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NATURAL SANCTUARIES

Snake River Interiors' Elisa Chambers creates peaceful, harmonious homes inspired and grounded by the palettes, patterns, textures and traditions of their surroundings

WRITTEN BY Eliza Cross



Interior design might not be the first career choice people associate with a master's degree in psychology, but Elisa Chambers says the two disciplines are an ideal match. "Great homes begin with communication," says Chambers, principal and founder of Snake River Interiors in Jackson, Wyoming. "I say to my clients, 'Talk to me about what you love.' Then I try to really understand their lifestyle and passions, explore what they would like to see in their home and help them bring their vision to reality."

The oldest of six children, Chambers found early design inspiration from her mother, a national horticultural judge. "My mother let me accompany her to flower shows, and when she wasn't working we spent a lot of time in antique stores," says Chambers. "She has a great eye for color, and she was always enamored with hunting for special objects — which clearly rubbed off on me."

Chambers was initially interested in shoe design when she enrolled at the Moore College of Art and Design in Philadelphia. She later moved to California and shifted educational gears, getting both nursing and psychology degrees. The first time she visited Jackson Hole for a vacation, Chambers says she was smitten. "I said to myself, 'I *have* to figure out a way to live here.'"

Her dream became a reality in 1992, when she made the move and took a



This page, from left: Designer Elisa Chambers is the founder of Snake River Interiors and Twenty Two Home. | Chambers designed the sweeping black metal staircase with steps of limestone to match the foyer floors. The antique chest is from the homeowners' collection and Chambers specified the Japanese rice paper and metal sconces. **Opposite page, clockwise from top:** Chambers paired a Claro walnut slab table with original Hans Wegner wishbone chairs in her dining room, illuminated by custom pendant lights created from French cloches. The painting is by September Vhay. | Bart Walker paintings hang above a Stickley bookcase, and the distressed leather chair is accessorized with a handmade crewel pillow. The rug is a Turkish kilim. | Soft gray tones create calm in a dining room, where a wood table with a weathered finish is surrounded by chairs covered in gray linen. The crystal chandelier is by Ochre and the painting is by Kathy Moss. Photos: Cameron Nelson



Snake River Style

“Our vision is to create a sanctuary that corresponds with our client’s vision, without compromising simplicity and beauty,” Chambers says. She shares some of her thoughts about how her firm achieves that design goal.

1. Our interiors are based in simplicity. We believe that empty spaces are as important as what we put in the room. **2.** We pay a great deal of attention to the way the light plays in the room throughout the seasons. **3.** The mountain homes we design are often modern and contemporary, and yet they have elements that ground them in the traditions and environment of the West. **4.** We like to layer textural components that add dimension throughout a space. **5.** Art is an integral part of your home, and we can create an entire room around a special piece and highlight it with placement and lighting. We design our interiors so that they don’t compete with the art. **6.** We often advise our clients to save their money for a special piece instead of buying a lot of things. Filling a space with just the essentials can create a sense of peacefulness and serenity. **7.** Design is an ongoing process, and we often help our clients collect things over time that mean something to them. Your home is not our project, it’s yours.



This page, clockwise from top: A. Rudin stools are covered in red leather in this kitchen designed by Chambers. The quartz counters are Caesarstone and the pendant lights are by Ironware. | Sliding doors open from a master suite to a private patio, providing stunning views of Jackson Hole from a deep bathtub. The painting is by Kathryn Mapes Turner. | Custom cabinets of reclaimed French oak contrast with a stainless Viking double oven and an Italian antique bowl. **Opposite page:** Chambers created the custom headboard and had it covered with grey cowhide. Two Cisco Brothers chairs are covered in a wool windowpane check; the painting is by Peter Hoffer. Photos: Cameron Nelson



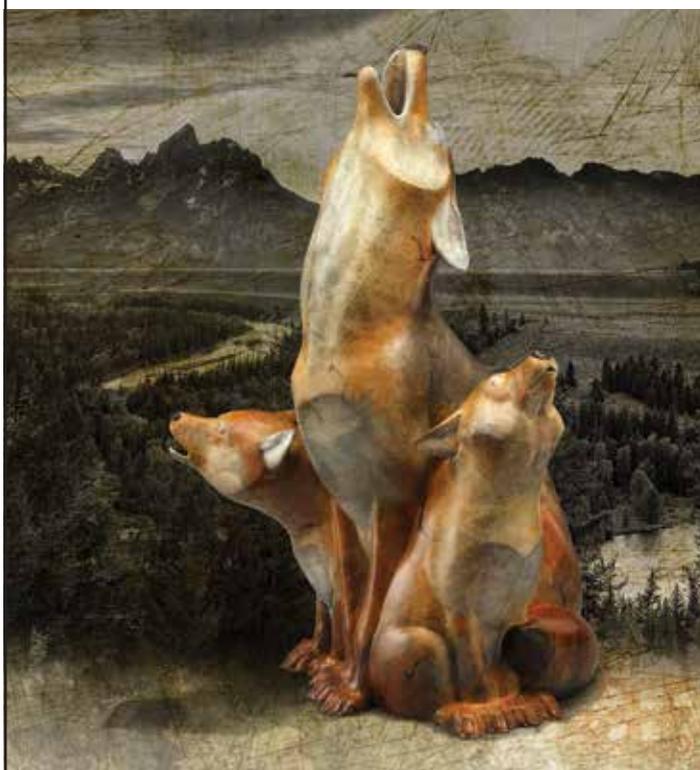
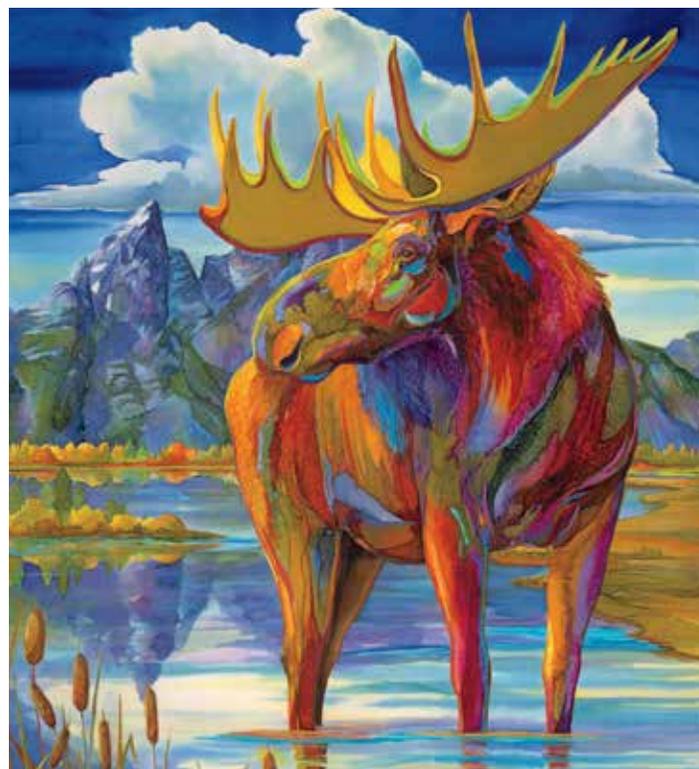
nursing job in the hospital's operating room. After starting a private psychology practice, she began buying, fixing up and selling houses on the side. Chambers enjoyed the creative process so much that in 1998, she decided to return to her artistic roots and open her own design firm.

