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European Modular Construction Finds a Niche in Aspen

How a local design-build team imported a chalet from Austria

By [Cindy Hirschfeld](#) Photography by [Michael Brands](#) June 10, 2024 Published in the [summer/fall 2024](#) issue of *Aspen Sojourner*



The wood walls, ceilings, doors, and balconies of this 5,066-square-foot chalet in a neighborhood near Buttermilk's Tiehack base area were precut and finished in a workshop in Bramberg, Austria, then shipped to the United States to be assembled on-site.

The old saw about beauty being only skin deep might apply to some places (and certainly more than a few people) in Aspen, but a Euro-chic chalet that sprouted seemingly overnight on the western edge of town is decidedly not one of them. Tucked into an intimate neighborhood near Buttermilk's Tiehack base area, the Aspen Golf Club, and Moore Open Space, the three-level contemporary home not only exudes Alpine ambience, but it's also authentically European—from the inside out.

That's because the 5,066-square-foot chalet's wood walls, ceilings, doors, and balconies were precut and finished at Holzbau Maier (a factory in Bramberg, Austria), then shipped to the United States to be assembled on-site. The process saved significant time and labor during construction but, importantly, didn't skimp on design or materials (such as premium Gaulhofer windows, also from Austria).



This method offers a superior grade of wood and level of craftsmanship, say the chalet’s developers: Bryan Peterson, head of Aspen-based Alpinist Ventures; John Blatz, the principal of Roaring Fork Valley firm Clearwater Construction Management; and Balz Arrigoni, proprietor of Minturn’s Arrigoni Woods, which specializes in wide-plank flooring and re-milled timber from deconstructed barns in Austria.

“In the last 15 to 20 years, the European wood industry has been extremely active in building more homes,” says Arrigoni, who apprenticed as a carpenter in his native Switzerland in the late 1990s before moving to the Vail Valley. “The big challenges had been fire ratings and interior acoustics, and those have now been tackled with different techniques.” Innovative technology also factors in; for example, using panels of high-strength, engineered wood, European modular home builders like Holzbau Maier can create large, structurally sound walls in sizes not available in the States.



The chalet's great room

Thanks to Arrigoni and his team, that wood construction has become an increasingly viable option for Colorado homeowners. Through a separate business, Concept 4012, Arrigoni imports prebuilt wood houses from Holzbau Maier, the company that crafted the Aspen residence. Arrigoni's own 3,800-square-foot chalet near Vail Village was imported from Switzerland. More recently, ski shop owner Jeff Gorsuch added a Maier-constructed wing to his Aspen home.





Master bath

Though Maier offers design templates, the Aspen builders went the bespoke route, conceiving the floor plan (along with features like a three-story, glass-enclosed elevator) themselves, then working with Maier designers to fabricate the pieces that would be required for the build. The goal, says Peterson, was to “create an authentic chalet-style feel, with a lot of glass.”

Another European element specced by the developers is the Swiss-brand SunStyle solar roof, consisting of photovoltaic shingles that charge five Tesla battery packs for the home’s 25-kilowatt system. Peterson says the chalet is the first house in Aspen to use the technology.





Elevator

While a custom home build can easily take 18 to 24 months, depending on size and details, the typical length of time to build a house from Maier is 8 months, says Arrigoni. The foundation can be poured while the wood walls, ceilings, and doors are being produced inside the climate-controlled Austrian workshop. Once the prefabricated components arrive from Europe, a small group of Maier craftspeople then travels to the home site, taking two to three weeks to erect the house. After the Maier construction team departs, interior finishes are completed, wiring and plumbing installed, and the home is soon move-in ready. Four Maier workers assembled the Aspen chalet—transported by ship, train, and truck in four Conex containers—in just three weeks, despite January 2023’s deep snowfall. From start to finish, the entire home build took 13 months. (Permitting issues caused a few delays.)

But the argument for using modular construction is not only about speed and efficiency. Homes like the Aspen chalet (which at press time was listed for \$18.5 million) have exceptional quality, thanks to engineered European wood that allows for a more precise and tighter connection during assembly, and also happens to look beautiful. “You can’t get this quality of wood in the US,” Peterson says.

Maier sources its wood—primarily spruce and larch—in Austria. Trees grow more slowly at high elevation, explains Arrigoni, resulting in wood that’s denser and stronger than what’s generally available in North America. While timberland in the US tends to be clearcut and replanted in relatively short cycles, forests in western Europe are managed by thinning out older trees, which are then milled for lumber. With such practices in place, “wood is one of the most sustainable products in the world,” Arrigoni says.

True to its origins, the Aspen chalet conveys the welcoming vibe of an Alpine ski lodge. Floors are engineered European oak, sourced by Arrigoni Woods, and all beams and rafters in the house are made of reclaimed spruce. Hidden lights atop the beams showcase the natural beauty of the vaulted wood ceilings while adding warmth. Blatz’s construction team used additional imported wood for interior-wall accents, several sliding barn doors, and the chimney cladding above the great room’s granite fireplace. Meanwhile, the home’s maintenance-free, unpainted exterior will naturally develop a rich patina as the raw wood ages.

Despite its European roots, the house seems perfectly at home here. All it takes to appreciate that is a minute or two on the master bedroom’s wraparound balcony, soaking in the views of Highlands’ ski runs and the top of Tiehack. The chalet’s sense of place is undeniably Aspen.

## Resources



**Alpinist Ventures**

Aspen, 970-948-0859

**Arrigoni Woods/Concept 4012**

Minturn, 970-479-1800

**Clearwater Construction Management**

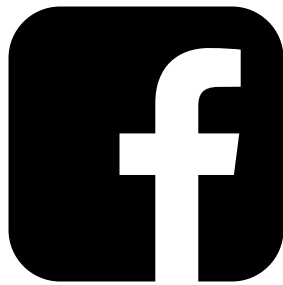
Snowmass, 970-379-3709

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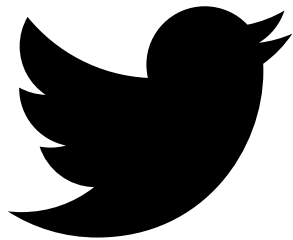
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