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IRON WILL

Phoenix architect Will Bruder
transplants his desert Modernism
to Jackson, Wyoming.

By Raul A. Barreneche





For more than 20 years, Will Bruder has been a designer of the desert. From houses to libraries, the sculptor-turned-architect has always drawn inspiration for building forms and materials from the Sonoran Desert's geological formations and its vernacular of roadside sheds, barns, and grain silos. Even his largest and most sophisticated building to date, the Phoenix Central Library (*Architecture*, October 1995, pages 56-65, 107-113), draws on the massive forms of mesas, its saddlebag service cores wrapped in the rusty copper of railroad sheds. In recent years, Bruder's work has evolved into an idiom that bridges the organicism of Frank Lloyd Wright and Bruce Goff and the more rigorous geometries of European Rationalists. Buildings such as the Cholla Branch Library (1990), Theurer Residence (1991), Deer Valley Rock Art Center (1994), and Temple Kol Ami (1994) marry stone and concrete curves with angular assemblies of glass and metal.

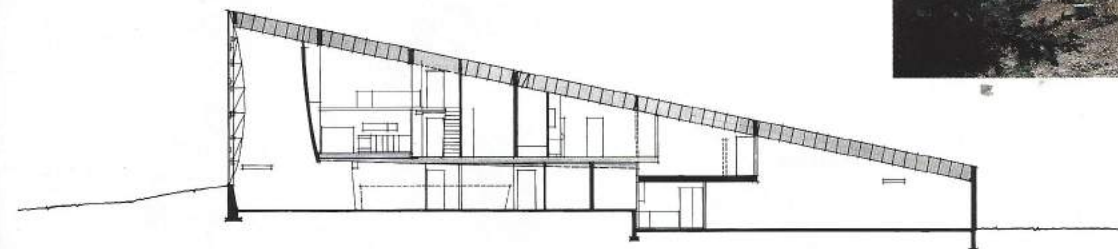
Bruder has built little outside Arizona—until now. Over the past two years, the architect has completed a trio of buildings in Jackson, Wyoming: An office building was inaugurated in 1995; a rafting company headquarters began operating in May; and this month, his Teton County Library opens its doors. These three projects represent an important turning point in Bruder's career, the first

significant translation of his rugged material sensibilities and notions of placemaking to a locale outside the desert. "After spending the majority of my professional life working in the same place, I've really had to dig deeply to understand Jackson," the 51-year-old architect admits.

Bruder's first visit to Jackson was serendipitous. In 1992, the county was looking to replace its rustic but outdated log library, so Teton County Library Board President Paul Lawrence invited the architect, whose Phoenix library was in construction, to address the board on his vision of library design. Later that year, Bruder won the competition to design the new Teton County Library, besting designers such as Michael Graves and Meyer, Scherer & Rockcastle.

While working on the Jackson library, Bruder picked up two more commissions from new acquaintances: Ed and Lee Riddell hired the architect to design an office building for their company, Riddell Advertising & Design, and local entrepreneurs Breck and Carla O'Neill hired him to create a new headquarters for their river rafting company. This trio of buildings, which Riddell jokingly calls the "Bruder Triangle," occupies a strip of highway just west of downtown Jackson, lined with shopping centers, fast food stores, and motels. Bruder's buildings

CLIENTS: Breck and Carla O'Neill **ARCHITECT:** William P. Bruder Architect—William P. Bruder, Wendell Burnette, Tim Christ, Jack DeBartolo III, Leah Schneider (project team) **LANDSCAPE ARCHITECT:** Verdone Landscape Architecture **ENGINEERS:** Brickey, Rudow & Berry (structural), Otterbein Engineering (mechanical), C.A. Energy Design (electrical), Nelson Engineering (civil) **CONSULTANT:** Lighting Dynamics (lighting) **GENERAL CONTRACTOR:** Capstone Construction **COST:** Withheld at owners' request **PHOTOGRAPHER:** Bill Timmerman



