



This new home replaced an aging, unremarkable '60s-era home, located on a remarkable, rural equestrian property, with priorities upon quality and outdoor living.

ARCHITECT: SHEPHERD RESOURCES, INC./AA  
BUILDER: BECK BUILDING COMPANY  
PHOTOGRAPHERS: PETER & KELLY GIBBON

# THE TEARDOWN TREND



Older homes on prime locations  
undergo redevelopment

BY KIMBERLY NICOLETTI



After replacing the original home, (below left), the new home enjoys expansive views and outdoor living environments beneath mature trees.

ARCHITECT: SHEPHERD RESOURCES, INC./AIA  
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 PHOTOGRAPHERS: PETER & KELLY GIBSON

Two years ago, Malia Cox Nobrega, a Realtor at LIV Sotheby's International Realty, sold a Vail Golf Course home for \$4.4 million. Now, it's under contract for more than \$15 million — and it only remained on the market for a couple of months. Though the market is improving, it's not skyrocketing real estate prices that led to the \$15 million deal, but rather another trend, which is taking root in the heart of Vail: teardowns.

Second- and third-homeowners, as well as builders investing solely to resell, are buying multimillion-dollar homes then tearing them down because they're located on prime lots in Vail.

Take, for instance, the now \$15 million home, located on the Vail Golf Course. Originally built in the 1960s and remodeled in the 1980s, the home didn't necessarily need demolishing, but it also didn't allow for the quality amenities — and even views — today's refined buyers want.

Now, the six-bedroom, 10,015-square-foot home maximizes views of the Gore Range with huge windows and receding glass walls, which open to outdoor water

features and landscaping on the 0.71-acre parcel.

"The lot itself is valuable enough (to justify the teardown)" Nobrega says. "Aging single-family homes are being valued more as lots versus as a home. This is why you may see a very old single-family home in a prime location being priced at a very high price per square foot despite its age and deterioration."

For instance, one Ptarmigan Circle home

had recent "cosmetic upgrades," says Robyn Boylan, of Beck Building Company in Vail, but the home's design failed to accentuate views of the Gore Range, and the family needed more space, so they rebuilt, with an entirely different layout. Another residence on Hornsilver didn't meet the buyer's style, but his main reason for rebuilding involved subpar mechanical systems, smaller windows and poor layout. He



While landscaping had matured, the original home greatly underserved the current value and attributes of this remarkable property. RIGHT: Architect Adam Harrison, of Shepherd Resources, Inc./AIA, engages the conceptual design process on the property.

built a much more energy-efficient home that captured mountain views. One homeowner challenged building codes for seven years to build his 10,000-square-foot (teardown) home, rather than a 6,000- to 7,000-square structure.

"It's not always easy, depending upon where you are," says architect Ryan Wolffe, of Shepherd Resources Inc./AIA.

Of course, most of these teardowns occur with Fortune 500 clients. At lower price points, homeowners tend to remodel rather than tear down, but the more prime, and rare, a location is, the more likely buyers will flatten it. In fact, these days, it's difficult to find a good teardown candidate because both homeowners and builders are snatching them up.

"(There's) low inventory because builders are watching," says Ty Stockton, Relator at LIV Sotheby's International Realty. "It's a fast-paced game. If the numbers work (to redevelop), there are 30 people waiting for it."

On the other side of the teardown spectrum, longtime locals who have owned their 1960s home, like one on Forest Road, may need to expand for their growing family. Their modern home now showcases views better and provides everything from four levels — as opposed to two — and more outdoor space, with decks and landscape to a sod roof.

Vail's premium properties are both limited and aging, and people want new, up-to-standard homes, Nobrega says.

"People are paying a lot of money, and they want something beautiful," she says.

Doug DeChant, architect and Principal of Shepherd Resources, Inc./AIA Architects, concurs.

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— MALIA COX NOBREGA, LIV SOTHEBY'S INTERNATIONAL REALTY

"Our clients have become more informed and sophisticated about architecture, asking for enduring, modern solutions," DeChant says. "This is very exciting."

Shepherd Resources has extensive experience with renovations, and in fact, the architecture firm currently has four custom homes working their way through the studio, each of which is a teardown.

In addition, strategic redevelopments are paying off in prime locales.

"People are more than willing to (tear down) if they feel the value will be there at the end of the project," Nobrega says. "Our trend of tearing down or significant renovation is inevitable. The more prime the location, the more likely."

#### RENOVATE VS. REBUILD

Certain indicators call for extensive renovation, rather than leveling and rebuilding.

One main factor involves newer building codes, which may not allow a certain height a home already reaches, and therefore, owners would need to rebuild a lower structure.

