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INSIDE THE WILD WORLD OF AMATEUR
MOUNTAIN TOWN HOCKEY

BY NICHOLAS HUNT

RESTAURANT REVIEW: BIB GOURMAND
WINNER THE GINGER PIG

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DENVER'S Best Bars

H RAINSTORM
ERRIN Pinot Noir
CRUSHER
White Sirrah

YUSTE MANZANILLA MARIETTA
Sherry SANTA JULIA QUERGETO Zinfandel
TINTO REY Malbec POGGIO ANIMA
Tempranillo Nero d'Avola

LA VIELLE FERME SACHETTO
Rosé BELLAFINA Sparkling Rosé
MAISON S. Y. DEL BUONO
Rosé Sangiovese

H E A L I N G P O W E R



WITH THE HELP OF LOCAL DESIGNER CAITLIN PAPPAS, TWO DENVER-BASED PLASTIC SURGEONS CREATED A PEACEFUL MOUNTAIN RETREAT TO SHARE WITH THEIR TRAUMA PATIENTS.

BY MICHELLE JOHNSON • PHOTOGRAPHY BY KIMBERLY GAVIN • STYLING BY NATALIE WARADY

Above the great room fireplace, a Samsung Frame TV enclosed by a gilded frame doubles as an art piece.



VIEW

FINDER

Homeowners Benson Pulikkottil and Lily Daniali (*right*) fell for the existing French doors and arched windows in this Aspen Valley home's great room (*opposite*). "Anywhere you stand, you can look out a window and off into the yonder," Pulikkottil says. Designer Caitlin Pappas selected a mix of modern furnishings to fill the space, including a roomy sectional with durable white upholstery. The adjacent sunken nook (*below*) features a porcelain-tile fireplace and extra space to gather or curl up with a book.

VERY LITTLE SURPRISES Benson Pulikkottil and Lily Daniali anymore. At Swedish Medical Center's Burn and Reconstructive Center in Englewood and the LaVie Institute—Pulikkottil and Daniali's private practice in Lone Tree—the husband-and-wife team of plastic surgeons specializes in both reconstructive and aesthetic procedures, from complex skin grafts and post-cancer breast augmentations to face-lifts and rhinoplasties. They've had the training to be able to help trauma patients, including an avid hunter who needed facial reconstruction after he was mauled by a grizzly bear in Wyoming, a Pueblo man whose right hand was shattered during a fireworks incident, and a Castle Rock resident who was critically burned and injured in a houseboat explosion.

"We take care of people from all walks of life, many of whom have had something traumatic happen to them," Daniali says. For many patients, that trauma can result in mental anguish that lasts long after they've healed physically. "When you've had something terrible happen to you, it's hard to understand how to fit that into your life outside of the hospital," Daniali says. "Often, our patients have had their independence taken away from them or must make real changes to their lives. People become depressed and have a very hard time with that."

Daniali and Pulikkottil, fortysomethings with two young children, have been lucky to sidestep the anguish they see in so many of their patients, but that doesn't mean they don't need a little help with their mental health on occasion, too. The couple's favorite way to de-stress and lift their spirits is by spending time outdoors. "We love to fly-fish; we love to hike. We turn to the beauty of Colorado to help replenish our cups," Daniali says. Several years ago, the notion of healing through nature sparked an idea: What if they created a serene space with direct access to the wilderness that they could open up to group retreats for burn patients?

The couple searched for a property that could act as a peaceful refuge for years before finding a nearly 4,000-square-foot home situated on about 10 acres of piñon woodlands in Aspen Valley, just outside of Carbondale. Although they knew the house would need a cosmetic overhaul, "I kind of fell in love with it when I first saw the pictures," Daniali says.







GATHER & GRAZE

In the kitchen (*right*), Daniali's favorite space in the house, a 15-foot-long island caters to large groups. A quartet of counter stools from local furniture brand Denver Modern sidle up to the countertop, which is made from the same marble used on the great room fireplace surround. Curved-back swivel chairs make for a modern counterpoint to the rustic table in the dining room (*above*), while a black sideboard supplies space for storing dinnerware and displaying accessories. "A pop of black grounds a room and adds some depth," Pappas says. The antler chandelier adds a touch of traditional mountain-house style.

Built in 1979, the five-bedroom house had a quintessential mountain aesthetic. Orange-toned pine wall paneling and flooring covered nearly every square foot; a river-rock fireplace towered in the great room; and there was no shortage of antler chandeliers or trophy heads. The original design scheme was far from the light-and-airy look Daniali and Pulikkottil envisioned for their high-country sanctuary, but they coveted the home's charming architectural details and just-remote-enough location. They closed on it in late 2021.

The couple tasked Denver designer Caitlin Pappas of Nest Out West with giving the home a modern update that still felt authentic to its setting. "We wanted it to be serene, warm, inviting, and luxurious for their patients and families, because they're going through a rough time," Pappas says. "We wanted it to be a treat for them." After making a few changes to open up the main





EASY DOES IT

The previous homeowner had recently renovated the primary bedroom (*opposite*) in a way that suited the new owners' aesthetic, making Pappas' task list for the space relatively short. She applied the finishing decor touches, including layered rugs and window treatments that add texture and dimension. A marble-topped vanity and brass fixtures lend a luxurious feel to the primary bathroom (*right*). Removing a large built-in bookcase from the guest room (*below*) provided enough space to add an extra queen bed. A sage-gray hue on the ceiling and wainscoting cozies up the space. The antique chest is from Denver's Rare Finds Warehouse.

floor—including removing an obstructive partition wall and a clunky second-floor landing in the great room—Pappas painted the walls and ceiling a soothing white hue and replaced the pine flooring with wide-plank oak.

In the great room, the river-rock fireplace was swapped out in favor of a modern marble surround and a tapered facade. The existing French doors were painted black for contrast against the white walls, and Pappas chose two-tier brass chandeliers for a touch of glamour. To warm the space and provide a sense of place, Pappas left the pine beams in their original state. “We were going for a cozy modern chalet vibe,” she says. “We didn’t want to modernize it too much and make it feel like a city house; we were going for the juxtaposition of modern and rustic.”

To achieve that goal, Pappas outfitted the home with antiques and secondhand items, including the guest room’s bedside chest, sourced from Rare Finds Warehouse in Denver, and the great room’s piano and primary bedroom’s antler chandelier, both left behind by the previous owners. A combination of calming earth tones, brass accents, and tactile fabrics and furnishings provides an elegant feel throughout.

With enough space to sleep 15 people, the updated home is equipped to host a crowd—whether it be Daniali and Pulikkottil’s patients and their families, their own friends and family, or even a small wedding party or business retreat. (The home became available for rent on Airbnb in June 2023; free therapeutic retreats for patients likely won’t begin until the fall.) “The house is designed around gathering places,” Daniali says. “The game area in the great room, the fireplace, the kitchen island—it’s all about little spots where you can have intimate conversations and have fun and laugh together.”

And with its secluded setting that provides convenient access to trails, open space, the Roaring Fork River, and ski slopes, the home is a restorative escape. “When you go there,” says Pulikkottil, “your blood pressure will drop.” Says Daniali: “Our hope is that this property will be a place where people can fill their own cups with the beauty of the surroundings.” ▲▲



