

BRINGING THE OUTDOORS IN

Story and photography by SIMONE PADDOCK



A Shevlin Commons home blends modern architecture with a sense of nature

Crouched against the unmanicured earth, the house appears to gently erupt from its natural desert setting. The soft brown, olive and amber colors of its wood siding place it firmly in nature's grasp, but the strikingly bold lines of its architecture leave no doubt: This is a decidedly modern home.

Elegant and understated, Jeff Pickhardt's 2,800-square-foot Shevlin Commons residence exudes a guarded sense of privacy to those who view it from the road. As you step through the front door and venture into the large kitchen-and-living room, the house opens up to show off a sudden and surprisingly close view of the Three Sisters and its adjoining Cascades.

"It's called the 'coyote perspective,'" explains architect Scott Gilbride. "We had an 18-foot height restriction for the home, so two stories were out of the question. But [Jeff] wanted to have some tall spaces nonetheless—so instead, we dug the house in.

"It ended up being sunk into the ground about four feet below grade, eliminating a lot of the grassy foreground and creating a very different, and much closer, perspective toward the mountains."

Another reason for the home's low profile is its location in Shevlin Commons. The area's 66 home sites occupy less than half of the 76-acre property, which borders Shevlin Park in west Bend, and it faces an open sagebrush plain that can be prone to strong winds. The Pickhardt home occupies the westernmost fringe of the development, so the nestled-in design also helps to create a necessary wind-break.



ABOVE: Need caption

Natural by Design

Pickhardt and Gilbride collaborated closely on the preliminary conceptual design, but many of the home's unusual features were spawned by a powerful third influence: the "Shevlin Commons Design Guidelines." The 91-page-long document outlines in detail the subdivision's unique development philosophy: By preserving a broad expanse of open space and carefully guiding development, Shevlin Commons seeks to create a seamless transition from urban Bend to its outlying forestlands. The landscape-based design stresses the importance of the natural setting in architecture and construction.

Bend native Andy Crosby, developer of Shevlin Commons, dedicated 43 acres of the land as a conservation easement with public recreational access via hiking and biking trails. "A subdivision proposal called for development across the entire property,"

Crosby recalls, "and that concerned me because it just didn't seem appropriate for the location. So we started trying to figure out a better way to preserve the property."

Shevlin Commons is divided into three residential zones: The square footage and roof heights in each zone are structured to ensure that every home has a dramatic view of the mountains. The rules also prohibit the use of toxic fertilizers or chemicals in gardens, encourage the use of environmentally friendly building materials and alternative energy sources and explain how to support native flora and fauna.

"The concept was to create a sustainable neighborhood that encompassed land conservation and environmental values, and which encouraged people to think differently about design—about their homes, their relationship to the land and how much square footage

they really need," Crosby says. "A lot of the creative, cutting-edge architects love working with us, because for them it's a blank canvas. Yes, there are guidelines, but the guidelines also give them the freedom to innovate."

The Pickhardt home, says Crosby, "represents all we are trying to achieve. There are some incredibly warm, sophisticated and efficient homes that are going to be part of this development. Jeff's house really broke the ice, and we are incredibly lucky to have it as our first home on the property. Scott [Gilbride] really went far above and beyond what the guidelines asked for."

Besides its visual appeal, the house is a marvel in its use of environmentally sound building techniques. The walls are constructed of Arxx blocks—insulating concrete forms (ICFs), made of expanded polystyrene, which stack and interlock like Legos and

create a foundation for poured-in-place concrete. Gilbride calls it, "a really great system. It reduces sound, has high fire resistance, is maintenance-free, and creates excellent insulation values, which of course saves energy."

Insulspan structurally insulated panels (SIPs) were used for the roof. Each panel has a core of molded polystyrene with strand board laminated to the top and bottom faces to create a sandwich. Gilbride also made the house ready for a sod roof to provide a "living" crown that will someday enhance the home's natural setting.

Creativity and Vision

With the neighborhood design guidelines and environmental building concerns of his client successfully addressed, the Bend



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ABOVE: A European-style stone fountain sets off a commercial reproduction on the east wall, facing a courtyard.

OPPOSITE: The Coca-Cola vending machine works just fine, though the Sargents plug it in only for “special occasions.”

architect was free to unleash his own creativity and vision. “It’s a personal goal of mine to try and create drama in the homes I design,” says Gilbride.

Influenced by contemporary residential architecture in the Puget Sound area, Gilbride applied his touch to both interior and exterior. Boldly slanted timber beams, with exposed metal connections, break up the rigidity of the otherwise straight design lines. Cool black concrete abuts warm, amber-colored fir-plank flooring. A Roman-style atrium at the center of the home brings nature, daylight and airiness into the rooms that border it. Practical and beautiful sliding barnyard-type doors on the bedrooms—one to the

walk-in closet of the master bedroom, two to guest bedrooms—are equally outside the box.

Gilbride and Pickhardt put a lot of thought into the details of the home’s function. “We worked a lot with steps [and] ceiling and elevation changes,” the architect says, “to distinguish between spaces, create privacy and diagonal vistas, and to cultivate spaces that are usable on a daily basis—for one or two people, or for larger groups.”

Support spaces—such as the powder, mud and laundry rooms—were gently hidden from the public rooms. The master bathroom was appointed with a cylindrical shower, which is topped with a

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triangular glass skylight to create a very spalike and restful space.

Then there's the view. "One of my pet peeves," says Gilbride, "is walking into a house and having a panoramic view from the entry—and after that, it never gets any better. What we did with the entry was to create a small, postcard-style window where you get a framed, breakdown view of the mountains. It's restricted, and it's a tease: It teases you of what is to come."

Floor-to-ceiling sliding-glass doors open the living room to the outdoors, which permits the adjoining stone courtyard (with its

Resources

Scott Gilbride:
541/388-3768; www.scottgilbride.com

Arxx Building Products:
315/482-5253; www.arxx.net

Insulspan:
www.insulspan.com





fire pit) to become additional living space when weather permits.

“I think details [are] what often make or break a project,” adds Gilbride. “If you look at this house in totality, there is an overall theme and a general aesthetic that carries through. While the individual details may be varied to achieve a certain result, they can also provide visual surprises here and there. Hopefully, the final result will create a few smiles of delight.” **BH**

The Inside Scoop on ICFs

Insulating concrete forms (ICFs) are among the fastest-growing building-material segment for residential and commercial markets in the United States. Introduced in Europe more than 30 years ago, the system is so fast and efficient that builders are able to erect entire structures in only a week or two—saving greatly on field time.

Lightweight ICFs replace traditional plywood in wall construction. The expanded polystyrene blocks are stacked in a running bond pattern, forming both exterior and interior insulated walls. Installers lay rebar horizontally and vertically inside the blocks to create a structurally sound wall. The blocks are then pumped full with concrete mixture, leaving channels for plumbing and electrical ducts, and left to cure.

Because the blocks have more than two inches of polystyrene insulation on either side, concrete can be poured even in sub-freezing conditions—something otherwise difficult to achieve with traditional wood systems, and of course a highly desirable quality in Central Oregon’s chilly winter months.

—S.P.