Mad River Boat Trips

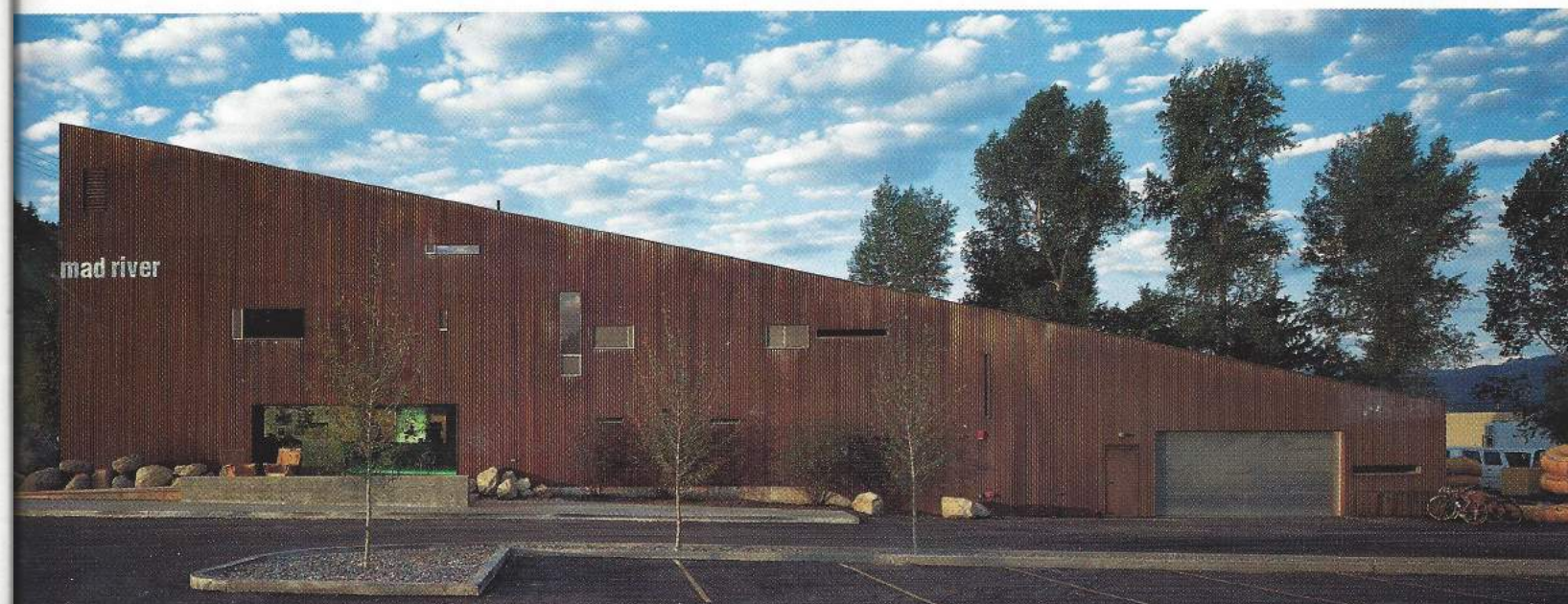
Bruder wrapped the 130-foot-long sloping structure of the river rafting company's headquarters in sheets of corrugated iron. The iron is now rusting to a burnt orange hue that harmonizes subtly with the building's surroundings (facing page). A Corbusian-inspired splatter of variegated rectangular windows edits key views of the building's surroundings from within the wedge (below). Behind the glazed truss wall facing the highway (top right) are exhibits outlining the history of river rafting and a

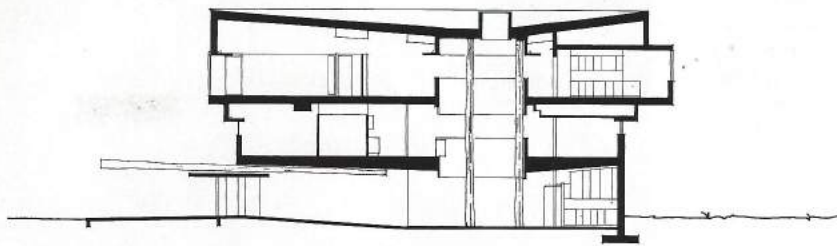
small retail area. Visiting rafters enter the building through a glazed opening in the north face of the wedge (below). At the rear, a spacious garage area (section, above right) provides storage space for rubber rafts and dry suits. On the second floor, small shared living quarters provide housing for Mad River's summer employees. The owners' loft on the second and third floors (section, top left) is a compact but airy space that rekindles the spirit of the Eameses in colorful plywood cabinetry.

avoid literal references to this roadside sprawl, instead creating a Modern idiom for the town—though they exhibit varying degrees of success.

