



Advertise on **dealplanet**

Subscribe on **dealplanet**

Contacts on **dealplanet**




Custom Canyon

by [Jennifer LaRue](#)
January 23rd, 2012

Like any flying object without the telltale wings or propellers becomes an unidentified flying object, so could an “anything but square” structure become an unidentified funky building; questions are raised, bets are made and pictures are taken. “People would actually stop and take pictures of it, and I heard that people made bets as to what it was,” says Chelsea Wood*, describing people’s reaction to what she and her husband Rutledge built first built on their property. “It’s simple really,” she says, explaining the unique look. “Rutledge thinks outside of the box.” Simply stated, it is a shop, a “garagemahal,” a man-cave or what-have-you, creatively designed and constructed, but to the Woods, the funky structure was the catalyst for the home that followed.

The Woods were living in Florida when Chelsea came to visit her sister in Chattaroy, just north of Spokane. She saw a For Sale sign on some acreage in the area and fell in love with the terrain. The couple purchased the property in late 2004. “I mistakenly told my husband that it didn’t rain or snow a lot in the area,” Chelsea laughs. “When we flew out in ‘04, it was snowing.”

They then moved to the area and began dreaming up the possibilities. The couple’s brother-in-law had a buddy named Carl Nelson from CN Contracting and Consulting and he did some building and remodeling projects for the Woods over the next five years, so they knew he would be the builder, but an architect was the wild card. They spoke to a few and then called Jeff Fountain at Copeland Architecture and Construction with the idea of first building a shop. “We almost sold the property two or three times,” Chelsea says. “It just didn’t seem like it would come together.”

Fountain was at first hesitant to design a simple shop, but when he was told a bit about their taste, his interest was piqued. He commented on the fact that what they were describing did not sound like a shop, rather a modern and interesting structure and he jumped on board. He sent out architect Austin Dickey and a melding of minds began. The shop was completed in 2009. “Austin is the reason we’re here,” Chelsea says. “We said to ourselves that if the shop goes well, we’ll move forward with the house.” Rutledge agrees, “It was a very personal process. He ‘interviewed’ us and got to know us and our preferences.”

Before the earth was turned by a shovel Dickey studied the land; canyons and rock formations became his palette. As he ventured further, he discovered rusted metal that had most likely been dumped in the canyons for years and he incorporated even that into his designs.

The introduction to the “Canyon House”, as it is called, is a wall of oxidized sheet metal with a meandering cut out design that may or may not represent the rolling hills or canyons. Flanked by concrete blocks, the “gate” swings open and a visitor is lead up a winding driveway. The front door has no outside handle and is also made of oxidized sheet metal. “It was meant to be a piece of art,” says Dickey. “A metaphor for the objects found in the canyons.” Stepping inside, more metaphors appear that represent the natural beauty of the surroundings.

The walls are more concrete blocks, smooth (ground face) with a contrasting meandering band of slightly darker and rough (split face) blocks running down the long main hallway that is less like a hallway and more like a canyon; the different shades of light and dark blocks representing the layer of rock one might find in the carved earth. Random steps follow the grade of the ground and the 18”x18” porcelain tiles beneath the feet are sometimes square and sometimes cut in half. Look up and there is nothing but a view of the sky; an extended skylight where, at night, tiny lights appear like stars. “When the moon is full, the lights aren’t needed; the hallway is illuminated by moon light,” says Chelsea.

When asked if there were any complications with such a “far from textbook” design, Dickey lays his hand on places where the concrete blocks slightly curve and says, “Well, the mason had never cut corners like this before and no one I know has ever done a skylight like this. Certainly it was complicated but a great learning experience.” He also mentions that the builders did comment on the lack of right angles throughout the house, but any perceived problems or challenges seem to have been forgotten, surpassed by the excitement of learning something new.

There are three distinct areas, what Dickey calls pods, in the 3,504 square-foot home. An aerial view of the home shows the three pods: the guest “pod” is an outcropping to the north, the living, dining and kitchen area face east and are separated from the master bedroom on the south end and west facing garage by the hallway/canyon. The south/west facing exterior wall of the guest outcropping serves as the visual mouth of the canyon leading into the path of the north to south running hallway through the front door. The design is organic; fitting into the terrain as if it grew there.

