

# \*SEEING STARS

Astronomy compels the soul to look upwards  
and leads us from this world to another. —PLATO



BY MELISSA M. KELLOGG

IF PLATO WAS ON THE  
mark, where better to look upwards  
than the crisp, clear Colorado mountain sky?

¶ While many Colorado mountain homeowners are likely to cite our plethora of outdoor activities and entertainment as reasons for living here, some say they have a Colorado mountain home just for the night sky. Stargazing is as old as humankind, and one way modern homeowners enjoy a deeper appreciation of the dark Colorado night sky is making an observatory part of their dwelling. ¶ Private observatories run the spectrum from a self-installed telescope on an upper deck to a highly complex, computerized telescope that can be integrated within a home's technology and entertainment network. The budget, too, runs the gamut. According to architect Jeff Terrell, telescopes alone can range from \$10,000-\$250,000. Three private observatories are profiled here, with insights from the owners who inspired the design of their private observatories and the teams that made it happen for their stargazing clients.

## CHANNELING “THE SHIRE”

Nestled into a quiet mountain hillside at the edge of an aspen grove in Eagle sits a new home designed by architect Jeff Terrell of RMT Architects. He built the home for a family for whom whimsy, fantasy and inspiration are prized values. Their home transports them from everyday life to a place that could have been built by characters from the novels of J.R.R. Tolkien.

Terrell describes the man of the house as the driving force behind the installation of the telescope.

“He’s a dreamer and a poet who loves the exploration of the world around him. He loves stories like *The DaVinci Code* and *Raiders of the Lost Ark*,” Terrell says. He also says the client’s love of cosmological fantasy has been a major driver of the project.

With its isolated location, the home is a perfect spot for a private observatory. Tucked into a hillside alongside the main house are the guest’s quarters, which also house the private observatory. Terrell was charged with creating a residence

and private observatory that captured the imagination — and looked as if it were built hundreds of years ago. For that he had to assemble a team of experts to help him achieve an Old World look that would also house a state-of-the-art observatory system.

His goal, he says, was to design and build a home and observatory that “looked as if it had been crafted by eccentric gnomes and engineers who could dream and see the stars, but without the modern techniques.” The final product will be an observatory built with large, rough-hewn stones topped by a rusted, copper dome.

The exterior, however, does nothing to indicate the technological complexity that lies within. The high-end telescope and dome open to the night sky and are integrated with the home entertainment network. From the entertainment room in the main house, the family can let the telescope know what they would like to see and the telescope will locate the desired target — whether the planet Saturn, a nebula or a distant galaxy — and display the image on the television screen in the entertainment room.

In planning for the observatory, Terrell had to consider things like preserving an unobstructed view, structural

stability, and the control of the interior environment to protect the telescope. For an unobstructed view, he designed the observatory to be a two-story cylinder. Next, he designed a cylindrical cement slab that would reach down to bedrock, affording the most stable foundation to prevent all movement of the telescope.

Designing and building the observatory did not come easy. Neither the homeowner, nor Terrell as the architect, nor the builder superintendent, Brian Bergstreser of Beck Building Group, were experts in building observatories. They spent countless hours talking to experts and doing research to learn everything they needed to know.

“There was lots of legwork in the beginning,” says Bergstreser. He also learned about fiber-optic red lighting so light in the room doesn’t interfere with the telescope viewing.

The home is now in its final stages of construction. Bergstreser says he can’t wait to see the finished product.





The owner of this observatory home in Eagle County wanted to look as if it was crafted by 'eccentric gnomes.'