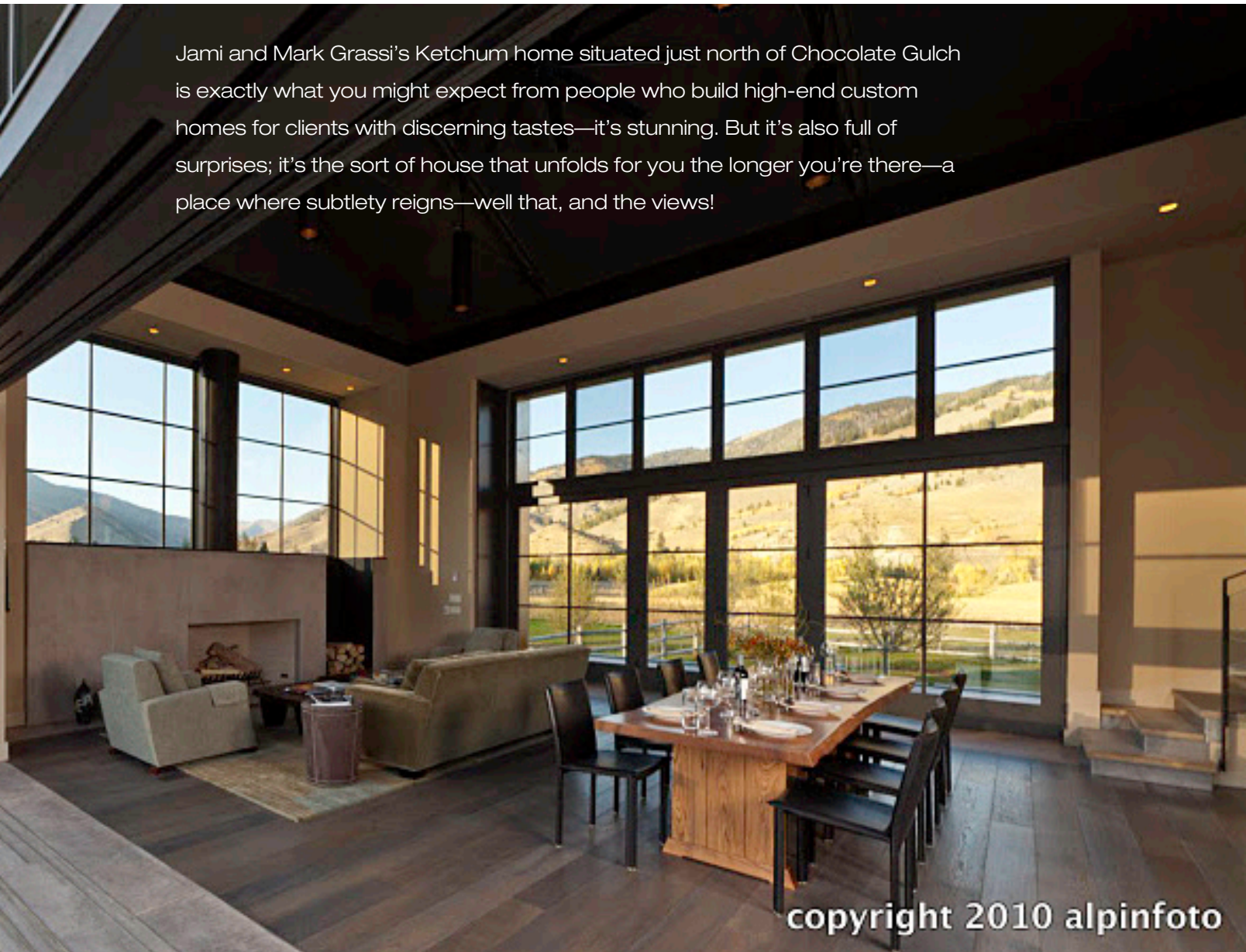


subtlety,  
reigns



Jami and Mark Grassi's Ketchum home situated just north of Chocolate Gulch is exactly what you might expect from people who build high-end custom homes for clients with discerning tastes—it's stunning. But it's also full of surprises; it's the sort of house that unfolds for you the longer you're there—a place where subtlety reigns—well that, and the views!