Named for the famed waterway that winds through Jackson Hole, Snake River Interiors is a full-service interior architecture and design firm housed in a spacious showroom a block from downtown. Chambers, Creative Director Saxon Koch and a team of interior designers provide services for projects ranging from the lobby of the historic Wort Hotel to numerous residences in Wyoming and beyond. While much of the firm's work is centered in the Rocky Mountain states, Chambers has designed projects across the country, from California to Texas to Florida. "My clients and I develop long relationships and lasting friendships, and I typically do more than one home for them," she says. "When I'm designing second and third homes, my philosophy is that your retreat home should have all the comforts of your primary residence."

The Snake River Interiors team uses varied approaches to communicate design concepts. "I'm very three-dimensional, and we try to make the

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process of visualization as easy as possible,” Chambers says. “Depending on how the client best processes information, sometimes we’ll go through inspirational photos and pull out pieces they like. We might create a montage of styles, colors and textures, or show them CAD drawings. We help our clients develop their ideas, and in our showroom we have a whole floor of fabrics and textual things that they can see and touch. We keep thousands of sources here so they don’t have to go to Los Angeles or Denver to the design center.”

In 2012 Chambers decided to expand her company, opening a retail store — Twenty Two Home — in a prime location on Jackson’s downtown square. “If Snake River Interiors is our couture line, then Twenty Two Home is our ready-to-wear,” she says. “You can furnish your whole home here, and we work with many interior designers who come in to find one-of-a-kind furnishings for their clients. We offer beautiful art, accessories and furniture — some European, but much of it made by artisans from the United States — as well as many sustainably sourced products.”

When a certain piece or style she envisions isn’t available, Chambers designs it herself. “I create a lot of custom furni-

ture and lighting pieces,” she says. “Sometimes we’ll take a typically Western motif like antlers or twigs and mix it up. For instance, we created a branch chandelier out of stainless steel — what I call ‘an irreverent take on nature.’ We always tell our clients, ‘we really can do anything you want.’”

Chambers’ interiors often have a peaceful, timeless quality. “The quieter and simpler your home is, the more you can focus on what’s outside,” she says. “We follow design trends, but we’re also inspired by traditional architecture. Our interiors are respectful of the past, and at the same time we always try to anticipate our clients’ future needs.”

It doesn’t take a psychologist to figure out why Chambers and her dual design companies have achieved such lasting success. ■

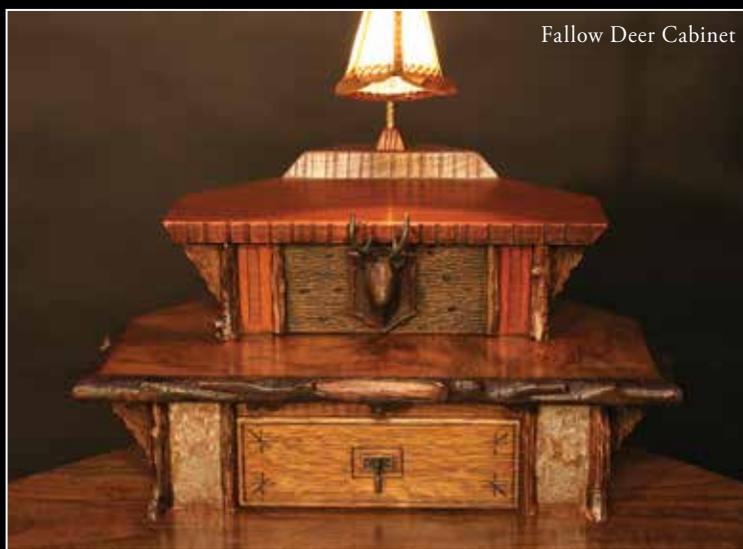
Eliza Cross (www.elizacross.com) is a contributing editor to *Western Art & Architecture* and the author of seven books, including the award-winning *Family Home of the New West* (Cooper Square Publishing). A member of the Authors Guild and Colorado Authors League, she has written more than 250 articles for a variety of national and regional publications.

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