



# At Home in the Trees

A FORMER COLORADO GHOST TOWN  
OFFERS A VERTICAL ESCAPE FOR A LONDON FAMILY

Architecture and Interior Design by Selldorf Architects/Text by Jean Strouse/Photography by David O. Marlow

**W**hen Katrin Bellinger and Christoph Henkel decided to build a house in the San Juan Mountains of the Colorado Rockies, they did not have to think about choosing an architect. Annabelle Selldorf, who has been a close friend of Bellinger's since they grew up together in Cologne, Germany, was already so

much a part of the project that she helped the couple select the site. She had redesigned and decorated their primary residence, a five-story Georgian terrace house in London, and had spent vacations with them in Colorado before they resolved to build.

Henkel, an international businessman originally from Düsseldorf, took a day off from skiing in Telluride in 1994 to

drive over the mountain in search of a small ghost town called Dunton Hot Springs, which sits at an altitude of 8,800 feet. "It really was a ruin," he recalls. "All the windows in the cabins had been shot out, there were marmot droppings everywhere, no phone lines or electricity, and the hot springs were not hot. I immediately fell in love with it."

He bought the property. A

Katrin Bellinger and Christoph Henkel fell in love with the Colorado ghost town of Dunton Hot Springs and recruited their longtime friend Annabelle Selldorf to design a grandly vertical family retreat for them (above). **OPPOSITE:** The couple's art collection includes a silver sculpture by Not Vital, displayed in the living room. Carini Lang carpet.





LEFT: The dining area opens to commanding views. RIGHT: Selldorf's choices for the kitchen design were influenced by her experiences cooking with Henkel. Terry Evans's photograph *Field Museum, Swan, 1891* hangs over the sink. Wolf range and hood, at Abt.com. BELOW RIGHT: Plans of the first two levels of the five-story house.

few months later he met his future wife, an art dealer and collector. Not long after that he took her to Dunton, which she also loved and where he proposed. They married in 1996, and together they began to restore the ghost town, turning it into a luxury resort with Selldorf's help.

Once the threesome found the perfect site in the woods above the resort, Selldorf says, it took "about seven minutes to realize the house had to be vertical." Elegantly vertical it is—nearly as tall as the surrounding trees—as well as sleek, modern and richly responsive to its context. The steel-frame structure, clad in recycled Douglas fir, has floor-to-ceiling windows that offer spectacular views in three directions and bring the landscape inside.

Although Selldorf jokingly describes it as "a Seagram Building in the trees," the house is not enormous—57 feet high and less than 4,900 square feet, with four main floors and a "penthouse" office and roof deck. The front façade, facing north, is virtually a wall of glass, with three expansive panels on each of the main floors. If you approach the house from the side or at an angle, you can see all the way through to the trees on the other side.

Bellinger thought from the start that it would be "fantastic to build a house with someone you've known so long who is also a wonderful architect." But she had a slight fear that "with all the glass, we might feel too exposed to the landscape—not sheltered or cozy. Because An-



nabelle has such a great command of scale, we don't feel that way at all."

The interior spaces are compact and efficient, as Selldorf makes maximum use of volume, proportion and light. Sliding doors on either side of the house open from an Indian sandstone terrace onto the first-floor kitchen/dining

area. Selldorf decided on a rare breccia d'Egitto marble for the kitchen's countertops and backsplash. She knew exactly how to design the space, she notes, "because Christoph and I like to cook together." A magnificently sinuous wood staircase with open risers and candlestick balusters connects all five floors.



The house's levels offer lovely gradations of view and mood. Snowcapped Dolores Peak, to the northeast, appears in different perspective from the first-floor terrace than it does from the penthouse deck. Looking out the living room windows on the second floor, you seem to be *in* the blue-green forest—yet, turning back toward a blazing fire, warm reds and oranges in the furnishings and works from the couple's art collection, you are definitely in sheltered space. The two Henkel boys, whose bedrooms are on the third floor, like the feeling that they are in a hot-air balloon among the trees. By the time you get to the master bedroom on the fourth floor, says the architect, "you gasp at the views."

the couple divided their own labor, too: Henkel was more concerned with technical and mechanical questions, his wife with aesthetics. Selldorf designed the interiors as well as the building. "Annabelle really knows my taste," reflects Bellinger. One major item that gave Henkel pause was Selldorf's plan to install louvered steel shutters, modeled on those often seen on windows in Paris. Steel proved too heavy, and aluminum eventually worked—so well that you barely see the shutters when they are folded back. "They perform flawlessly," concludes Henkel.

The three collaborators also worked with project architect Matthew Schnepf, formerly of Selldorf Architects. Of course,

With the project finished, Selldorf looks back at the "opportunity of a lifetime to work for dear friends in such a location with such a great builder. I miss that." Bellinger says, "We had a completely fantastic time—the process was such a pleasure. I really miss it!" □

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**ABOVE:** Selldorf installed shutters and board-and-batten siding of reclaimed barn wood on the exterior to achieve shadows. "It's immensely rewarding when the spatial moves you've thought about turn out the way you imagined or better," she says. **RIGHT:** The master bedroom.

**OPPOSITE:** The roof deck has unobstructed vistas of Dolores Peak, looming in the northeast. Selldorf was commissioned to design a house that would, above all, provide the family with privacy. Although it's "a frivolous thought," she says with a laugh, "I've always suspected they were doing it for me because of my deep appreciation of the place."



