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## Aspen Modern: America's International Resort

Christine Madrid French

Elaine B. Stiles

*Roger Williams University*, [estiles@rwu.edu](mailto:estiles@rwu.edu)

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# Aspen Modern

AMERICA'S  
INTERNATIONAL RESORT



**Aspen Modern: America's International Resort** is part of the Modern Module program, a two-year endeavor in four cities, aimed at building public support for and engaging in discussions focused on the study and protection of America's modern architectural resources. This series of events and publications is coordinated by the National Trust for Historic Preservation's Modernism + Recent Past Program and funded by grants from the National Endowment for the Arts and the Henry Luce Foundation. The Aspen Modern event was presented in partnership with the National Trust's Mountains/Plains Office and the City of Aspen, and in cooperation with the Aspen Art Museum, the Aspen Historical Society, the Aspen Institute, and Spring Board Aspen.

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NOVEMBER 2011



## Modernism + Recent Past Program

Significant sites come in all shapes and sizes, and from all eras of American history. The architectural and cultural resources of the Modern movement and the recent past are an important chapter in our national story, encompassing innovative ideas in architecture and planning, as well as places that demonstrate the influence and impact of the Cold War, the Civil Rights Movement, and urban renewal. Day by day, however, a steady campaign of demolition is eroding the physical fabric of the recent past, with little consideration of its community importance, design significance, or role in creating a sustainable future.

In order to address what many consider to be a growing crisis, the National Trust for Historic Preservation inaugurated its Modernism + Recent Past Program, also known as TrustModern, in 2009. Headquartered at the Western Office of the National Trust in San Francisco, TrustModern seeks to reacquaint Americans with their living history by reframing public perceptions about Modern and recent past architecture; creating stronger federal, state, and local policies to protect these sites; promoting contextual studies; and fostering an action network of individuals and organizations interested in resource preservation and rehabilitation. The National Trust is also breaking ground in the conservation of modern architecture at its own sites, including two of the most significant residential designs in the US: the Philip Johnson Glass House (1949) in New Canaan, CT, and Mies van der Rohe's Farnsworth House (1951) in Plano, IL.

Preserving our “familiar past” is a complex and sometimes controversial undertaking. Thoughtful conservation of the built environment, however, not only informs our collective history, but provides innovative opportunities for planning and stewarding our landscapes. The National Trust is working to lead on this issue and moves forward with the firm conviction that these places matter. We welcome you to join us in this conversation.

**ON THE COVER** Aspen Institute, Marble Garden; Herbert Bayer, 1955.

**FACING PAGE** Boomerang Lodge, 500 West Hopkins Avenue; Charles Paterson, 1956.



## Aspen's Modern Legacy

### **Restore the best of the old, but if you build, build modern.**

**WALTER GROPIUS, Aspen town meeting, August 29, 1945**

Aspen's mid 20th-century renewal as a high-end vacation resort coincided with the widespread adoption of modern architecture in America. Wealthy patrons sought out innovative design solutions to attract attention, and global tourists, to the scenic mining town. Adherents of two differing approaches—Wrightian/Organic and Bauhaus/International—augmented the Victorian-era character of the community with a richly defined collection of modernist buildings. Entrepreneurs also erected a number of contemporary Swiss-style ski chalets, rustic lodges, and pre-fabricated log buildings to entertain and house a growing numbers of visitors.

World-renowned architects and young idealists were attracted to the area by Aspen's economic potential and its one-of-a-kind mountainous surroundings. Their architecture communicated both a distinct sense of place and a sophisticated level of design, whether in the organic treatment of natural wood and rock walls or the machine-like precision of glass, concrete, and steel. Modernist buildings and landscape features characterized the new Aspen Institute campus, and alpine, vernacular, and manufactured structures were interspersed among extant buildings downtown and along neighboring streets.

As Aspen matured into a noted sports and arts destination, builders introduced a new type of building to accommodate visitors: the condominium. "Condos" made a major impact on Aspen's townscape, economy, and demographics as affordable housing, traffic, and planning priorities became important concerns. Today, retaining the picturesque historic character, including the "new" modern heritage of the area, is a pre-eminent preservation issue in this close-knit community.

