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ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS

A LOCAL FIRM FOCUSES ON GOOD DESIGN
AND ECO-FRIENDLY SOLUTIONS TO HELP
REDEFINE THE WAY PEOPLE LIVE

“Elemental Living” is more than the name of a Denver-based architecture practice – it is a cornerstone of the firm’s work. According to Jonathan Coppin, a partner at Elemental Living, “‘Elemental’ embodies multiple principles; it is **BASIC, SIMPLE** and **MINIMAL**. It also is essential to nature, and one’s connection to nature; earth, air, fire, water. Also, it more literally relates to design and the firm’s aesthetic as components or design parts assembled into a whole.”

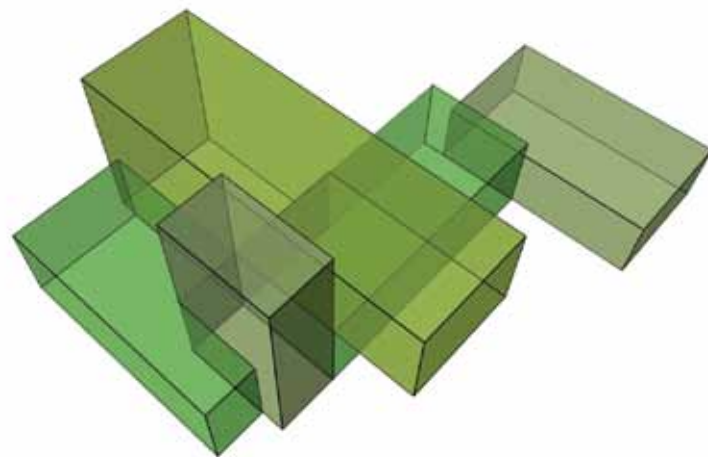
LEFT: Founding partner Jonathan Coppin stands inside the living room of a home his firm designed.



ABOVE: An exterior view of one of Elemental Living's residences on Ivanhoe Street in Denver. The stone on the exterior was reclaimed from a building on the University of Colorado's Boulder campus.

RIGHT: A rendering of the home's massing.

FAR RIGHT: An early sketch of the home.



With backgrounds in commercial architecture the founders were afforded opportunities to work on projects around the globe. "On one particularly late night," says Coppin, "we found ourselves exhausted, sitting in a restaurant in Dubai wondering what had happened to our lives. Constant traveling and an unwavering commitment to our jobs was taking a toll. It took a couple hours of reflection and contemplation – and some good wine – but it was there where we were able to come up with a way to balance our professional goals and family." As a concept, the firm came into existence in early 2006 and officially became a LLC in January of 2007.

More and more members of the 'creative economy' are using design as an avenue for change. From the firm's "Founding Elements" and other writing found on its website to interviews and walk-throughs of one of its homes, Elemental Living seems to present a manifesto on design, materials and the way people live. According to Coppin, "Good design simplifies your life and helps create order. It connects people to nature, light and air; it can rejuvenate and revitalize. Good design can transform cultural norms and redefine the way people live." So with these principles as guides, Elemental Living set out to create a firm unlike any other for the local landscape.

Elemental Living chose to handle development, design and construction as one entity for several reasons. "First, it allows us to ensure that our vision and design concepts are executed and carried out through the entire project; no detail is lost in translation. It also allows us to offer modern homes at a more competitive cost because of the efficiencies that are gained in the process. We don't spend hours in traditional owner/architect/contractor meetings. We wear all three hats," explains Coppin. "The most difficult part is not letting the architect in us always win the internal debates, we have to reel ourselves in sometimes."