Like other Western resort towns such as Aspen, Boulder, and Sun Valley, Jackson was transformed by a real estate boom in the late 1980s and early 1990s, as the power brokers of Wall Street and Hollywood arrived in search of a laid-back vacation retreat. This sudden surge in popularity brought the usual trappings of gentrification to this frontier town of 6,000 residents: Now, the locals and more than 3 million tourists who visit Jackson each year can sip cappuccino and shop at Ralph Lauren in faux-log storefronts that recall the Wild West. This overnight sophistication, combined with soaring real estate values, however, threatens to spoil Jackson's original small-town character.

For Bruder, Jackson presented obvious differences from the desert in climate, topography, and local building traditions. But, like many of the Arizona towns in which the architect has built, Jackson is still a frontier town at heart, despite its rank among the wealthiest communities

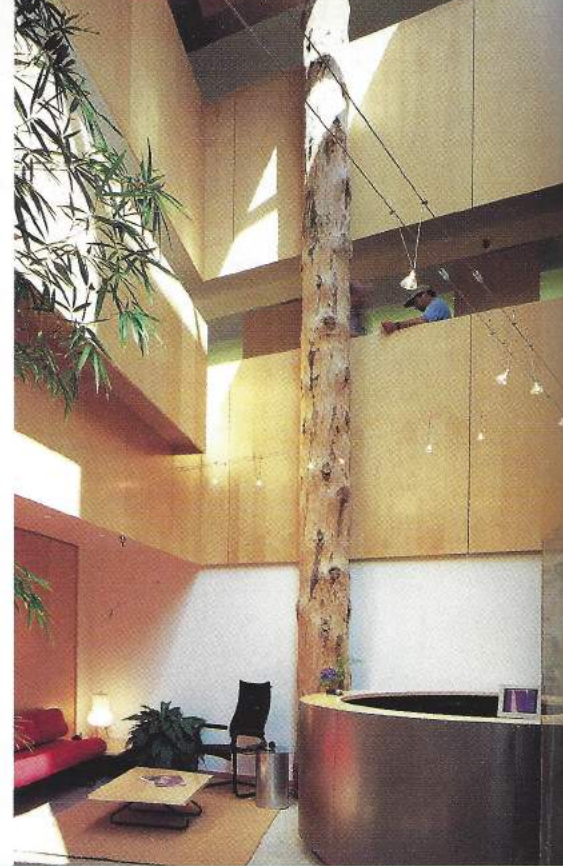




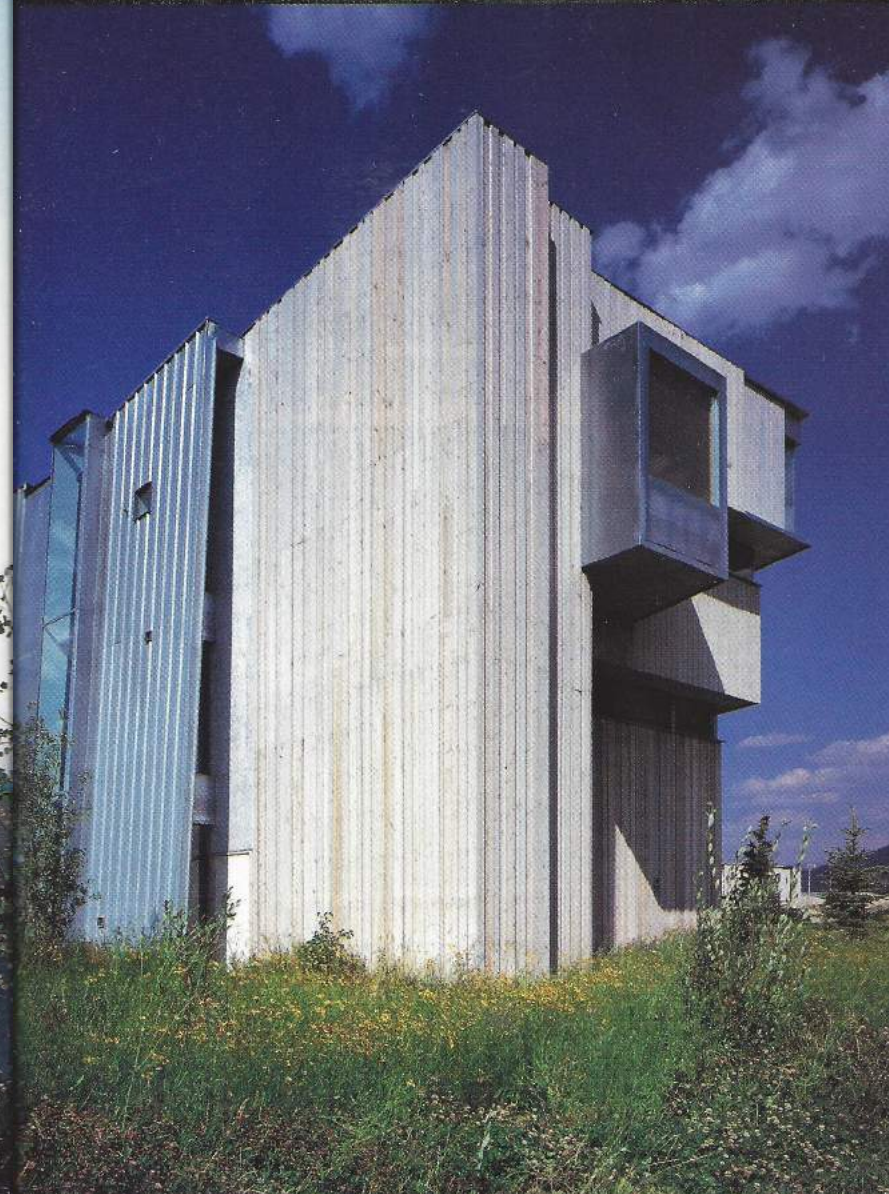
Riddell Advertising & Design