The short list of Chelsea’s “must haves” included making sure their own furniture fit with the interior design, that the home and grounds be low maintenance and that every space be functional. The house they lived in prior to moving into the Canyon house in April of 2011 had just under 6,000 square feet and the couple admittedly only used half of that; the



THE dealplanet



Deals from 50% to 90% off!

rest collecting dust. All of Chelsea's criteria were met and then some in this house.

For the most part, Dickey took the lead. Having gained knowledge of the couple during the choices made in the shop, he had a frame of reference and went from there, offering Rutledge up to three options for any given space. "He always chose the most interesting option," says Dickey. "He really appreciates the custom process."

While Dickey took the lead and Rutledge made many of the final decisions, Chelsea simply trusted. "Some visitors have asked if the selections were mine and I say no, because I never could have come up with any of this," she says. Her husband knows what she likes, what she needs, and what will make her happy. It seems their tastes are almost one. She did not ask for any changes nor did she balk at any choices. "Well, I did have a problem with the color scheme in the master bedroom," she recalls. "Especially the blue. The other colors were a lighter tan, a darker brown and green. I was very resistant to it and just couldn't see it working." Knowing it was only paint and that it could be painted over, she went with it, trusting in the process. She left for a few days and returned to the finished paint job. "It all worked," she says. "I love it."

One of the ways Dickey helped the couple envision his designs and suggestions was by using a computer generated 3-dimensional model. "Looking at it was like standing in the room," Chelsea says, "He even put in characters that represented us." Dickey gives an example of the benefits of the 3-D model. "While the house was under construction," he says, "Rutledge called me when he was negotiating the purchase of the dining room painting to mock-up some different size and proportion canvases in the computer to help settle on the right dimensions."

Art is important to the couple and is scattered throughout the house. Televisions are hidden behind large paintings and really, many of the architectural elements are artworks in themselves, including the large custom made rug in the living room with a pattern that is fashioned after the dimensions of the home and the subsequent mini-rugs used elsewhere in the house.

Natural inspirations in the master bath include a concrete slant sink while built-ins in almost every room might represent the nooks and crannies dug by animals or formed in nature over time. Doors and cabinets throughout the house contain sea grass cast between two layers of acrylic paneling in pleasing shades of green and brown, including the upper kitchen cabinets that slide up rather than open out. The wood grain used on the drawers and lower cabinets are chocolate bamboo; sleek and with vertical lines. Look due east through a wall of floor to ceiling windows that make up the whole east side of the kitchen, dining and living room pod, and you will recognize that the vertical towering trees as well as the horizontal lines of the land, hills and mountains somehow seem to be an extension of the lines and color choices within the house.

Thoughtfully chosen, everything seems to be an extension of something else. Little nuances stem from larger concepts, like the tapered rectangle shape of the guest wing that is carried over to subtle shapes in the front door and the tile in the floor that is again recreated in concrete on the patio. The dining room table is a large concrete rectangle split in two, similar to how the hallway splits the house, and the design on the front gate and the canyons. The patio table is also fragmented yet solid, standing on legs of more oxidized steel. A steel beam supports the patio roof, and hanging above the patio table is a large rusted and organic looking light fixture made by local artist Sean Smith. Look up in the kitchen and more aged steel serves as a canopy that contains lighting for the island below. It hangs suspended from a dropped ceiling painted in a warm green, breaking up the high ceiling. The island, made of quartz, is a unique shape; pointed to allow the couple to gaze at each other while drinking coffee and conversing.

Many of the highlights throughout the home were instigated or designed by Dickey, including the rugs, the dining and patio table and the large tornado "chandelier" that hangs in the dining area and is made of heated and formed acrylic panels. One of the large windows had to be removed to bring it into the house.