Another key element, which often leads

buyers to settle for a renovation, occurs when the older structure sits closer to the river than current regulations allow.

Additionally, if the current home has "great bones," which include high ceilings, an open floor plan — or the ability to create an open plan without moving structural walls —, proper orientation to views and the ability to modernize it with huge windows, people may renovate.

"It takes strategic planning to determine whether or not (people) tear down or if (the home is) sustainable," Nobrega says.

Shepherd Resources/AIA Architects knocked down a home not even 10 years old because it was poorly designed, DeChant says.

"Something built in 1989 or older (on a great lot) is typically going to be a teardown," Boylan says. "1970s and 1980s architecture was more of a fad style — not something you'd want to see restored."

Most older homes, especially those built in the 1960s or 1970s, don't lend themselves to modern renovations. Tiny bathrooms, lower ceilings, small garages and inferior mechanical systems often characterize these homes.



LEFT: West end of existing home, prior to complete renovation. RIGHT: A complete renovation used quality, enduring materials and integrated primary living spaces with the stream setting.



The facade of this new, LEED Gold home engages the prime creek setting in dramatic ways that the original home, bottom left, missed. As seen below, new entry façade features architecture as art.

ARCHITECT: SHEPHERD RESOURCES, INC./AIA  
 BUILDER: RA NELSON  
 PHOTOGRAPHER: DAMN COFFEY



"Quality wasn't really the priority," DeChant says.

And people in the multimillion-dollar price range typically don't want the "Band-Aid" solution of a remodel, says Tom Bashford of Shepherd Resources/AIA Architects. "A lot of (early) homes generally don't have good bones."

Still, architects like those at Shepherd Resources/AIA almost always begin with studying what it would take to renovate a house. However, one of the most difficult, and common, aspects they run into is low ceiling heights — a particularly problematic issue on the main floor.

"There's a certain point where you can't take the house any further, or you have to



"Lifestyles have changed. It's a lot less formal and a lot more casual."

— TOM BASHFORD, OF  
 SHEPHERD RESOURCES INC./AIA

live with compromises," Wolffe says.

Yet, the architectural firm recently found a clever way to renovate a 1992 home on Gore Creek that wasn't oriented to take advantage of the views — owners couldn't see the river from the main living space. Since the footprint, foundation and main level floor "were a good start," DeChant says, they designed a significant remodel to

link the river environment with the home.

Another reason teardowns are becoming more popular involves "a changing of the guard," so to speak, says Adam Harrison of Shepherd Resources/AIA. "There was an aesthetic for more rustic architecture in the 1990s, but the generation that's building now is looking for more modern."

One major renovation they recently completed cost \$6.25 million but includes huge glass doors in the main living area, that, when open, seamlessly blend outdoor and indoor living.

"Lifestyles have changed," Bashford says. "It's a lot less formal and a lot more casual."

That means no more separate dining rooms, kitchens and living rooms.

In addition, technology of materials has improved, such as the size and insulation factor of glass.

Landscaping also has become more desired.

"It wasn't that long ago people weren't that interested in landscape and big outdoor living," says Stockton.

Now, owners want larger patios with extensive outdoor kitchens and landscaping with water features, fire pits and more. In other words, the quality is stretching beyond the borders of the exterior walls.

"That's what they want, rather than all these bedrooms," Stockton says. "Vail is a social place, so (owners) are putting their square footage in the living rooms, so it feels like a mountain modern lodge, where 25 people can gather and tell stories about the activities (of the day)."

Occasionally, if a dwelling is historical and valuable enough, it may be relocated. Such was the case with a late 1800s log barn that sat by June Creek; Shepherd Resources/AIA took it apart and reassembled it south of Buena Vista.

## BEYOND VAIL

Will the trend continue? As homes built from the 1980s to 2000 start to age, many experts believe the same teardown trend in the heart of Vail will extend to outlying regions, including Beaver Creek. In fact, Nobrega already has seen a couple buyers level homes and rebuild in Beaver Creek, and she believes the market will support that, so more buyers will rebuild. Shepherd Resources/AIA is starting its first teardown in Arrowhead while watching another architect redevelop in Beaver Creek. Even Strawberry Park, a relatively young community, is beginning to experience significant renovations, DeChant says.

However, Boylan hasn't seen the leveling

trend occur extensively in Beaver Creek yet because most homes don't have enough equity. But it seems to simply be a matter of time.

"It's going to extend out to second homes as the valley ages," Nobrega says. "If something has enough value, it's inevitable."

Stockton is starting to see \$1 million to \$2 million homes in East Vail and West Vail being torn down.