Bruder designed the vertically telescoping headquarters for a 17-person advertising agency to echo the muffin-shaped haystacks of neighboring ranches. Its cedar and aluminum-clad exterior recalls local barns and sheds, but with obvious contemporary flourishes. The boxy building is organized around an atrium (section and

right), with archives and a photography studio on the ground floor; the upper levels house offices and production areas. A projecting glass box on the north elevation (below) encloses a conference room. Projecting from the south facade, a small metal-wrapped window (facing page, top and bottom) marks a staff cafeteria.



CLIENTS: Lee and Ed Riddell **ARCHITECT:** William P. Bruder Architect—William P. Bruder, Ed Ewers, DeWayne Smythe (project team)
LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTS: Christy Ten Eyck (designer), John Grant (contractor) **ENGINEERS:** A.W. Schwan & Associates (structural), Tesco (mechanical), California Energy Designs (electrical), Nelson Engineering (civil) **GENERAL CONTRACTOR:** Capstone Construction
COST: Withheld at owners' request **PHOTOGRAPHER:** Bill Timmerman



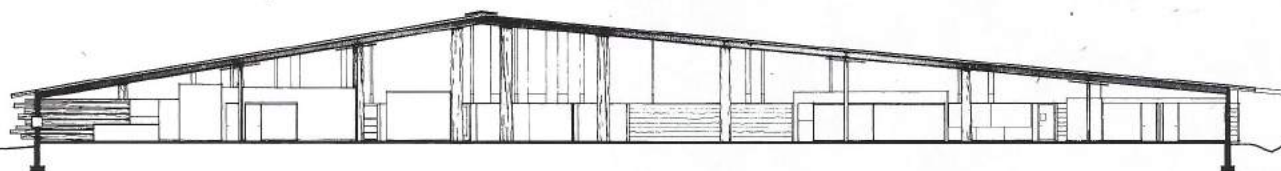
in America. Stagecoaches ride by the Million Dollar Cowboy Bar in the center of town; city commissioners work as waitresses by day; and the mayor acts out mock gun battles in the town square by night.