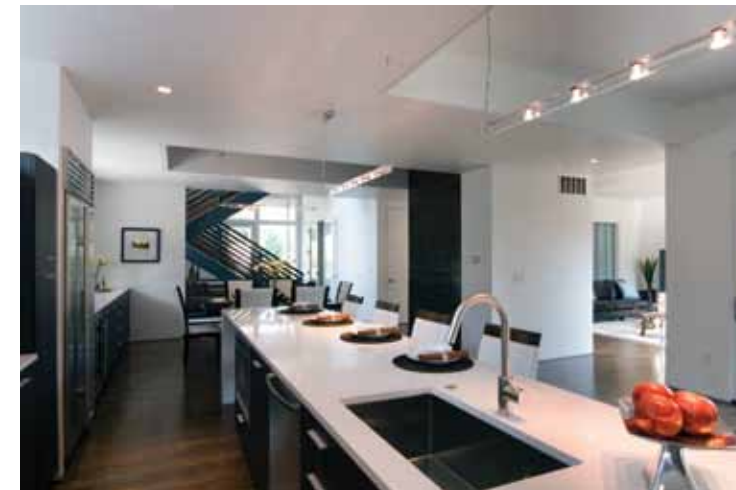


However, the transition from large-scale commercial projects to residential endeavors has been easy. The house featured with this article is an example of that transition. It features some commercial-feeling elements, such as the high ceilings and tall doors, and vent covers, among others. About the transition, Coppin says, “it is really nice to personally be in touch with every aspect of the project. There is no detail too small.” Commercial projects are simply too large to allow any one person the ability to be involved in all decisions. “We have carried with us the expectations of quality, craftsmanship and attention to detail that we expected to see in our commercial projects to our home projects. Because most of our commercial projects were large civic structures they were designed and detailed to last. We apply our knowledge in materials and detailing to our homes and build the highest quality homes available on the market,” says Coppin.



OPPOSITE PAGE: The Ivanhoe home designed by Elemental Living features living roofs. The multitude of plants selected are native to the area, and different plants bloom throughout the year.

THIS PAGE, TOP TO BOTTOM: A hot water recirculation system allows owners to enjoy hot water without waiting. The lower level of the home features a fairly open floor plan so that people with varied lifestyles can enjoy and make the best use of the flexible space. The majority of the home’s interior and exterior elements are reclaimed from local sources.





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But that is not to say that Coppin has stopped learning. He explains, “Starting a design and development company in the worst housing market in our lifetimes has been a real challenge. However, there is a big opportunity with the pause in the market to redefine what consumers can expect in a home and from a housing developer.”

Because both the modern aesthetic and truly green building features are often expensive and difficult and time consuming to execute, historically, many speculative home builders look to high volume and quick delivery to make the bottom line work. In the commercial sector the economy of scale has afforded the industry the ability to incorporate green features and modern detailing for decades. Elemental Living is founded on the fact that these are important aspects for the housing industry and people deserve the opportunity to choose a truly green and modern home. “The industry is heading in this direction as eco-consciousness and the demand for truly green housing increases among the public,” says Coppin. “Hopefully, this will drive the cost of green residential materials and systems down.”



OPPOSITE PAGE: While many of the home's materials were reclaimed, such as the stone on the home's exterior, others are entirely new. Calling on their commercial background, the firm's designers created custom details such as these metal sliding door locks.

ABOVE: Computer renderings of future Elemental Living homes.



Looking toward the future of the company, Elemental Living plans to move beyond just providing homes. Coppin notes, “We are working on developing products that embody ‘elemental living.’” ‘Elemental Objects,’ ‘Elemental Furnishings’ and ‘Elemental Transportation’ products are forthcoming.

The firm envisions an increase in the demand for modern green homes in Denver. Currently, local buyers seeking modern homes are vastly underserved. Increased awareness and demand will push home builders to create modern homes. Denver, and Colorado as a whole, are on the leading edge of eco-consciousness; this local sensibility will inevitably lead to more truly green housing alternatives.

Elemental Living tries to use local resources whenever possible. They rely on General Casework for cabinetry, Ram Grinding for custom hardware and metal work, and ICS Rocky Mountain for S.I.P. panels.