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When Jami and Mark Grassi, decided to buy a second home in Ketchum, they thought they'd buy something in town for the sake of convenience. And because in his everyday life in Napa Valley, Mark, owner/operator of Grassi and Associates Construction, spends his days tending to the ins and outs of high-end custom-home designs, the couple resisted the idea of building. Jami recalls, "I told Mark that our second home

should be about relaxing. Building is what he does, and I thought if we took on such a project, he would never relax." But when they began looking seriously at real estate, they surprised themselves with a directional shift. After seeing the lot north of Ketchum and the panoramic views of the stunning Idaho landscape, they enlisted the help of a long-time colleague and friend, architect Juancarlos Fernandez, to help give shape to



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TOP TO BOTTOM: The cedar of the exterior and the weathered steel of the roof echo the rural setting while the use of concrete, glass, and clean lines elevate the design to the realm of the sophisticated; the loft above the kitchen serves as a yoga studio, and the dark ceiling adds to the warmth of the main living area.

ABOVE  
that is p



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their vision. For people who make a living helping others realize their dream homes, this was their chance to literally construct their own dreams.

Standing alone just north of Chocolate Gulch, the Grassi home testifies to the wisdom of merging smart architectural design with a reverence for the natural surroundings. It also speaks to the benefits of teaming up with someone who knows you well. Juancarlos, well-known for his architectural contributions to Napa Valley, has worked with Mark on a number of projects

in the Napa area including CADE Vineyard and a smattering of private homes. When Mark approached him about designing their Ketchum home, Juancarlos had just left his long-time employer Lail Design Group and was freelancing while he put together his own architectural firm. The Grassi home is the perfect calling card for Juancarlos's versatility and vision.

While each of Juancarlos's projects is distinctive, there is a common vernacular in his Napa Valley designs because they make sense in the landscape they live in. Given that our Idaho landscape is different than Napa's lush and rolling green hills, Juancarlos dealt with a different palette. As he familiarized himself with the landscape and the architecture of Sun Valley, he knew that he "wanted to do something unconventional for the area." Unconventional, yes, he achieved that, but he also managed to pay homage to the landscape and the rural heritage here.

When you drive north from Ketchum and pass Chocolate Gulch, it's hard to resist the urge to turn into the driveway and knock on the door to see what's going on behind those tall, dramatic cedar walls. The drama stems from the convergence of two worlds: the cedar and the weathered steel roof of the exterior hint at the barns dotting the landscape

of south-central Idaho, while the simple sophistication of the design suggests a different time and place altogether. The two buildings, a guesthouse/garage and main house, are connected by concrete patios hemmed in by steel rails. The main house is punctuated by walls of glass on the west-, north-, and east-facing aspects. The master suite sits on the upper level on the southern side of the house and boasts its own window onto the world. The cedar offers an innate verticality to the house that gives you the sense it is reaching skyward. It's a phenomenal effect, this grounding a building so thoroughly in the place but leaving room for that building to reach beyond it.

Knowing Jami and Mark as well as he does, Juancarlos knew that he had the good luck of having clients who understand architecture and would "have the patience to try to understand" his design. Speaking to Jami and Mark about their home, I ask them what their favorite detail about the house is. Mark laughs and sheepishly admits that it's the steam shower in the master bathroom. Knowing that they spend as much time as possible Nordic skiing out their front door, his response was understandable even though a bit surprising considering the magnificent architectural details that abound. Upon further reflection, Mark



The kitchen at the Grassi home is open and centered around a large island perfect for culinary preparations and gathering.

shares a story of an experience they had in the late summer. Lying in bed with the expansive window open to the south valley, they watched a early evening storm roll in. Mark admitted to being awe-struck by the storm as well as the way the house invites the natural world in. Mark continues to say that, “there’s a subtlety to the house” that allows them to discover new reasons to love it the longer they live there.

