I don't know what this is going to look like, but I'll give you plans when we're done.'"

"With us everything is trial and error," adds Dunsdon, referring to their unconventional formula for success. "We framed the walls first and moved them a few times, while we argued about the best layout."

The he-said, she-said banter continued throughout the two-and-a-half-year renovation. They tried different locations for the main hallway ("putting it in the middle ended up being best for the floor plan,"

New skylights and a gap between the walls and ceiling "let light bounce around," says Dunsdon. **top left:** In the living room, a Ralph Lauren Home leather sling chair is paired with an A. Rudin sofa covered in Powell & Bonnell flannel. A Design Within Reach bench doubles as a low table. **left:** A pair of bamboo chairs and a reed-and-bark Native American basket punctuate another portion of the living room. **opposite:** Original maple floorboards line the central hallway.





he says); wrestled over wall shape ("I wanted rounded walls, but that didn't happen," she says); and had a meeting of minds regarding the partitions that delineate the main living spaces, stopping the interior walls a few feet from the fourteen-foot-high ceiling to allow light to flow through the first floor. That last decision required punching through the solid-brick east-facing wall to make way for three sets of six-by-ten-foot steel-and-glass doors designed and crafted by Borkenhagen.

While he attended to other interior finishes in the 3,900-square-foot space, like fabricating high-density particleboard shelving with pine trim for various rooms and helping to select a Chinese grey limestone-tile floor in the bath, she handled the color scheme and furnishings. "Taupe on the grey side is my favorite color," says Dunsdon, who selected classic white for the living and dining room walls, a subtle grey for the master bedroom and a soft taupe for the study and home office. Similarly, furnishings throughout sport fabrics in quiet, neutral tones.

Determined to keep clutter at bay—"I try to alleviate the eye noise," says the designer—she sifted through collections gathered over decades to handpick favorite Native American baskets and pots, fly-fishing rods that belonged to her father, and old cottage tools and other items to display on shelving and tables and in art niches.

Due to Basalt's lower elevation (6,600 feet to Aspen's 7,900), the small town has fewer snowstorms, resulting in more sunny days for Dunsdon and Borkenhagen to throw open the oversize doors to let fresh air in and enjoy the park-like setting they created in the side yard. A 400-square-foot raised concrete terrace steps down to the yard and a pavilion that has a Cor-ten steel roof supported by old twelve-inch-by-twelve-foot timbers and topped with a custom wind vane. "It breaks up the large expanse of yard," explains Borkenhagen.

Despite the owners' best efforts to make the streetside face appear less commercial by including a lawn, shrubs and a residential-style fence, a couple of passersby have come knocking when they spied the collectibles in the old storefront windows. "They think we're an antiques store," says Borkenhagen, who admits the enhanced Smith Brothers sign spanning the front brick wall might add to the confusion. But the occasional interruptions don't ruffle the pair, because they know their anomalous mountain home is special. "We call it a ground-floor loft," he says. "It's the most unique place we've ever lived." She wholeheartedly agrees. "It's irreplaceable." +

opposite: Dunsdon paired Janus et Cie's Sussex wicker chairs and a table designed by Chris Lehrecke for Ralph Pucci in the dining room. Guatemalan baby carriers were mounted on the wall and reimagined as candleholders. A low-hanging Japanese screen ensures privacy. **top right:** Fly rods that belonged to Dunsdon's father rest between leather-and-wicker chairs from Janus et Cie. "We wanted to fold our family heirlooms into our lives," she says. **right:** Crow decoys perch above the kitchen's Thermador cooktop. An old restaurant worktable serves as additional counter space. The refrigerator is from Sub-Zero.



Ten-foot-high steel-and-glass doors, designed by Bokenhagen, open to the garden from the master bedroom (this page). The outdoor furniture is from Brown Jordan. A Ralph Lauren Home wool blanket covers an ash-wood bed from Huston & Company. **opposite:** Japanese fishing nets were hung above the master bath's Lefroy Brooks tub and Dornbracht tap. The floor's limestone tiles are from Ann Sacks.





A photograph of a modern wooden pavilion with a flat roof and a central spire, situated in a lush garden. The garden features a winding stone path, green lawn, and various trees and shrubs. In the background, rolling green hills or mountains are visible under a clear blue sky. To the right, a portion of a red brick building is visible.

DUNSDON AND BORKENHAGEN THROW OPEN THE OVERSIZE DOORS TO LET FRESH AIR IN AND ENJOY THE PARK-LIKE SETTING THEY CREATED IN THE SIDE YARD.

The couple purchased a lot on the east side of their residence, and with the assistance of Aspen landscape architect Greg Moxton, they created an expansive outdoor area with a pavilion and a water feature designed by Borkenhagen.