## COMMERCIAL

Commercial development slowed dramatically in Aspen after the Silver Crash of 1893, when the local mining economy fell to ruin. Yet, the community came back strongly in the mid 20th century, when the rise of the ski industry in the West brought new opportunities, people, and ideas to the area. The city welcomed a league of imaginative architects and builders, who revived the downtown core with innovative office, retail, and recreational buildings.

Taliesin fellow and expert skier Frederic “Fritz” Benedict designed the Bank of Aspen at a prominent downtown corner in 1956. The flat-roofed building, composed of wood and recycled brick, evoked Frank Lloyd Wright’s influence in its dramatic use of cantilevering, overall horizontality, and massing of chimney and piers. This deep respect for natural materials, composed with an eye towards modernity and an organic style, informed many works of the period, including the 1976 Aspen Athletic Club and the



● The Bank of Aspen, now Wells Fargo Bank, 119 South Mill Street; Fritz Benedict, 1956.

Photo courtesy Aspen Historical Society, Aspen Times Collection.

● The Patio Building, 630 East Hyman Avenue; Thomas Benton, 1969.

● Aspen Athletic Club, 720 East Hyman Avenue; Robin Molny, 1976.







1976 downtown pedestrian mall by architect Robin Molny, the 1969 Hannah-Dustin Building, by Benedict protégés George Heneghan and Daniel Gale, and the 1969 Patio Building by Californian architect Tom Benton.

Each of these architects delighted in exploring new ways to manipulate materials (wood, concrete, brick, glass, tile, and stucco), light, and scale to create buildings that maintained a unique relationship to nature and the surrounding community. Deep overhangs protected citizens from the summer sun glare as well as the massive winter snowfall, while expansive glazed walls allowed people to communicate with the outdoor landscape even while indoors. Artfully controlled window and door openings presented a changing sense of light and shade throughout the day, enhancing the architectural experience.



- Hannah-Dustin Building, 300 South Spring Street; Heneghan & Gale, 1969.
- Aspen Sports, 408 East Cooper Avenue; Sam Caudill, 1970.
- Pedestrian Mall, Robin Molny, 1976. Photo courtesy AHS, Aspen Times Collection.



SKIERS CHALET

In January 1947, the world's longest ski lift opened on Aspen Mountain. A rush to develop the area for a plethora of visitors soon followed, with an eclectic assortment of ski lodges, motels, and vacation homes rising throughout the valley.

Rocky Mountain resorts at mid-century often relied upon Alpine imagery to attract tourists who identified downhill skiing only with the Swiss Alps. Aspen promoted this European link (with a distinct 20th century slant) in a number of exuberantly-styled ski buildings. The Skiers Chalet, adjacent to the chair lift, featured broad sloping roofs, an abundance of wood, wrap-around balconies, and Tyrolean decorative motifs.

Pan-Abode buildings are a distinctive feature of the mid-century landscape. The company produced pre-fabricated “Lincoln Logs” that could be formed into a variety of structures (all wood, including walls, ceiling, and floor). This affordable option thrived in Aspen, with



● Skiers Chalet Lodge, 233 Gilbert Street; Allied Builders, 1965.

● Aspen Highlands Base Lodge; Fritz Benedict, 1958, demolished. Photo courtesy AHS, Aspen Highlands Collection.

● Christiana Lodge, 507-509 West Main Street; Pan Abode Cedar Homes Company, 1962. [The address on this photo is 511 and doesn't match the caption.](#)



more than fifty Pan-Abode buildings erected, including vacation housing, commercial buildings, and lodges, such as the Christiana.

The 1956 Boomerang Lodge was the creation of Charlie Paterson, who escaped Nazi Germany and settled in Aspen in a one-room cabin. He designed the modern lodge, one of the oldest in Aspen, while studying architecture at the Taliesin studio. Paterson incorporated unique uses of glass, including mitered corner windows looking towards the mountains and an underwater window for views into the pool from the lounge.

