



# PASSIVE

*Makes Perfect*

## INSIDE RAMMED EARTH WALLS, THIS INNOVATIVE HOME FULFILLS EVERY WISH.

The sun is up, and the big world outside the windows is bathed in golden light. A woman sits in her favorite spot, flames dancing in the fireplace, a cup of coffee in her hand. She looks out at the mountains and the lake.

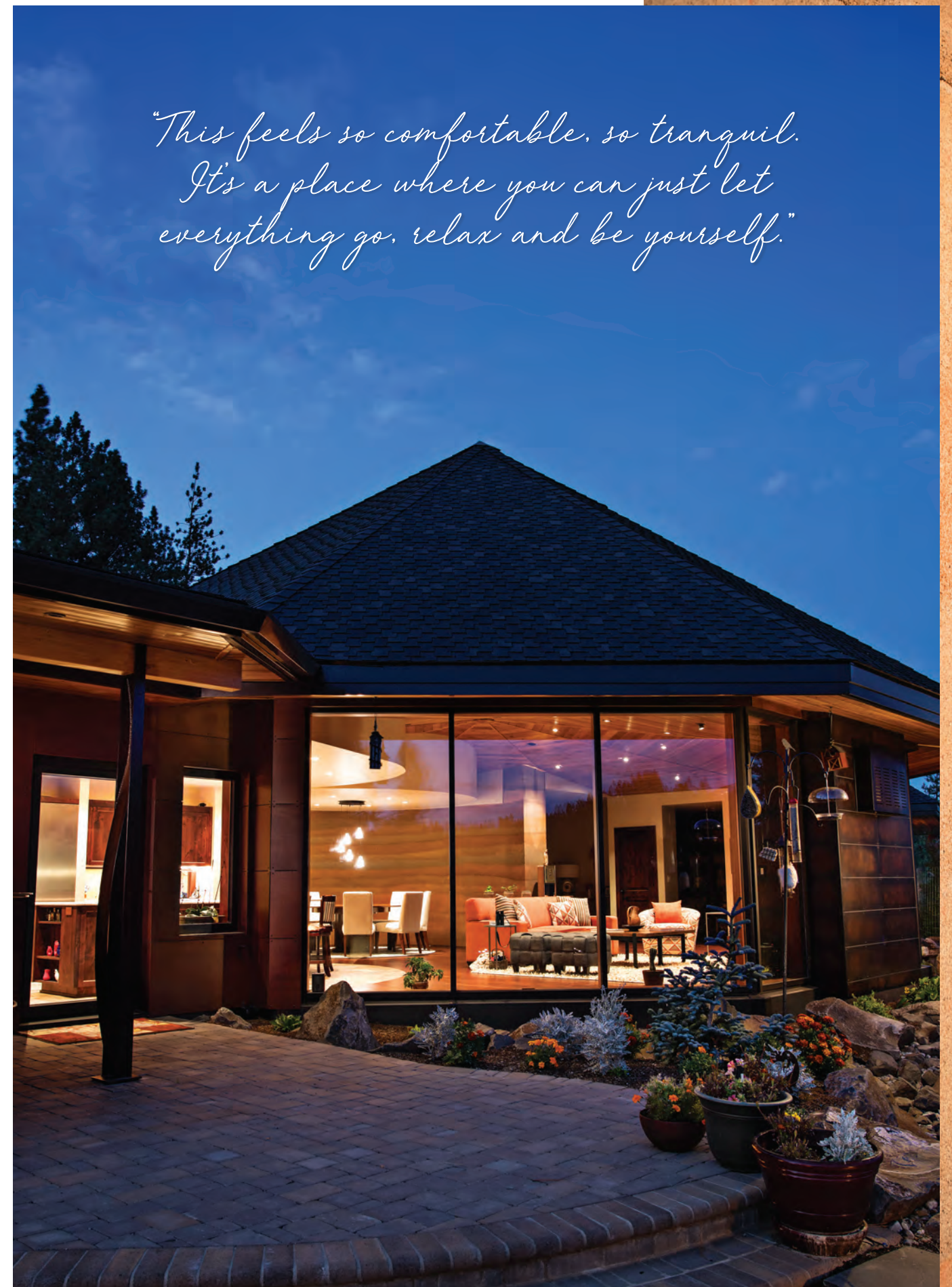
"I love just sitting here and watching the birds," she says. "We've seen so many different varieties... finches, flickers, magpies, bluejays, bluebirds, meadowlarks. Now we're just waiting for an osprey to occupy a nest we built in that tree."