Bruder looked deeper to find the soul of Jackson, drawing from the true local vernacular of clapboard barns, ramshackle tin-roofed sheds, trailers, and log ranch houses. "There's a certain rigor and modesty of scale in these outbuildings that I enjoy," he explains. "I believe that architecture is not about bringing style to a place, but looking carefully at everything around you and asking serious questions of a place."

The primary forms of Bruder's buildings are typically simple and straightforward: He favors wedges, boxes, and sheds. In Jackson, the architect has built one of each. The strongest building in Bruder's Jackson trio is the one with the simplest parti—the rusty roadside wedge of the Mad River Boat Trip company. Its sloping, corrugated iron form responds simultaneously to the surrounding mountains and to agricultural sheds and prosaic highway buildings.

The sophisticated interiors of the wedge belie its rusty exterior. Here, Bruder creates spaces that capture the energetic activity that fills the building as busloads of adventurers depart for and return from rafting excursions on the Snake River. Brightly painted walls, translucent fiberglass counters and dressing rooms, rafting exhibits, and retail space behind the glassy east face of the wedge set the tone for visiting river runners. Upstairs, Bruder created a single level of shared living quarters for employees—a response to a new local ordinance requiring new businesses to provide affordable housing for its workers—and a loft apartment for the company's owners.

Located just east of Mad River is the Riddell advertising agency headquarters, a stepped wooden box inspired by the quirky, muffin-shaped haystacks on surrounding

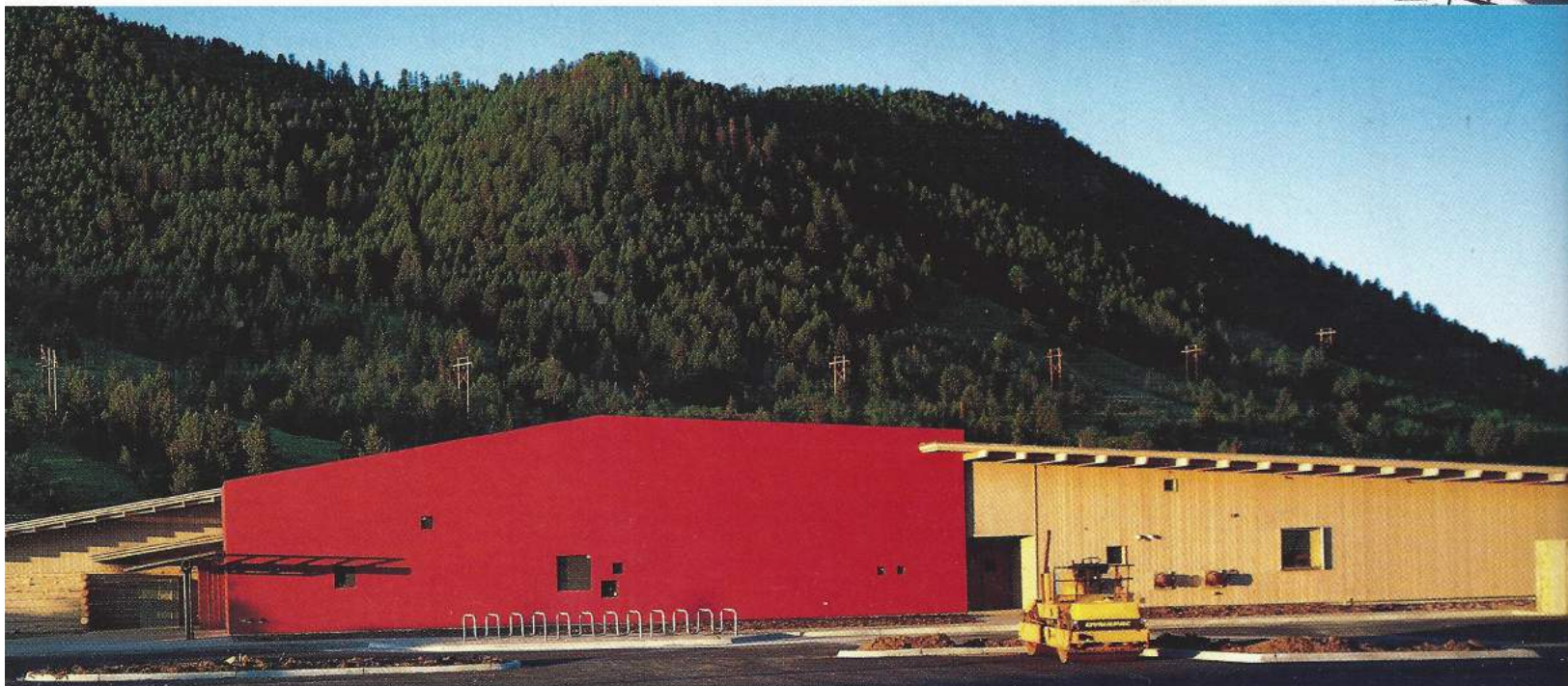
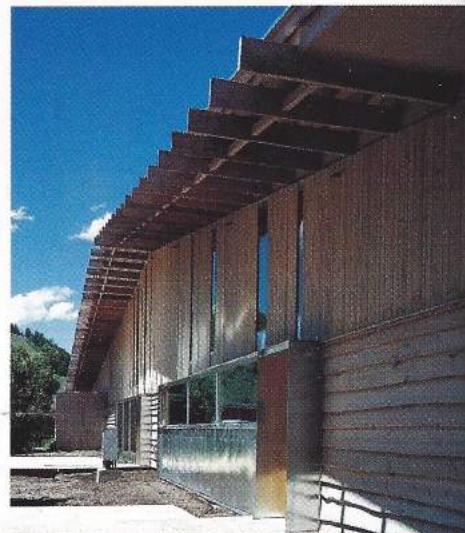