Nearby is the Hearthstone House, designed in 1961 by Robin Molny, another Taliesin fellow. Sited deep into its corner location, the handsome wood structure has two angled wings projecting from a central hearth; the wide, shingled roof and horizontal scale of the building create a home-like atmosphere for the guests.



- **Hearthstone House, 134 East Hyman Avenue; Robin Molny, 1961; enlarged 1963.**
- **Boomerang Lodge Pool photo caption needed, Photo Robert C. Bishop© images.**
- **New caption for new photo**



Buttermilk Mountain Base Lodge; Jack Walls, 1958, demolished. Photo Robert C. Bishop© images.







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 RESIDENTIAL

Although Aspen hosts a number of year-round residents, housing in this area caters primarily to those who arrive seasonally to enjoy the snowy winters or the pastorally-green summers. The Swiss-style is a favorite, with a range of homes tucked into neighborhoods like little Alpine cabins. Yet, this traditional look (such as the 1946 single-family chalet at 945 W. Smuggler Street, possibly Aspen's oldest example of this style) mixes easily with the more contemporary versions, referred to locally as “Modern Chalets.”

First appearing in the 1960s, the Modern Chalet is less decorative and more robust in scale than its forebears. With low-to-moderately pitched roofs based on a 3:12 ratio and broad façades of rectilinear glass and solid panels, these homes opened up to the outdoors and were considered more conducive to the mid-century resort lifestyle. Excellent examples can be seen in the West End, on Francis Street and along Bleeker Street.



- 118 East Bleeker Street; 1965.
- Stern Residence; Rob Roy. Photo courtesy AHS. [Still need higher res image here.](#)
- 114 East Bleeker Street; 1965.



In 1967, Fritz Benedict designed a modern twist on the Alpine cabin for *Ski* magazine; clients from Denver later built the house in Aspen. This shingled variation of the humble A-frame effectively shed the snow, fit well in its mountain landscape, and epitomized affordable ski housing.

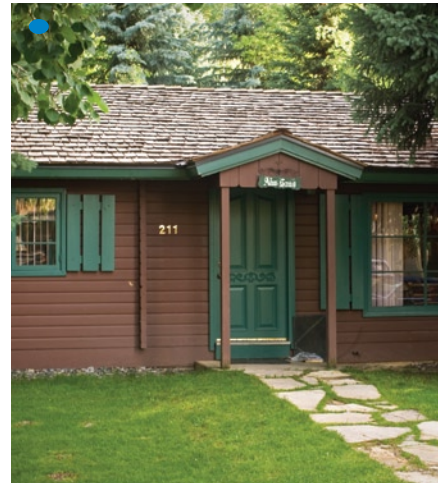
Newcomers to Aspen brought their admiration of modern design to the mountains. Their International Style single-family homes, designed by Herbert Bayer and others, are, however, becoming increasingly scarce. One-story, with flat roofs, glass walls, and small footprints, the buildings are often targeted as teardowns. An exception is the well-preserved 1972 residence designed by modernist Victor Lundy for himself and his artist wife Anstis, next door to an extant Bayer-designed residence. Lundy cantilevered the roof of the vacation home/studio to extend over the floor-to-ceiling windows that frame the 20-foot-high great room and towering trees that line the property.



- Edmundson House; Fritz Benedict, 1960, demolished. Photo courtesy City of Aspen.
- 949 West Smuggler Street; 1946.
- 1102 Waters Avenue; Fritz Benedict; 1967.

The Pan Abode log cabin on Hopkins Avenue was erected in 1956. Ordered from a catalog, the kit was delivered by train or truck and assembled on site. The company, still in business today, produced only about 100 buildings a year at that time. These simple structures are considered locally significant in Aspen's architectural history.

Shadow Mountain Condominiums, built in 1965 at the top of Aspen Street near Lift No. 1, signaled Aspen's enthusiastic embrace of a new housing model. Designed by Texas engineer Donald W. Kirk, the buildings step up the mountain, the many gable roofs appear stacked like traditional chalets in an Alpine environment. The saw-tooth roofline also paid homage, in the modernist sense, to the peaks behind. Condominiums changed the small-scale residential atmosphere of Aspen and altered patterns of development throughout the 20th century.



