

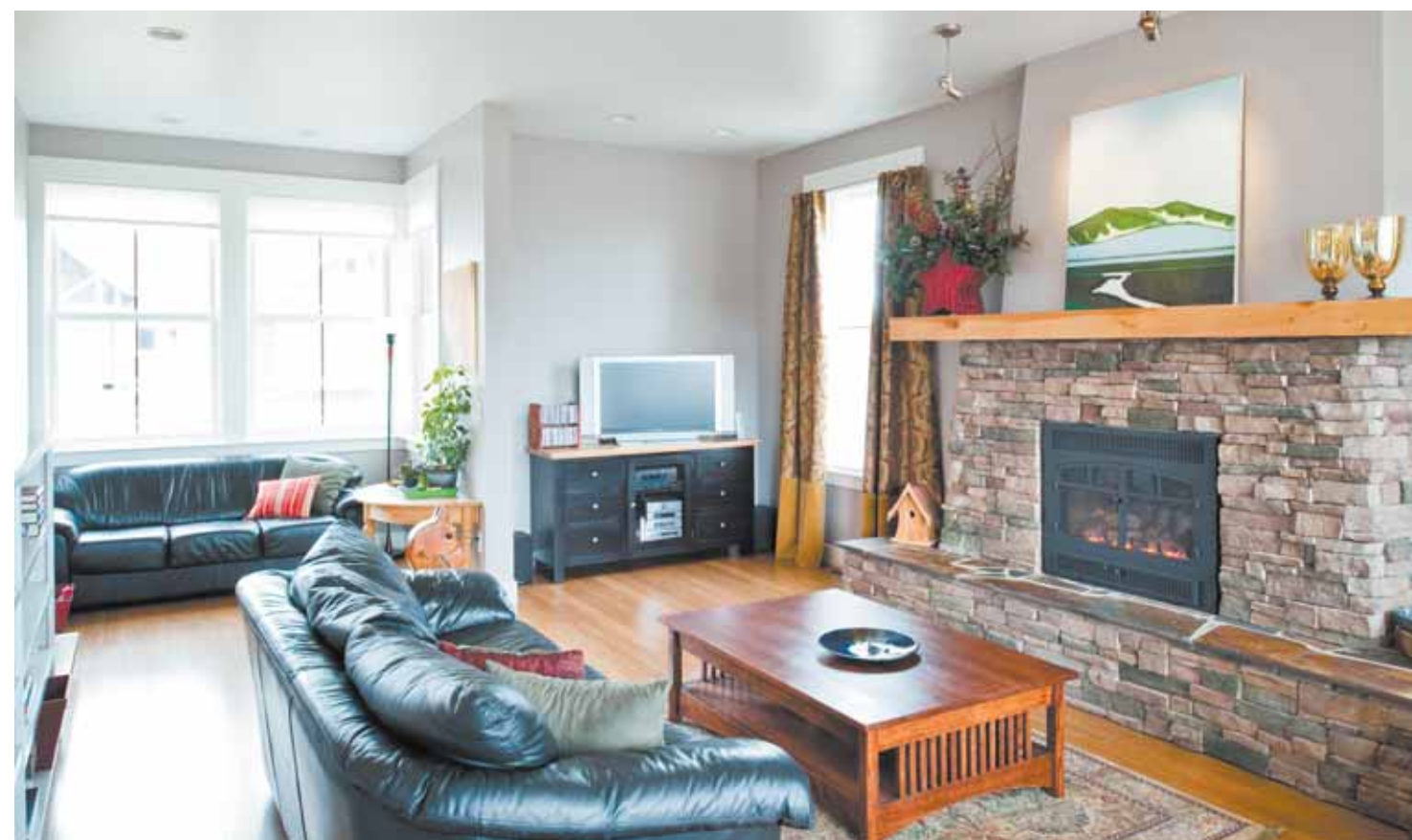
# Mother Knows Best

*One of Bozeman's only female contractors emphasizes practicality and livability in her Energy Star home*

BY NICOLE ROSENLEAF RITTER

PHOTOGRAPHY BY  
THOMAS LEE

ON AN AVERAGE HOME TOUR, A BUILDER WILL GENERALLY SHOW OFF THE parts of a home that are, well, showy. Penny Murray — general contractor and owner of Penny Lane Home Builders, LLC — is no exception, pointing out a stunning custom fireplace and luxurious soaking tub, among other distinctive features. Where things differ somewhat is when she highlights the areas that so many people take for granted — an entryway here, a laundry room there.



Once she explains the careful thinking that went into those areas, however, Murray's ministrations make perfect sense. Areas that are much-utilized but little considered don't get the short shrift from Murray, an attention to detail that she chalks up in part to her other job: mom.

