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MARIE-DOMINIQUE VERDIER / SPECIAL TO THE DAILY

This staircase in a Breckenridge home was designed and built in Switzerland before being shipped to America.

Choose your staircase style

A look at trends in mountain-home staircases, plus a spotlight on one Breckenridge home that imported its staircase from Switzerland

By Kim Fuller
Special to the Daily

Stairs connect the levels of a home, and while they serve this specific and important function, more and more designers are integrating style into the structure.

Allen-Guerra Architecture of Breckenridge worked with a team to have a custom stairway built in Switzerland and then shipped in one piece. The home was in the most recent Parade of Homes.

The entire home is a showcase of design and materials, including the helical steel stair that is a sculptural centerpiece and eye-catching in its unique design.

The spiraling stair climbs from the main floor to a crow's nest office space, providing a secluded spot to catch up on work.

"The space was designed to showcase a sculptural stair," explained project manager Tim Sabo, "and we sketched, modeled and searched around for a long time to find just the right piece that would complement the project's mix of contemporary lines and

forms, natural materials and industrial detailing."

After discussing ideas with several local steel fabricators, they came across a company that specializes in creating beautiful modern stairs.

"The stair is simple but bold, and it commands attention while blending with the other elements of the home," Sabo said.

Allen-Guerra Architecture commissioned Gyger Metallbau AG in Heimberg, Switzerland, to fabricate the stair.

"Their design skills and manufacturing capabilities are incredible," Sabo said. "This is the first stair they made for a project in the U.S."

Sabo and his team coordinated the design, measurements and structural needs between the carpenters and the stair fabricators, and directed shipping and customs work to get the stair to Breckenridge.

Construction project manager Ty Cortright developed the installation plan to get the 900-kilogram stair into the house through the upstairs office window. Design coordination and shop drawings were done by Matthias Luginbühl. Fabrication was done by Lukas Luginbühl, Christian Rubin and Matthias Luginbühl.

The helix was bent cold with a large rolling machine and the parts were cut with a tube-laser and a flat laser.

The steps are made of hot-rolled steel, and the outer helix is also a

hot-rolled steel, but this is a specially hand-picked plate of steel that is selected with the final look of the stair in mind — Sabo said this steel only comes from a very old mill in England.

The finish is maintained with a natural resin hardening oil, similar to that of wood.

"The stair was shipped from Switzerland by trains, ships and trucks, and craned into place during the construction," Sabo shared. "The crate that the stair travelled in was disassembled and the wood was repurposed into doors and trim within the house, and feature the freight stamps and markings collected on its journey."

'FEATURE OF DESIGN'

Sabo said open stairs with "clever exposed structure" are trending in the home design industry. Minimalist designs in steel wood and glass are showing up in residential, commercial and civic design projects all over the world.

"Because stairways need to be able to be accommodated safely, strict codes are applied controlling measurements," he said, "and thus they are a great design challenge."

Christina Romano, lead interior designer for Pinnacle Design Studio out of Frisco, said open treads are currently popular — so that the stairway is exposed and really becomes an architectural focal point of the house.

"We work on a lot of

houses with multiple floors, so it's always about making the stairs a feature of design on multiple levels of the home," she said.

In a house designed by Pinnacle for the most recent Parade of Homes, they brought in rustic timbers for the treads of a central staircase, and instead of staining them, they wire brushed and charred them.

"So it brought out the natural tones in the wood," Romano explained, "so it was rustic, but still with really clean lines."

The piece leans more toward industrial than rustic, but combines materials like wood and metal to create a feeling that reflects a mountain modern flavor in the home, with a touch of mining theme as well.

"There's a light fixture that hangs down four stories with lanterns that are attached by rope," she said. "It kind of chimes down the center of the stairway."

The vintage design touches gives the industrial style of the house a traditional feel.

Instead of vertical bars between the stairs and hand railings, these stairs open up the home with a paneled mesh that allows you to see through and to other levels.

"It's definitely a great feature in that house," Romano said. "You come in the lower level, and that lantern kind of peeks though one of the floors, and then draws your eyes up to the main level."