- Shadow Mountain Condominiums, 809 West Aspen Street; Donald W. Kirk, 1965.
- 211 West Hopkins Avenue; Pan Abode Cedar Homes Company, 1956.
- 301 Lake Avenue; Victor Lundy, 1972.

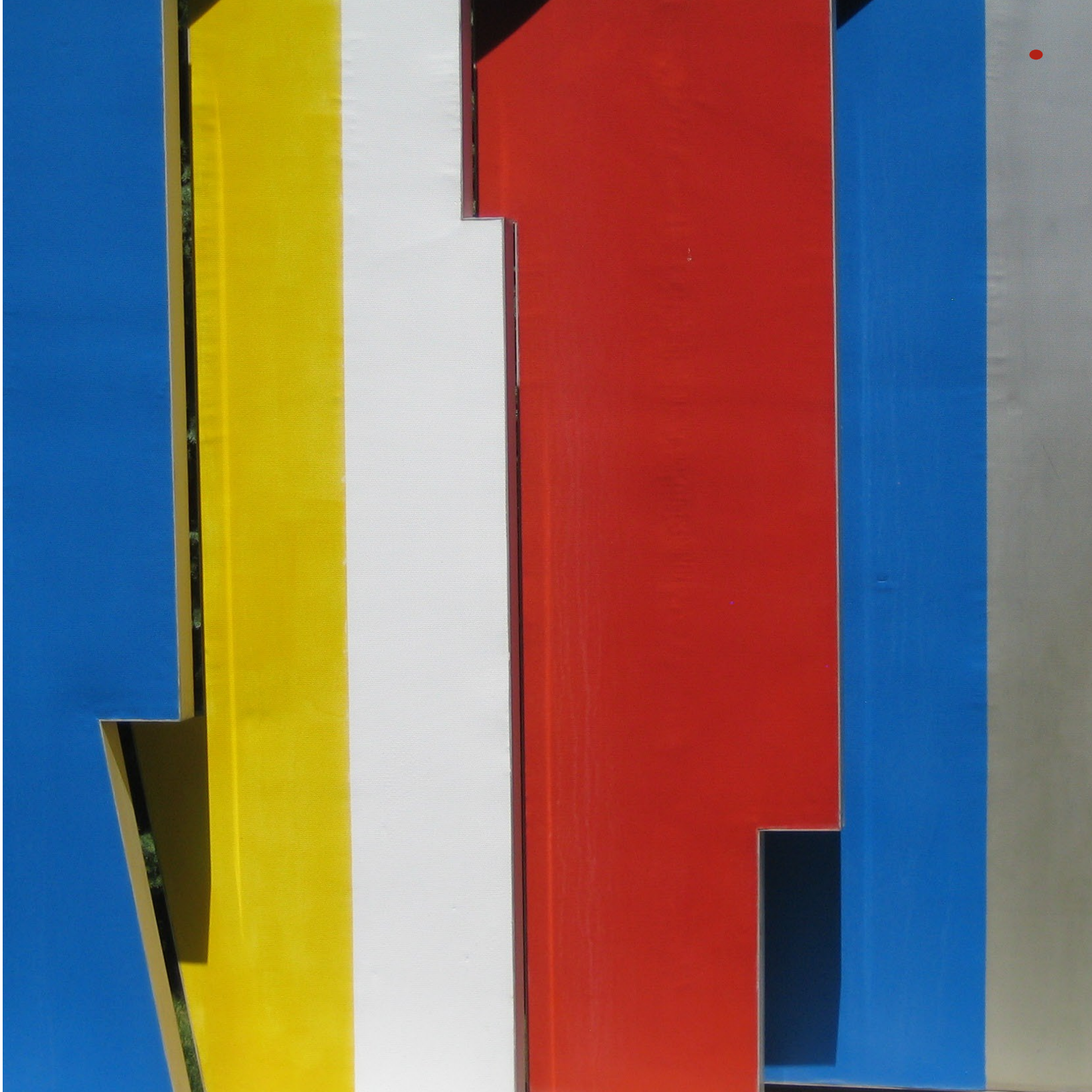


Soon after World War II, Chicago industrialist Walter Paepcke arrived in Aspen with the singular dream of transforming the sleepy town into a center for exploring the arts, culture, and life. He started the Aspen Skiing Company and quickly followed that enterprise with the founding of the Aspen Institute of Humanistic Studies on the open meadows west of town.