"I find that I come at a project from a different perspective," explains Murray, adding that she thinks she might be the only female contractor in Bozeman. "I am looking at the home from a functional and design perspective, and the ability to carry the design through in all the details is a great advantage when you are the contractor. Being a mom also gives me a very practical approach to problem solving and design. I am a big believer in functional mud rooms, kitchens, entryways and laundry rooms!"

For example, in this, her own Energy Star-certified Bozeman home — which she based on a Not So Big House floor plan and built herself — she completely redesigned the entryway to better suit

**Clockwise from top: Cultured stone accents the chimney of this four-bedroom home. Quartz countertops in the kitchen provide a durable and clean cooking surface. A large opening connects the kitchen to the dining area and the rest of the home.**



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Montana weather and simply to function better.

“Originally, the home was designed for a site in Rhode Island, and the entry was a breezeway with a powder room that was reached by going through the mudroom,” she explains, then adds with a laugh, “It didn’t make sense, at least if your mudroom looks like my mudroom.”

In Murray’s incarnation, the entryway is a spacious enclosed porch and the mudroom — which also offers generous storage — is concealed. It was also designed to create a true separation between the house and husband Dan’s favorite part of the house, the attached three-stall garage. “I wanted an airlock between the house and the garage for both air quality and energy conser-



**A built-in bookcase separates the living and dining spaces. Left, the stainless steel surface of the refrigerator won’t hold magnets, so this piece of sheet metal was installed to give the home a place for bulletins and accolades.**



vation purposes,” Murray explains.

Through the glass door that leads into the house from the entryway, the first level is open and bright, with gleaming floors made of pre-finished, carbonized, strand-woven bamboo. The galley kitchen feels spacious,

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### Mother Knows Best

savings.

Another gas fireplace is found in the master suite upstairs, this one featuring a custom granite, slate and glass surround. An asymmetrical vaulted ceiling adds visual interest to the spacious bedroom, with one side sloping into the area of the generous master bath. Designed for relaxation and comfort, the master bath sports a large soaking tub and double shower with glass enclosure. Tile walls with a glass mosaic accent strip set off the green slate floors and coordinate with the tempered glass vessel sinks.

Murray says that she can't resist this room's comforts. "I can get lured in here almost anytime," she says.

Another tempting place is the craft room she has set up in one of the other bedrooms upstairs. She and her daughters, ages 10 and 11, spend a lot of time in the room working on projects together there.

"We make cards and we do scrapbooking," she explains. "It was important for us to fit this room in."

**The master bath features a floating vanity.**

One of the most important aspects of the home is not visible to the naked eye, however. Murray built the home to comply with Energy Star certification, a set of guidelines set out by the

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in part thanks to dual-color maple cabinets.

"We didn't want it to feel narrow, and the two cabinet colors bring the eye up," she notes.

Most of the countertops are Cambria natural quartz, which Murray says she generally recommends to clients for ease of use.

"Granite isn't totally food-safe and really needs to be sealed every six months. Honestly, who takes the time to do that?" she says with typical practicality. She did allow for one leathered granite countertop on the breakfast bar, however, since no food is prepared there.

Behind the breakfast bar is a small dining area full of windows, designed to be a sunny breakfast nook. A larger dining area sits between the kitchen and living room, which are divided by a built-in breakfront featuring storage on one side and bookshelves on the other.

"I had boxes and boxes of books in our old house that were literally in the basement for 10 years in our old house, so I love these shelves," Murray enthuses.

A gas fireplace with a reclaimed Douglas fir mantle warms the living room, which also features paintings done by her grandmother and more abundant windows. The home's windows

**Lots of natural light illuminates the master bedroom.**



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Environmental Protection Agency. New homes must be at least 15 percent more efficient than homes built to the 2004 International Residential Code to meet the standard and must also include additional energy-saving features to be 20 to 30 percent more efficient than standard homes.

To earn the Energy Star rating, Murray incorporated environmentally friendly options such as Structural Insulated Panels, low- or no-VOC paints, Energy Star appliances, a high-efficiency furnace, and an on-demand hot water heater.

Murray says that she set out to showcase how efficiency and aesthetics can exist together in one home, and that mission holds true throughout her wider business. With a Bachelor's of Environmental Design from Montana State University's School of Architecture, Murray says that starting her own business has allowed her to use her design background and encourage green building.

"I want to show people that energy-efficient, healthy homes that are practical and beautiful are possible," she says. "A green house doesn't have to look like a yurt." ☺

*Nicole Rosenleaf Ritter is the managing editor of At Home and Business to Business.*

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