



## FARMHOUSE *Rising*

A couple with contemporary style builds their dream home in a traditional neighborhood.

*By Maggie Theodora  
Photography by David Agnello*

Kristan and Eric Burba worked with Chicago- (and now Jackson-) based Northworks Architects + Planners to design a modern farmhouse. "It seemed like a style that was timeless. Something that was uber contemporary might fall out of style; also, for this neighborhood, which is older and where houses are traditional, contemporary wouldn't fit," Eric says. "But we didn't want a house that was brown and log. So this is what we came up with."



**W**ould the fireplaces in the home they were building in Shootin' Iron Ranches be wood-burning or natural gas? Kristan Clarke Burba wanted the convenience of natural gas. Husband Eric Burba wanted the coziness and crackling sound that comes from wood.

"We got married, got pregnant, and started building this house—we weren't together for all that long," Kristan says. "I was nervous going into this that, being newlyweds, it could destroy us. But in reality it made us stronger faster." The fireplaces were the biggest disagreement in the design/build process. "I think we did okay," Kristan says.

Eric, senior vice president of mortgage lending and Jackson branch manager for Guaranteed Rate, had previously flipped three houses. He says that "[this] was the most emotional house I have ever moved into. I started to cry when I walked in. It sank in that this was the culmination of fifteen years of hard work and busting our butts to make this happen, and that this is where we'd live and grow up as a family."

The couple, with then three-year-old daughter Saige, moved into their new house on December 8, 2017, Kristan's birthday. "It was the best birthday present," she says. They celebrated—in front of a gas-burning fireplace—with wine and pizza, relaxing afterward on a distressed-leather couch that they brought from their former house in East Jackson.

Many houses currently under construction in the valley have a modern farmhouse form. Kristan and Eric's is one of the first of this type to be built and inhabited here. "It was the style we knew we wanted from the beginning," says Kristan, who founded and runs Rendezvous Event Management, a boutique public relations company. Eric says, "We both like contemporary design, and I've lived in some über contemporary spaces, but I thought this would be something we could grow old with and it wouldn't go out of style. Also, this is an established neighborhood with more traditional houses. We weren't going to do log, but were sensitive that this wasn't the place for something really contemporary."



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[ ERIC BURBA, HOMEOWNER ]



**Top:** Kristan loves "how open and bright" the kitchen is so much she often finds herself using the island as her home office. The pendants above the island are by Rejuvenation and the chairs are by Cherner Chair Company. The kitchen faucet is an OND HighFlex faucet by KWC. The kitchen sink, a model by The Galley, isn't merely a sink, but, thanks to numerous attachments and accessories, a workstation at which Kristan and Eric can prep, cook, serve, entertain, and clean up.

**Left:** Eric found Studio McGee on Instagram and liked the design firm's style. "When he realized they were in Salt Lake City we thought it might be perfect," Kristan says. The couple were initially skeptical of the large Restoration Hardware table the firm suggested for the dining room. "We thought that it would be too large and feel too big," Eric says, "but it ended up being kind of perfect for our needs." The elk antler chandelier is vintage from Kristan's family's house on Cape Cod. "My mom died when I was twenty-five, but my dad kept this," she says. The couple found it in the barn when they were at the Cape Cod house for their wedding. "We actually hung it up in the barn for an after-party," Kristan says. "I love that it's in this house now." Eric found the 1950s Disques Radio Tele poster at Chicago's Randolph Street Market. "I fell in love with it because it's a character in a lab coat with a big vinyl record head," Eric says. "I have always collected vinyl and been a DJ and just loved the imagery and colors."

**Right:** The exterior materials palette includes cedar and granite.







In the living room, Kristan and Eric worked with Studio McGee to mix pieces they already had (and loved) with new pieces. The leather couch is one the couple had in their prior home. "We knew we were keeping it," Kristan says. The chairs, by Brazilian designer Roberto Schilling, were a find by Studio McGee.

When the couple first saw this property, Kristan says they weren't seriously looking. "I just saw this pop up on the MLS," she says. "This" was a nearly four-acre lot in Shootin' Iron Ranches, in the Snake River bottoms southwest of Melody Ranch. "I was happy with our place in East Jackson, but ready for a change, and Eric wanted to get out of town, so we drove down and checked it out." They liked it, but were a little hesitant. "It was a good price, so we wondered what was wrong with it," Kristan says, laughing.

There was a small hiccup: Prior to the installation of levees on the Snake River, during high water the river would flow through part of the property. "So parts of it were classified as wetlands and there were setbacks because of that," Eric says. "We had to spend significant money and time on due diligence before we even owned the land." This was frustrating at the time, but Eric now says, "Because it wasn't easy to obtain—there was some level of having to earn it—that makes it even more rewarding. I think the due diligence work scared off people who weren't willing to put in that work. But we liked the detective work."

Kristan and Eric closed on the property the week Saige was born. When Saige was six weeks old, they met architect Austin DePree of Chicago-based Northworks Architects + Planners, which now has a Jackson office. The Burbas said they spoke with and interviewed numerous local architects, and that "everyone wanted to do this style of house, but no one we interviewed had actually done it yet," Kristan says. "No one had it in their portfolio to show us. Austin did, and that was reassuring. And then when we met him in person, we totally hit it off."

In their finished home, the room the family hung out in the night of Kristan's birthday is the couple's favorite space. "I love how open and bright it is," Kristan says. Eric adds, "There are these huge windows looking out at mountains, and light coming in from every direction. It is the heart of our home."

Standing at the kitchen sink at the opposite end of this space from the stone fireplace, Kristan points out that from that spot, on clear days there's a beautiful view of the Grand Teton. "We both had ideas of what this house would be like, and the reality is even better," she says. ☺



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