She and her husband have been married 48 years. In that time, they've really only lived in one other house. Then in retirement, they moved into a high-rise condo together. They

loved the walkability and downtown lifestyle, but she wanted something more.

"The condo never felt quite right," she says. "But this feels like home." She gestures at the warm tones around her. "This feels so comfortable, so tranquil. It's a place where you can just let everything go, relax and be yourself."

She worked as a nurse and her husband as an orthopedic surgeon. They met at Los Angeles County General Hospital when she helped him find some medical supplies. He asked her out on Valentine's Day, and it's been a full life together ever since.







In building their first custom home together, the couple knew their priorities. “I wanted comfort and serenity,” she says. “And I wanted to be surrounded by nature. I wanted a pragmatic house that wasn’t for show, but was easy and practical to live in.”

“I wanted a view,” he says. “And it was important to have just one floor so we can stay in the house as long as possible. I wanted a place that was energy efficient.”

He was intrigued by contemporary design and advanced home features, while she yearned for a rustic, woodsy and cabin-like feeling. The design and build team nailed it, combining all these wishes and more into one amazing package. The finished home uses rammed earth construction, an engineered wood exterior, European high-performance windows and passive house technology.

“For him, functional considerations were paramount and for her, it was all about aesthetics and tranquility,” says their architect, Sam Rodell. “That duality is a classic mission statement for architecture, which should always be both practical and beautiful.”

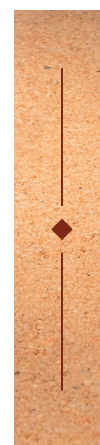
A prime example is the home’s rammed earth walls, which make a marvelous first impression.

“This eye-catching wall garners attention, both inside and out,” says builder Andy Smith of Edwards Smith Construction. “It resembles sedimentary sandstone without the thousand-year wait and is energy efficient while providing warmth, quiet and comfort.”

Built as the north side of the home, the rammed earth is made of pure inorganic material brought from local road construction quarries. The earth was colored and packed into a two-foot-wide curving structure.

“I told the architect, I really like curves,” she says. “I was thrilled with all the curves I got in this house.”

*He was intrigued by contemporary design while she yearned for a cabin-like feeling. They got it all.*



Says the architect: “The home divides the land into a public realm and a private place overlooking spectacular views. The walls that create the privacy are thick, opaque rammed-in-place architectural sandstone and the windows that frame the views are high-performance insulating glass. You can sit right next to those glass walls in the dead of winter in total comfort.”



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Originally, the doctor wanted to build an earth home, and he wanted energy efficiency, even considering being off the grid altogether. That conversation with architect Rodell led to a home that's certified to the highest standards by the Passive House Institute and the United States Green Building Council as LEED Gold.

"To create this home, Sam's design team applied computer modeling to 100 years of historical weather data from that location to find the best wall assemblies, insulation values, mechanical systems and windows," says builder Smith. "This created a highly efficient home and superior human comfort."

The home only needs a relatively small heat pump system for both cooling and heating, and has a separate continuous filtered fresh air ventilation for pristine interior air quality. "We like to say you could heat it with a hair dryer," jokes the owner. The living space is indeed exceptionally comfortable, with clean air that's perfectly heated or cooled, great acoustics and low maintenance.

"This home is a great example of how all the benefits of a passive house are still possible with natural light and expansive views," Rodell says.

She especially loves the central vacuum cleaning, the roomy bathroom and master bedroom with a massive walk-in closet with its own island of drawers. The entire home is on one level and uses Universal Design, which means a person can easily access every space using a wheelchair or walker.

He loves having a big finished garage with storage, with room for a small sailboat and a place to plug in his electric car for a 50-amp recharge. He's also very pleased with his office where he works on photography, with a Murphy Bed on the wall for those times when the grandkids visit.