"People want today's amenities, today's finishes," Stockton says. "They want new and nice, and they're willing to pay for it ... They don't want headaches from older homes — things breaking — and they will pay a significant premium for that."

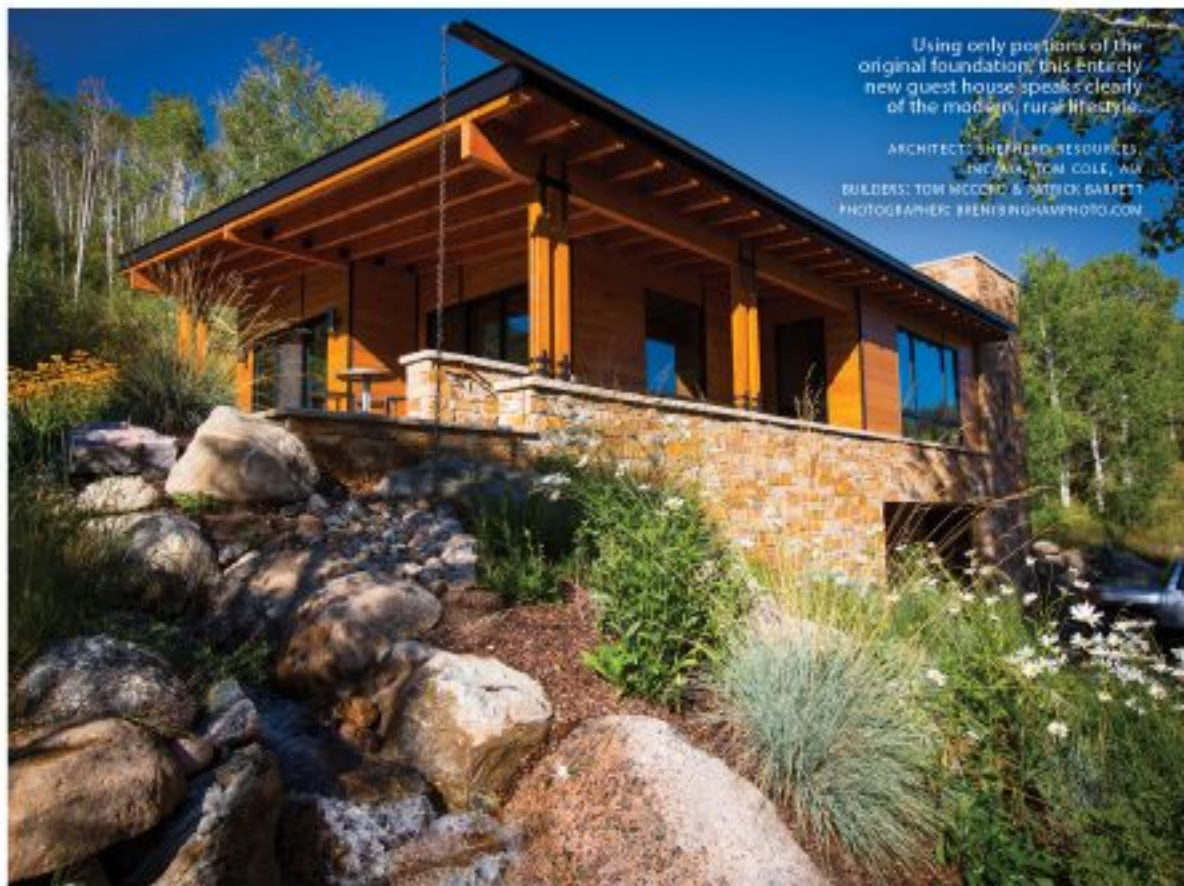
"In Beaver Creek, the same phenomenon

could happen, though (those homes) were built on a much larger scale ... (and many) would cost way more than the land value to tear down."

In contrast, early residents in Vail built smaller homes, so there's "little value in the home; the value is in the land," Stockton says.

With Vail Resort's world-class status and Vail and other prime area's limited land, the teardown trend seems likely to continue.

"It's just such a rare location and highly sought after," DeChant says. "When you talk to people who have skied all over the world, (they choose Vail). It's like the heart of New York City or San Francisco. The desire to own here is never going to change." ■



Using only portions of the original foundation, this entirely new guest house speaks clearly of the modern rural lifestyle.

ARCHITECT: SHEPHERD RESOURCES INC./AIA, TOM COLE, AIA  
BUILDERS: TOM MCCOY & PATRICK BARRETT  
PHOTOGRAPHER: BRENNINGHAMPHOTO.COM



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