Jami’s favorite aspect about the house is that it doesn’t overwhelm the natural environment, rather it, “integrates and meshes with the beauty around it.” They wanted a house that seamlessly transitions from the outside world to the inside world—a house that doesn’t seal them off from the nature they had come here to live in. The liberal use of glass contributes to that effect but so does the thoughtful and consistent use of, as Juancarlos says, “functional, durable, and appealing materials” throughout the property like concrete for the patios as well as the floors and countertops. Moving from outside to inside the house, you sense a continuity. The architectural language that gives meaning to the exterior also informs the interior and the result is a clean, authentic experience.

The home offers some insight into the couple that lives there. Mark shies away from the word “spectacular” to describe the house. He resists anything that is “over the top”

and Jami, although a bit more inclined to use the word “spectacular,” shares this humility. When Jami speaks of the home as spectacular, it’s not in a self-congratulatory way—no, it’s with a sense of awe for the way the house seems to be in its element. It’s a house that frames their appreciation for the things about the valley that drew them there in the first place.

Juancarlos admits to being “surprised” by people’s responses to the house. When I ask if he was surprised if people “liked” the house, he says, “It’s not my concern whether or not people like the house. No, my concern is whether or not people ‘get’ what I’m trying to do.”

He laughs knowing that his response is only going to elicit another question from me, a question I’m embarrassed to ask but that I can’t resist—a question that sounds something like, “Do you want to tell us what it is that you were trying to do?”

Juancarlos responds, “There’s a word in Spanish that means something between simple and basic, but I can’t think how to say it in English. I’m not trying to work in a particular style of architecture. I aim for something that is basic and has a function.”

Knowing that it must be frustrating or tedious for an artist to explain his work, I let him off the hook. Truth is, I’d rather read it for myself anyway. When I stand in the Grassi home, taking in the stunning late autumn views, I understand that a reverence for function gave meaning to the form. I see that the design mirrors the way of the natural world—there’s nothing extraneous, nothing superfluous. But I also know that a prioritizing of function doesn’t mean that the home is sparse and utilitarian in its simplicity. No, all you have to do is pick any one of the amazing views that Juancarlos’s design frames and you can see that a respect for function is anything but sparse. The nearby hills are dotted with a late autumn flurry of color, and the mountains further north remind me of the intricate connection between form and function. Overall, it’s clear that the home is *of* the elements and *in* its element.

## the pro’s picks

Mark is no rookie when it comes to building. He’s the founder of Grassi and Associates, an award-winning construction firm that has been building residences, wineries, and estates in the Napa and Sonoma Valleys for more than 20 years. When it comes to building his own dream home, here are his picks.

### ARCHITECTURE

**Juancarlos Fernandez | Signum Architecture | Napa Valley, California**

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When Jami and Mark decided to build a home north of Ketchum, they had one architect in mind to help them design their dream home—their good friend, Juancarlos Fernandez. Born and raised in Guadalajara, Mexico, Juancarlos worked at Lail Design Group for eight years before opening Signum Architects with Jarrod Denton in May of 2011. He lists the likes of Herzog, De Meuron, and Kundig as influences. But since his designs are meant to be lived in, it makes sense that he also includes “life” as a major influence. If you like what you see and you’re looking to build, call him up—you won’t be disappointed.

### CONSTRUCTION

**Brian Burrell | Class 5 Enterprises Inc. | Hailey, Idaho**

P.O. Box 3552 | Hailey, Idaho 83353 | Phone: 208.788.6344

Although Mark acted as general contractor for their Idaho home, to oversee day-to-day operations on the jobsite, Jami and Mark hired Brian Burrell from Class 5 Enterprises. Brian and his crew also handled all the carpentry for the guesthouse and main house. Mark had nothing but praise for Brian saying, “He was invaluable to me through the course of the construction.” High praise from a man who runs such a successful company of his own.