Seeing many of Dickey's designs played out in the house, you have to ask, "Are you an architect or an artist?" He replies, "I'm an architect who likes to design furniture. I'm very technical. I like to look for a pattern." Besides being technical, Dickey is also into researching and figuring things out, going so far as to study the rising and setting sun, making sure the jutting roof over the patio shades just so. And, technically speaking, the house is smart; wired in such a way that everything can be controlled from Rutledge's iPhone or iPad, and a computer controls the window shades that roll down over the east facing windows, managing the incoming sun on a celestial calendar schedule. That and the radiant in-floor heating and forced-air system, served by a geo-thermal system, are efficient ways to keep utility bills down. Dickey and Nelson both admit they learned a lot from the whole "smart home thing". "They were very tolerant of my desire for technology in a house with technically challenged owners," Rutledge says, "This house is smart." Suddenly, a television is exposed, a fireplace lights up with warmth or a light is playfully turned off in a bathroom (only for a second) when it's occupied.

Completely custom, the Canyon House fits like a glove into the terrain, as does the interior to its inhabitants, down to the height of the shower heads in the master bath's large walk-in shower. The other two residents are Dusty and Sydnee. Dusty, the couple's 10-year-old Red Heeler follows behind the heels of Chelsea and is happy when she's happy, but Sydnee, the Woods' 10-year-old Cockatoo, was often the subject of late night conversations. Things had to be well thought-out when it came to the loud and curious bird who has his own room in the guest wing that was sound-proofed with extra board on the walls and a thick layer of glass behind the sea grass adorned acrylic paneled door. Sydnee joins the couple in the living area and patio daily and his habits had to be considered. "I think it was kind of painful for Austin," Chelsea says, "We had to make the kitchen bird proof." Dickey corrects her, "You mean bird resistant."

Dickey visited the home the Woods were living in before the Canyon House and measured the height at which Sydnee chewed to insure that nothing at that height was chewable. He also made sure there were few perches for the bird and the material that trims the two steps leading from the kitchen/dining area to the living room is aluminum rather than the more appetizing wood. Aside from the occasional hat, watch or finger, Sydnee is on a chomp-free diet.

Like Chelsea requested, every nook and cranny in the home is functional and regularly used. She loves getting things



FREE EMAIL NEWSLETTER

Subscribe



2015



CALIFORNIA CLOSETS®
Exceptional designs for every room

ARBOR CREST
A CALIFORNIA CLOSETS COMPANY



done and hanging out with friends in her “office” located in the guest wing, strolling through the hallway and reading in the nook. “Aside from the bed and bedside tables, we didn’t want furniture in the master bedroom, but I did want a place to read,” she says. Dickey’s design was a surprise and better than she had imagined; he broke out of the geometry of the bedroom, creating a nook that appears as a natural growth on the south facing outside wall, its own personal window faces Mt. Spokane to the east. “Sometimes I spend all day there reading the Bible,” Chelsea smiles. “Dusty likes it too.” No doubt she eyes the wild turkeys that frequent the area.

What the Canyon House encompasses is nature and the couple’s love for the beauty of God’s creations. Intended or not, one theme seems to be “up.” Follow the vertical lines, look up and gaze upon the heavens, bask in the beauty of nature, recognize all of the imperfections from the cracked and juted formations to the deep canyons and find comfort where you are. “Exactly,” Chelsea says, “We kept things untouched as much as possible. We relish in God’s canvas and the awesomeness of it.”

Since moving into the home, the couple has sold their motor home. “This home is our oasis. We really don’t need a vacation,” Chelsea says. Rutledge has planted an orchard and, while Dickey, Nelson and a handful of subcontractors have learned new things on this particular job site, we learned something new as well; though they will take a few years, a hearty brand of Kiwi grows well in our area. When the trees are grown, they too will raise questions and maybe solicit a bet or two as people try to take in the uncommon sight.

* Names have been changed for privacy.

Categories :

Guides

2012 Best Doctors Guide [WA Magazine]
July - August Dining Guide [Spokane CDA Living]
2011 Best Lawyers List

Bozzi Media

phone 509-533-5350
104 S Freya
Tapio Yellow Flag Bldg.
Spokane 99202-4866

Advertising

Copyright 2011 Bozzi Media
Website by Spokane Web Communications

