

The Barnett Residence

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Mountain Modular

THE HOUSE SOARS three stories up on a hillside behind the resort town of Breckenridge, all angles and peaks and slanted wood siding. Greenhouse windows cascade down two of the stories like a glass waterfall, the towering lines unbroken but for two balconies. There is nothing in the appearance of the house to suggest its somewhat humble origin—the factory of Mitchell and Sons in Commerce City.

The house is modular, built in seven sections that were loaded on flat-bed trucks and hauled over Loveland Pass to Breckenridge, where they were assembled like giant building blocks.

The total time for construction from beginning to move-in was less than three months. Gunson estimates the house would have taken nine months to build on site.

Architect Jon Gunson's design puts the Barnetts' house on solid footing with its environment, the wood structure appearing to snuggle into the mountainside, the towering greenhouse windows transformed into mirrors of the landscape when dusk falls.





Jerry Barnett said the living room was designed “so you can see the fireplace, television set, and outside view from any angle in the room. It’s selfish to want it all, I guess, but if you can have it, why not?”

In 1980, the Barnetts were ready. They approached Breckenridge architect Jon Gunson with their ideas for a house. “We knew we wanted an open feeling, a sunken living room, and a spectacular entrance,” Jerry said. “And Kathy wanted the kitchen to be the command post of the house. But we didn’t have the exact configuration in mind. Jon did a very good job of satisfying our requirements.”

Gunson designed a three-story, four-bedroom, 2 1/2-bath house with 2,500 square feet split over six levels. It was everything the Barnetts wanted. But what they didn’t expect was the method of construction recommended by Gunson. Because winter was approaching, he suggested the house be factory-built to save precious time before the snows set in.

The Barnetts admit they had doubts about “factory-built housing.” Once completed, however, skepticism turned to admiration. For one thing, Kathy got her command-post kitchen, from which she can monitor arrivals at the front door and converse with guests in either the living or dining rooms. Entrance to the house is through a plant-filled solarium with tiled floors and moss rock wall. A half dozen steps lead to a floor that contains the sunken living room, and kitchen, each on a slightly different level. Another set of stairs off the solarium spirals downward to other levels, which contain bedrooms and baths.



The command-post kitchen (left) overlooks the solarium and living room, and features a breakfast bar.

The living room (right) perches above the dramatic solarium entryway with its soaring greenhouse windows. Double glass doors lead to a tiled foyer just inside the front door.





Sliding glass doors off the living room lead to a balcony that boasts colorful patio furniture and a magnificent mountain vista. "We do a lot of entertaining out here," Jerry pointed out, and Kathy added they often enjoy dining out on the balcony.

If the Barnetts had any doubts about the practicality of modular housing at the onset of the project, those doubts have been more than dispelled after nearly two years of living in the house, and Jerry believes the house is more sturdily constructed than it would have been if built on site.

Gunson concurs, "I'm convinced the house is as good or better than you could do site-built. Moreover, the mountain environment is a good place for modular construction because of the short building season. Granted, projects are built year-round here, but it's a slow process because of supplies and labor. And I believe it can be done cheaper in the factory than on site," he said.

