



Bernese Mountain Dogs Maui and Sanders take in the mountain view. In honor of Valentine's Day, we celebrate the art of the pet portrait. See story page 62. TOWNSEND BESSENT, MOUNTAIN DOG PHOTOX

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ON THE COVER

Pet portraits celebrate our pets — and sometimes memorialize them. Kai was the much-loved dog of Traci Macnamara McCoy and her husband, Antony McCoy. A rescue from Rifle, “Kai had a very big soul,” says Traci. “He could sense when people needed extra love.” She describes him as a lap dog in a Boxer-Lab body — he was a cuddler despite his big size. Unfortunately, the McCoys had to put Kai down two years ago, but his memory lives on.

Photo by Townsend Bescent, Mountain Dog Photo

My mom has always kept a tidy home. She doesn't need things fancy, but she does want them clean and well cared for. Her house doesn't require any extra cleaning before having houseguests, because it's always *that* clean already. So when she adopted a couple of kittens last summer, we knew there would be an adjustment. Enter Copper and Zinc: brothers. Suddenly there were kittens hanging from blinds, knocking over vases and using furniture as scratching posts. There were also purrs, cuddles and the sort of happy noises that can be equated with life and liveliness. Mom decided it was a fair tradeoff, and is unbothered by the slow shredding of her armchair — much to the shock of her daughters. But that's the magic of pets. The barrel in, make the sort of demands nobody else would dare to make, and become an intimate, integral part of the family. Which is why we decided pet portraits were a good subject for our February issue, as there are no better valentines than our furry friends. Read Kimberly Nicoletti's story featuring several local artists who excel at their craft.

Also in this issue is Laura Lieff's piece about kids' forts. After observing her five-year-old's penchant for designing and creating forts throughout their home, she dug in to the "why." High-end candles, pet products, air plants and an intensive remodeling project round out this issue.

Wren Bova
Editor

THE ESSENCE OF FORTS

Sense of space has no age limit

by LAURA LIEFF • photos by LAURA LIEFF and KELLI HOLTZ



Designer Kelli Holtz has noticed that her daughter, Lake, loves repurposing items to use for her forts.

MOST ADULTS remember building forts when they were kids — whether it was outside creating wonderlands out of rocks, sticks and branches or inside turning a living room into a castle made of pillows and blankets. Regardless of the materials or tools, building forts is a rite of passage that showcases kids' creativity and, in some cases, “architects in training.”

Fleet, my five-year-old son, has been building forts since he

was about two and a half. While the scale and details have gotten more extensive over time, the creativity has always been there. Sometimes his forts involve assembling a house for his lion stuffed animal and other times he uses pillows, chairs, cardboard, blankets and sofa cushions, among other materials, to create intricate forts resembling the Millennium Falcon. Recently he asked us to help rearrange his room to include a “big boy” desk and chair so he could draw plans for his next creation.

Like other parents living in the Vail Valley, when the temperatures are in single digits and the sun has long dipped behind the surrounding mountains, my husband and I are constantly looking for new ways to entertain our kid indoors. Over the years, we have found that fort building is a fun and creative way to spend time after school or on the weekends. Additionally, because Fleet uses items around the house to build, that means we are not spending money on entertainment which is especially helpful coming out of the holiday season. That

being said, making forts is not just about passing the time — it's about watching kids create a space that means something to them.

Design Driving Forces

Holtz Design Studio Principal Kelli Holtz brings over 20 years of interior design experience and has a seven-year-old, fort-building daughter named Lake. Throughout her career, Holtz has found that there are several driving forces behind selections people make about their spaces including personal style, lifestyle,

travel experiences, and emotional needs. “Personal style is the biggest one because people draw inspiration from their own unique personalities, interests and values,” says Holtz. “How people live also impacts their design choices — for example, families with young children might prioritize play areas and durable materials, while couples may focus on creating a cozy and intimate atmosphere.”

Though it is no secret that both adults and children gain insight from traveling, it is interesting to see what kids take away from their adventures. For example, when we return from a beach vacation, Fleet usually integrates shells, rocks, and other items he found while exploring different landscapes into his forts. Adds Holtz, “Visiting different places can spark inspiration. Maybe someone fell in love with the rustic charm of a Tuscan farmhouse or the sleek minimalism of a Japanese tea house.”

As a parent and writer, the emotional-needs part of design fascinates me as I watch the wheels turn in my son’s head as he decides where things “should go” while building a fort. Both Holtz and I have found that our kids begin each building session with a clear idea of what they want to create and sometimes want help. If they do, they usually do an impressive job giving directions. As an interior designer, Holtz strongly believes that “homes should be a reflection of our inner selves” and illuminates that “people often design spaces that evoke feelings of comfort, relaxation, joy or creativity.” Psychologist Dr. Shaina C. Fieldstone says that making spaces our own is an inherent human trait. She points out that “evolutionarily, it was helpful to claim land and build a safe space to protect against harsh weather, animals and other threats and then develop that space to create homes and communities.” She continues, “I have read that an area of our brain stays awake when we don’t sleep in our daily bed which shows the importance of ritual and safety in a space.”



The author's son, Fleet, uses pillows, chairs, cardboard, blankets and sofa cushions, among other materials, to create a variety of forts that serve different purposes.

CREATING FORTS IS INDICATIVE OF BEING HUMAN.

Fieldstone has three kids (ages eleven, nine, and four) who each have found ways to claim and then build their own space. “For one, it was a pile of special blankets on the bed. Another created a nook on his top bunk filled with his ‘special things.’ Each gets territorial with the items closest to their bed.” When asked whether these “architect in the making” tendencies are indicative of anything specific or if building forts is simply “kids being kids,” Fieldstone says creating forts is indicative of being human. She explains, “As adults, we like our house, room and bed a particular way. I think what’s in that space is what indicates who we are — our sense of self, values, or ways to feel internally safe.”

Creative Materials + Minds

In addition to the reasons behind yearning to create, the materials are a significant part of what makes fort building

so interesting. In many cases, Fleet builds off of a piece of furniture (like a couch or table) that’s already there, uses various materials to enhance the structure, and then adds books, toys and balls — all of which add dimension and color. And he loves his packing tape dispenser. I’ve also noticed that the “design” depends on what’s around the house (as opposed to wanting something that is not already lying around) and Holtz has noticed the same. “Lake’s designs vary based on the time of year and available materials. She loves repurposing anything from a cardboard box to a pipe cleaner. Her creativity amazes me.”

There is also an element of problem-solving that goes into building forts. For example, if something doesn’t look right, flexibility and malleability become part of the process. Fieldstone adds, “Spatial awareness, planning, the ability to shift plans and frustration

tolerance are all part of the problem-solving aspect. If there is a joint space-sharing situation, communicating plans and compromising ideas come into play.”

When Fleet finishes a fort, he wants to leave it up for as long as we will let him and I think there is an element of wanting to look at his work and decide if any changes or upgrades need to be made. There is also a sense of pride that goes along with his creations — especially regarding the time and effort he puts into making them look a certain way. On another note, the coziness of these forts is apparent as our pup Zephyr enjoys hanging out in the middle of our son’s creations. Whether Fleet and Lake end up becoming architects or designers remains to be seen, but watching them put their creative minds into action by making their visions realities is something we will always remember. **VVH**