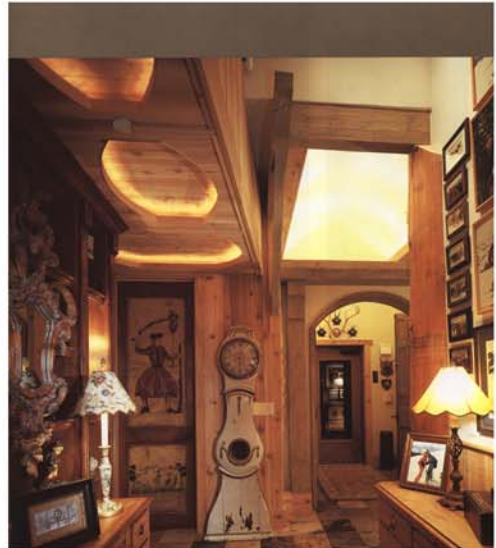




Kyle Webb, K. H. Webb Architects



One architect sees mountain-west style evolving toward more contemporary, a second sees a predominance of old-world nostalgia among his clients, and two others endeavor to spotlight the unique qualities that set a community apart from other areas of the country. By Joy Overbeck

Kyle Webb, K. H. Webb Architects, Vail

About four years ago, a new client walked into Kyle Webb's Vail office and handed him a book called *The Not So Big House* by Sarah Susanka. Though Webb was familiar with the book and its ideas had been influencing his work for some time, he was surprised that someone building a 5,000 square-foot home on the Vail Golf Course would be a fan. And the architect was elated, too, that the client valued the spatial discipline advocated by the book—just as Webb himself does.

"He wanted the house to be very efficient, even if it was large," recalls Webb. "We filled it up with built-ins and window seats so that every little nook and cranny was utilized. The house also has no hallways, which waste a lot of space."

The process took a lot of think-time, but it resulted in an extremely flexible home. For example, the breakfast room can also be set up as an office, and a guest room can double as a den or even a home theater.

Originally from Cleveland, Webb moved to Vail in the late 1980s after obtaining his architecture degree from Catholic University in Washington, D.C. He was familiar with the area because his family had skied at the popular resort for many years while he was growing up. Webb spent some years with various firms, then went back to graduate school and worked in D.C. for awhile. Returning to Vail fulltime in 1991, he started his own firm in 1999.



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K.H. Webb now employs four architects plus its principal. They do a mixture of work, including restaurants and other commercial, but the mainstay is high-end residential.

Webb thinks that the rustic mountain lodge motif may have run its course in the exclusive ski enclaves hereabouts. With clients hailing from such geographically diverse outposts as New York, Los Angeles, Dallas, Chicago, South America and Hong Kong, "People are definitely being more unique and trying to differentiate themselves from everyone else," he says. "They are kind of sick of walking into their friends' homes and seeing the same thing they have in their homes."

Traditional Western interiors are



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evolving, adding more contemporary elements like curved, clean, all-white walls, or steel and rusted metals, perhaps a steel fireplace, for instance. And homeowners are increasingly drawn to woods other than the typical pine, cherry and maple, rather, opting for more exotic burled and patterned woods.

In keeping with ecological thinking, many of the woods are grown on plantations instead of being harvested in the forests, Webb says. Furniture isn't quite as hard-edged as what you'd find in a Manhattan apartment, but it's not all leather couches and Indian blanket upholstery anymore, either.

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different story altogether, in architecture as well as interior design, Webb maintains. That's particularly true in the large portion of his business, which involves renovation.

"Renovating is a very important trend right now and has been for awhile," says Webb. "In Vail, because it's such a superb location, people are taking places 20 or 30 years old and updating them substantially. We take it down to the studs and start over."

The firm finished a remodel that linked two '70s condos, one above the other, into one urban-style penthouse in the midst of Vail village. All the walls were torn out on the upper level, which became one huge open space housing the living, dining, kitchen and office areas. Walls of curved cherrywood continue the sleek, modern theme, and a sculptural stairway with steel balusters descends to the bedrooms at the lower level.

Many other aspects of the way people live is changing, too, Webb reports. For instance, the remodels he does almost always include updated wiring for DSL, as most owners will have a home office or two.

Perhaps because many of his clients come from regions with hot and muggy summers, Webb finds they often insist on air conditioning even in the high, cool Rocky Mountains. The architect recommends a system used for decades in commercial buildings, called the economizer, which efficiently recirculates outside air to cool the home without the expense of traditional air conditioning. Since in winter the same system heats the residence, Webb is seeing less use of in-floor radiant heat. Once a given for high-quality home comfort, radiant heat is being used mostly in bathrooms now, according to the architect.

Crucial to pleasing the client with the finished result, notes Webb, is the planning that goes on beforehand.

"We have a systematic and organized approach to everything," he explains. "We really spend a lot of upfront time, getting to know the client and understanding exactly what they want and need, before we ever draw anything."