

Members Spotlight

BREWSTER MCLEOD ARCHITECTS RISES QUICKLY AMONG ASPEN'S ELITE ARCHITECTS

BY DAVID FIORE, Mountain Builder



JAMIE BREWSTER MCCLEOD

Brewster McLeod Architects, Inc. is a high-end luxury design firm based in Aspen, Colorado. Its founder, Jamie Brewster McLeod, is infectious to talk to. As she lets you into the world that shaped her, you can't help but wonder whether her talent and insights are innate or something that she picked up from a great education and following great mentors. The answer is yes to all of the above. She exudes artistic talent and has from a young age. Her artistic talent shines through and you can see how her education brought a foundational level of maturity to her work. Great leaders took her under their wings to springboard her to establish one of Aspen's top architectural firms.

Jamie grew up at the doorstep of Glacier National Park—her family having various jobs in park service. Jamie's great grandfather, Horace Dewitt Brewster (1855 – 1932), was the first ranger of Glacier National Park and in 2012 was inducted to Montana's Cowboy Hall of Fame. Jamie described building cabins with Lincoln Logs for her little sister so she

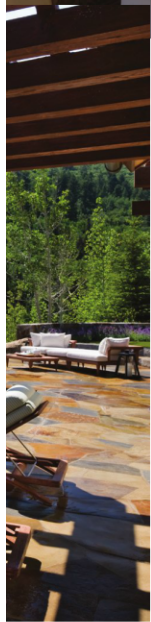
would play with her and recalls, "that actually really inspired me." In high school she was encouraged to take a drafting class after there were no art classes left to take. When an Ivy League architect visited her drafting class, that cinched her interest to ultimately secure a Masters in Architecture from Montana State University. Her upbringing as a child of the National Park Service in the American West profoundly shaped her flare for western architecture with a sensitivity for the environment.

Jamie opened the doors of her business in 2006 after years of honing her skills under the late David Gibson, an architect who left his mark on Aspen and Telluride.

Harry Teague, an Aspen architect and Yale classmate described Gibson as someone who was working on a whole different level and a star architect at Yale. "Everyone would look forward to seeing what he came up with,"



said Teague. Gibson hand selected Brewster to manage the Telluride and Aspen Offices. Brewster herself credits Gibson to having a huge influence on getting her to think about the buildings she was creating from the



outside in and the inside out; to look at natural light; how people move through their homes; sizes of space—tall vs. short for example and to look at the spatial living aspects of design.

In 2011 Jamie's spatial insights landed her firm the top Chairman's Award for Creative Spaces for her [Aspen] Highlands Residence project and 3rd Place for Best Interior Finishes in the Roaring Fork Valley Parade of Homes. In just 6 years Brewster McLeod Architects landed coverage in *Luxe Magazine*, *Mountain Living*, *Western Home Journal*, *SheKnows*, *Cowgirl Magazine*,

Aspen Peak Magazine, and both Aspen newspapers – the *Aspen Times* and the *Aspen Daily News*.

The downturn in the economy didn't seem to hamper the growth of Brewster

McLeod Architects. "Life is fabulous and it's not just a blip on the radar. We just hired two new employees and are looking to add more," said Brewster.

Brewster is optimistic on the future and was pleased to note, "It's about teamwork. When we get work we pull in contractors and subcontractors and everybody wins."

When *Mountain Builder* probed Jamie about her formula for success, the conversation focused on the boutique nature of her design practice offering a one-on-one interaction with her clients. She encourages clients to participate in the bringing together of a design-build team starting with her company and following with the selection of the general contractor from which together

they can all assemble an Integrated Design Team (IDT). Many of the top professionals interviewed by *Mountain Builder* recognize the importance of the IDT approach. "It's much better to get as much 'on paper,' to coordinate in advance rather than in the field 'after the fact,'" says Brewster.

Mountain Builder asked Jamie about bringing new technology to her projects. "I am constantly researching; I want to make sure it works before we incorporate it," said Brewster. She further commented "As much as we want to be on the cutting edge, we want to make sure that technology doesn't ultimately make a house obsolete. Control systems are notorious for that." Jamie told *Mountain Builder* that she likes to challenge her vendors like Paragon Technology Group to have them provide input to the question, "What is it going to be like in 4 years or 10 years?" Conversations like this result in design considerations to include pulling extra wires for the future or like those in Brewster's Aspen Highlands Residence project. At Highlands the IDT's Audio Visual guys said they were constantly pulling racks out. Brewster McLeod responded by creating a multi-purpose utility room where you can



"...get behind the system(s)," said Brewster.

Turning to environment-friendly design questions, *Mountain Builder* was surprised to hear the depth of thought Brewster effortlessly conveyed on policy and social considerations. Looking more closely at her civic involvement, it's no wonder. Jamie was the Roaring Fork Valley Director of the American Institute of Architects (AIA) for three years until 2012 when she moved up to the Executive Committee. Since then

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she accepted the at-large AIA Colorado West Director position. She serves on Pitkin County's Board of Adjustments and is a member of the Aspen Historic Preservation Commission. *Mountain Builder* asked when she would be prepared to join the M2M HBA Board with a possible appointment to the CAHB Board. Jamie said, "Not this year but maybe next year. I love being a part of organizations...I like to be part of change."

Jamie was asked about government involvement to mandate green building standards in municipal codes or even state or national law. "Tying home efficiency to home mortgages [alone] is a slippery slope," said Brewster. "We need to start with the track home builder and trickle down from the high-end homes," she added. Brewster McLeod tries to educate its clients who have the budgets to incorporate the gamut of high energy improvements. Jamie expressed, "By investing in today's energy technologies [our

clients] can help manufacturers succeed to ultimately increase demand which in turn brings down product costs. That way, such technologies will be in everybody's home someday." Jamie feels that high-end construction offers a vehicle to establish trends; for her clients to be the trendsetters. She feels that moderately priced home building projects often simply cannot absorb the cost to reach a below 50 HERS rating.

Mountain Builder discussed pending House Bill 13-1105 that seeks to enhance the efficiency of new and remodeled homes through an Energy Saving Mortgage Program. Jamie expressed that "...incentives are clearly a better path than mandates." It is clear that she feels that while incentives are a good entry to begin advancing

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green building technologies, they must be established in a manner that reaches the broadest target of home building to make the greatest possible social change. See Pages 26 and 27, of this issue of *Mountain Builder* for a further discussion on this topic.

Mountain Builder took special note of Jamie's command of the complete circle of green energy improvements starting with manufacturing. She said it is really hard to convince your clients this is a good time to jump in while we are going through a period of rapid change. Solar panels manufactured five years ago, while still functional, are very different than those offered today. "Manufacturers should offer a recycle or rebate program for solar panel owners are choosing to upgrade," said Brewster. *Mountain Builder* and Brewster jointly discussed having some sort of incentive, perhaps legislatively, that would encourage owners of early generation technologies to be credited for donations made to entities such as Habitat for Humanity.

Between 2010 through this current date, Brewster McLeod Architects has amassed nearly 25 projects under its belt. This doesn't happen by accident but reflects a strong referral business built upon reliable time tested professional performance. The company is managing seven projects in various stages of design and construction. Some of the projects "on the boards" are from across the Roaring Fork Valley and Colorado, Montana and as far away as New Zealand. The company offers LEED and energy consulting services, commercial tenant build-out, and remodeling expertise. Jamie herself also worked on specialized projects including wineries and restaurants through the prestigious San Francisco firm of Bauldauf Catton Von Eckartsberg Architects. For further information about Brewster McLeod Architects see the membership directory in this issue of *Mountain Builder* page 7.