Because this is the first custom home they've ever built, she particularly enjoyed the collaborative process of working with the design team and builder to pick out every finish. It brings her pleasure to gaze at each of those elements now.



## THEIR ADVICE FOR BUILDING A CUSTOM HOME

### HE SAYS:

"The more you study beforehand, the better you're going to do," he says. "A lot of your research time should be picking the right architect and builder. To help keep your costs in line, ask the builder and architect for options as you move forward."

### SHE SAYS:

"Look for quality," she says. "Tour other houses by the builder. Look at the small details and make sure it was done right."



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The couple enjoys sailing, travel and mountains, and those passions are evident here. A map with pins shows all the compelling places in the world they have seen. “The more you travel, the more you want to see,” she says. “It’s so rewarding to read a book and recognize the places it describes.”

They have a splendid kitchen with induction cooking, tons of built-in storage and a huge pantry. One request was that the kitchen and his office be close so the couple can chit chat. Fair enough, but the doctor likes piles of work everywhere, and his wife would rather the guests not see the mess, and so the architect devised a clever solution: A pass-through window between kitchen and office that shutters when necessary.

She also appreciates her pottery space in the mechanical room, as well as a separate room for her crafts and watercolor. She has a lovely garden off the garage, with a fence to keep the deer out, sunny southwest exposure, raised beds and nice views.

The Parklex siding is a European, resin-based wood paneling installed as a ventilated rainscreen assembly that offers a clean, unique and beautiful facade. Both the Parklex panels and rammed earth walls protect against adverse weather without the need for maintenance or treatment down the road.

Custom steel panels with applied patina by local artist Teresa McHugh provide an additional natural material dimension inside the home, while still maintaining warmth with rich, dark tones. The tongue and groove ceiling and woodwork was created by Edwards Smith’s team of in-house craftsmen.

Site development was performed in a very cost-effective and eco-friendly manner. All the excavated material stayed on site, minimizing the need to import and export materials. There is a small footprint to the landscaping.

“I especially appreciate the outdoor living areas, and how they serve as an extension of the interiors,” Rodell says.

A fire and water feature atop the rocks makes a pleasant sound that screens out any ambient noise.

“There are nights we have friends over, barbecue dinner and eat outdoors together,” she says. “The moon is up over the mountains, the fire and the fountain are on and it’s just perfect.”

Yet another benefit of the passive house is that it’s very quiet.

“It’s so beautiful when it snows. The mountains are covered in white, the landscape lights are on and it’s so tranquil here,” she says. “It’s more than we ever dreamed. I couldn’t be happier.”

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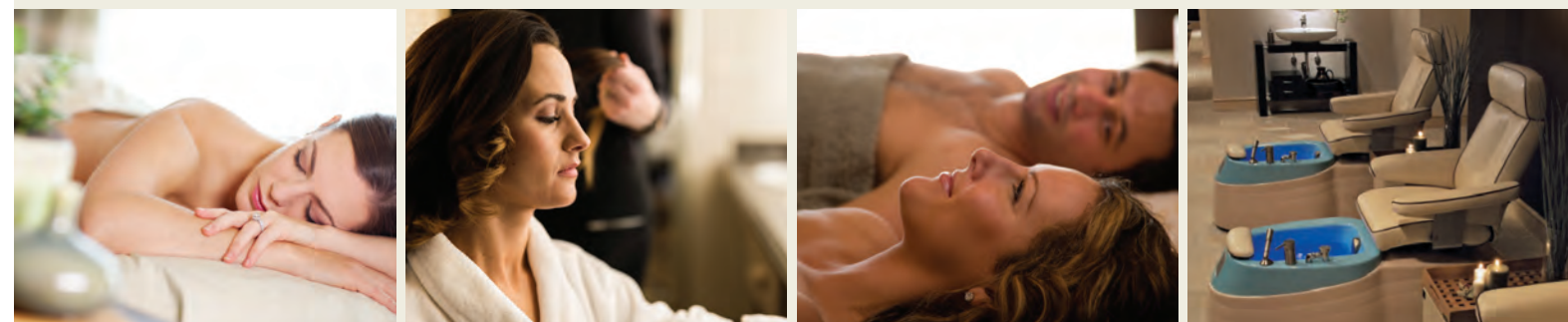
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