Teton County Library

The least successful of Will Bruder's Jackson projects is the town's new 25,000-square-foot public library; its wood-clad east facade (top) incorporates a clash of Modern punched windows and interlocking logs. On the north-facing entrance facade (below), a stark, stucco-clad wedge encloses a auditorium for use by the community.

Patrons enter the building under a small ribbed metal canopy to the east of the auditorium. Low bookshelves, interior partitions, and fiberglass pendant lamps attempt to reduce the scale of the cavernous interior (section), which features unstripped log columns. From the reading room, visitors exit onto an enclosed plaza to the south (right).

CLIENT: Teton County Library Board
ARCHITECT: William P. Bruder Architect—William P. Bruder, Wendell Burnette, Tim Christ, Jack DeBartolo III, Ben Nesbeitt, Brett Oaks, Leah Schneider (project team)
LANDSCAPE ARCHITECT: Floor and Ten Eyck
ENGINEERS: Brickey, Rudow & Berry (structural), Clark Engineering (mechanical), C.A. Energy Designs (electrical), Nelson Engineering (civil) **CONSULTANT:** Bob Rolhf (library) **GENERAL CONTRACTOR:** Continental Construction **COST:** \$3.4 million
PHOTOGRAPHER: Billy Timmerman



ranches. A tilted aluminum wall punctured with square windows and vents leans against the west side of the building; peeled logs thrust outward over the front door to create a figural entry canopy. Its simple rectilinear massing, horizontal strip windows, and sleek interior finishes and furnishings suggest that this building is part of a larger Modern context beyond Jackson. Yet its cedar cladding, already streaked with rust from iron nails, and exposed timbers root it firmly in a Western vernacular.

Sadly, the Teton County Library—the commission that brought Bruder to Jackson and his only public building there—is the weakest of the three Wyoming projects. The oversized shed adjoins a campground and a trailer park west of the town square, near the Riddell and Mad River buildings, and echoes the log construction of the county's existing downtown library, a cherished but well-worn 1950s structure. Bruder's building is a disappointing interpretation of its predecessor, with awkward proportions resulting from a 25,000-square-foot floor plate that rises to only 25 feet in height in an effort to fit in with its neighbors. The main elevation turns a surprisingly solid, inhospitable face to the street: An auditorium housed in a large red stucco wedge dotted with small, randomly placed windows interrupts the long, wood-clad north facade.