Paepcke supported the work of the Bauhaus in Europe and the U.S., and hired architect Herbert Bayer, with colleague and brother-in-law Fritz Benedict, to create an idyllic campus distinguished by Modern buildings and landscapes. Curving paths connected the structures, with a series of artworks and sculpture augmenting panoramic views of the mountain range beyond. Contributors to the Aspen Institute included Eero Saarinen, in his 1949 Music Tent (now demolished), and Buckminster Fuller's 1952 Geodesic Dome (rebuilt in [xxxx](#)).



- **Walter Paul Paepcke Memorial Building, Aspen Institute; Herbert Bayer, 1962.**
- **Kaliedoscope art [new caption needed here.](#)**







The Aspen Institute campus was designed without a master plan but loosely organized in three main areas—housing for guests, institute administration and activities, and affiliated institutes. The first permanent building was the 1953 Seminar Building, designed by Bayer and Benedict. Bayer also created environmental sculptures, the 1954 Green Mound and 1955 Marble Garden, early examples of the “earthwork” and environmental sculpture movement. Paepcke hoped to expand further and build an entire neighborhood of modern homes next to the Institute, featuring the work of Walter Gropius and Philip Johnson among other notable designers, but the plans died at his passing in 1960.

Benedict and Bayer went on to design the Pitkin County Public Library at 120 East Main Street, now converted to offices. The pair of architects created a low-pitched hip roof, red brick building with deep overhanging eaves. Veteran newsman and American icon Walter Cronkite dedicated the structure in 1966.



- Anderson Park; Herbert Bayer, 1973. Photo by Jim Lindberg, NTHP.
- Koch Seminar Building, Aspen Institute; Herbert Bayer, 1953.
- Former Pitkin County Library, 120 East Main Street; Fritz Benedict and Herbert Bayer, 1960.


## Afterword

The architecture and landscapes of the “recent past,” those built within the generational memory of our own time, are particularly vulnerable to untimely destruction. Too young to be appreciated for their historic contributions, many of these structures are targeted for the bulldozer before reaching the venerable age of the antique. Unfortunately, Aspen has recently suffered its own major loss.

In October, 2011, the University of Colorado demolished the Given Institute, once determined eligible for the National Register of Historic Places for its “exceptional significance.” In 1972, Chicago architect Harry Weese, also known for his vaulted concrete Metro Stations in Washington, D.C., created a serene conference center intended to promote advanced thinking in molecular biology and medical research. The Given Institute was named “one of Aspen’s finest modernist works” in *Buildings of Colorado* and placed on the 2011 Most Endangered Places list for Colorado Preservation, Inc. Advocates nationwide fought for its re-use. Now it is gone.



● Given Institute, 100 East Francis Street; Harry Weese, 1972. Photos by Greg Watts.  
FACING PAGE Aspen Institute, Geodesic Dome; Buckminster Fuller.



National Trust for Historic Preservation  
1785 Massachusetts Avenue, NW  
Washington, DC 20036-2117  
[www.PreservationNation.org](http://www.PreservationNation.org)

Mountains/Plains Office  
535 16th Street, Suite 750  
Denver, CO 80202  
303.623.1504  
[mpro@nthp.org](mailto:mpro@nthp.org)

Modernism + Recent Past Program/TrustModern  
Western Office  
5 Third Street, Suite 707  
San Francisco, CA 94103  
415.947.0692  
[trustmodern@nthp.org](mailto:trustmodern@nthp.org)  
[www.PreservationNation.org/TrustModern](http://www.PreservationNation.org/TrustModern)  
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**Text** Margaret Smith

**Editors** Christine Madrid French, Amy Guthrie, Elaine Brown Stiles

**Design** Lori Twietmeyer

**Photography** Brian Porter

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