Inside, the architect tried to re-create the cozy atmosphere of the old library. But the space feels cavernous, despite attempts to infuse an intimate scale with furniture, shelving, and small support rooms. Juxtapositions of sleek finishes such as citrus-colored partitions and tiny halogen spotlights feel cacophonous against the rough timber walls and columns. In a town without clearly defined civic buildings, Bruder should have created a strong public presence, instead of deferring to the idiom and scale of adjoining trailers and campers.

But the library has been well-received by locals. The Riddell building, in contrast, caused quite a stir when it was completed in 1995; though Bruder is a tireless teacher and charismatic salesman of his work, not everyone in Jackson was convinced by his Modern vision. Resident Murray Kostamo wrote a letter to the *Jackson Hole News* to suggest that a class-action suit be filed against the building, and added that the "genuine uniqueness of Jackson Hole should not be jeopardized by nonresident, ego-oriented architects." Then-Mayor Abi Garaman also attacked the building and suggested the architect be taken off the library job. Garaman asked Planning Director Bob Horne to ensure that "a building like Riddell's never happen again in this community." Such negative publicity almost scared off the owners of Mad River: "Half the town warned us to stay away from Will Bruder," recalls owner Carla O'Neill. Fortunately, she and her husband were undaunted by the controversy.

For an architect who runs a 10-person studio and travels the world lecturing and participating in juries, Bruder remains remarkably involved in the detailing and fabrication of his projects. He considers the design

of every component of his buildings, down to its furnishing, lighting, and signage, which he often installs himself. (During a recent site visit to the Mad River building, Bruder was busy applying dry-transfer lettering to custom-designed metal signs and hanging them above the front desk.) Always the sculptor, Bruder prefers to work out details in the field, rather than drawing them in the studio. At the Riddell building, for example, he left the pattern of cedar siding unresolved before construction: "I walked around the perimeter with a big marker pen, and just drew on the substrate where I thought the wood strips should get denser or more spread out," he explains.

This last-minute detailing has its problems, however. In the warm, arid climate of Arizona, joints that don't meet or skins that leak air are more commonplace and less problematic than in cold, snowy Jackson, where Bruder must pay closer attention to the execution of his details. After just two winters, for example, some interior drywall surfaces in the Riddell building are already damaged from water leaks. This criticism isn't news to Bruder, however. "I've been faulted occasionally for details that aren't as graceful as they should be," he admits. "But there's always a gusto in the invention that's more important for me than the execution. I'd rather have a building that's about ideas."

Back in the desert, Bruder's studio is brimming with work. He is designing and building more than a dozen houses in and around Phoenix; a contemporary art museum in Scottsdale; a 1 million-square-foot office, retail, and museum complex at Arizona State University in Tempe; and a log house in the mountains of Colorado. His next big jump will likely be to Europe, where the architect has his sights set on potential commissions in Holland, Belgium, France, and Ireland. New buildings abroad will certainly allow Bruder to further adapt and evolve his work—and hopefully refine his construction techniques, given Europe's exacting standards for craft.

Having completed three projects in Wyoming, Bruder is interested in maintaining a presence there. Currently, he is designing a glassy addition to a house located just outside Jackson, inspired by Ludwig Mies van der Rohe's Farnsworth House, as well as a hillside house for an ex-river runner and author. With just three buildings, Bruder has succeeded in shaking up Jackson, offering new visions that challenge the town's conservative design sensibility and make residents reconsider their expressions of place. Client Ed Riddell maintains that the controversy surrounding his building opened up an important public discussion about architecture in Jackson. "People who were for and against the building were both very emotional. I never thought architecture could stir up such feelings," Riddell remarks. Bruder has heard reports that even cowboys at the bars are talking about architecture. Aside from fostering such dialogue, his buildings in Jackson have brought a sense of permanence to a place of nostalgic veneers and false fronts.