

PEOPLE Formerly Wired and Temporarily Retired in Park City

Barbara Kuhr and
John Plunkett
Find Their Rhythm

For their first seven years in town, not many locals even knew they existed. Except, perhaps their elderly neighbor, Thelma Burgener, who would occasionally blow kisses to them at 3 a.m. from her nearby kitchen window, while getting up from sleep for a glass of water. She probably felt her neighbors, sitting in the glow of their computers, could use a little "pick-me-up" as they scrambled to meet yet another deadline in the wee hours of the morning.

Originally, designers Barbara Kuhr and John Plunkett's plan was to settle into the beauty and small-town pace of Park City and work remotely via technology. It was an escape from the urban lifestyles they had grown weary of, living in cities like Los Angeles, New York, Seattle, Paris and London. Barbara's western roots tugged at her, luring them both eventually to Park City, where they moved into an historic home on upper Park Avenue. But in 1992, a year after settling here, they took a chance that led to seven years of commuting, by both air and electrons, between San Francisco and Park City.

By Peta Owens-Liston Photos by Derek Smith



**"We want to create
little jewel boxes,
not trophy homes."**

from the back of an old miner's shack.

No more than a few issues into *Wired's* life, and the tsunami hit. The magazine made waves; big waves. "It was a case of 'be careful what you wish for,'" says John. They worked 18-hour-plus days, seven days a week. "At the same time, it was so interesting and exciting — the ideas, the material, the people — but you knew that as fast as you ran, you couldn't keep up with it all," explains Barbara. This treadmill included not only their roles as the magazine's designers and marketers, but eventually as Web designers for the digital version — *Hotwired* — and as designers of the company's work spaces. The company grew from 12 to 50 people in its first year, tripled in its second year, and by its third year, staff stood at 300. "It got so every day we'd wake up and feel like we were two weeks late on something," recalls Barbara.

Designing "Outside" The Box

At *Wired*, John and Barbara were creating a whole new genre of design. Their intent was to create a magazine that looked like it had landed from another planet. It needed to stand out from all other magazines on the rack and call attention to itself. They did this by ditching the conventional rules of magazine design; often the result was that the reader worked harder to decipher the text, and became more conscious of the design as a part of the message. This created a love-or-hate dynamic among its perusers.

"Each issue was an experiment in how to use the new technologies to tell a story about technology," says Barbara. "We tried to make the electronic future visible to the reader." Today, the graphics would not seem all that foreign, because their style has been absorbed into the culture; but at the time, it was novel. "We wanted the layout to be kinetic and alive, rather than lock it into the same old three columns of text. It needed to convey both the intellectual and emotional content of the story," explains John, reaching for some old issues of *Wired* from their bookshelf. Fluorescent colors; pushing and pulling type; layering text and breaking it up; and altering photographic images were all techniques used to pique the reader's awareness.



- PAUL MITCHELL
- BIOLAGE
- ARTEC
- JOICO
- NIOXIN
- LOGICS
- TIGI

Mon & Fri 8-6
Tues & Thurs 8-7
Sat 8-5

Hair Salon
645-7878

1351 Kearns Blvd.
(Centura Emporium)
Park City



**PARK CITY'S BEST SPA & ONLY
FULL SERVICE SPORTS CLUB!**



Home of Marc Raymond Salon

Massage Therapy • Skin Treatments • All Hair & Nail Services



INDOOR BEACH POOL, WATERSLIDE & LAZY RIVER DURING WINTER MONTHS
(Whirlpools, Steam, Sauna, Yoga, Child Care, Racquetball, Spinning®)

Silver Mountain Sports Club & Spa

2080 Gold Dust Lane, Park City (Prospector Square)

649-6670

www.silvermountainspa.com

VISITORS WELCOME!

then was a result of that time," says John. He got his first taste of technology in Paris in 1984, when he took a job designing an investment newsletter on one of the first Macintosh computers. This is also where he met Louis, the newsletter's editor and future co-founder of *Wired*. The two of them would buy armfuls of magazines from the newsstands and critique them together, dreaming of creating one of their own some day.

It wasn't long before their second retirement installment arrived in 1985; they had the opportunity to sail the Atlantic in a 36-foot boat with another couple for nine months. "It's good to remind yourself that you have other choices; to decide that you are going to have a grand adventure and realize you can do it and land on your feet after, and then go on to something else," says Barbara, reminiscing on what they took away from their nautical detour.

Not long after they disembarked and ended up in Los Angeles, they got an offer to design a signage system for the Louvre. So back to Paris they went. "It was like some graduate school from hell," says John with a laugh, recalling

the meetings surrounded by a dozen French-speaking bureaucrats. John and Barbara struggled to convey abstract, complex ideas to them in their basic French. "We sounded like fifth graders." This was also the first project they tackled together with computers — a foreshadowing of things to come. Although a grinning Barbara adds, "we nearly killed each other."

Their Canvas: Historic Park City

Right now, pouring their time and passion into the details and craftsmanship of historic homes is enough to satisfy their creative bent. "We want to create little jewel boxes, not trophy homes," explains John. In their home, sunlight streams into rooms that feel spacious and open. Their work studio, in another old miner's shack, was destined for demolition when they bought it. Now, it is a modern, high-ceiling office with a black pot-belly stove and a wall of French doors that slide open, allowing the outdoors to flow in.

"It's pretty impressive that these two have taken five small miner's houses, and instead of doing what most people

have done — expanded and blown them out to the maximum square footage — they've restored them to their most natural characteristics," says Mike Guetschow, a neighbor, who had help from Barbara and John in restoring his own 100-year-old home.

Their meticulous eye for design on paper and in their surrounding space is apparent, yet they are at ease letting the details of their own lives fall into place. "We've learned that every now and then it is important to stop what you are doing and allow other things to happen in your life," says John. Barbara, tucking a wisp of brown hair behind her ear, nods in agreement. "For example," explains John, "people usually feel they need to have another job lined up before they quit one, but there's an 'opportunity cost' to that approach — you eliminate the chance of encountering new and unimaginable opportunities."

Such a perspective seems to have served John and Barbara well. ☼

Peta Owens-Liston is a freelance writer living in Salt Lake City.

WINNER of WINE SPECTATOR MAGAZINE'S
AWARD of EXCELLENCE for OUTSTANDING WINE SELECTION

THE CABIN
located in the Grand Summit Resort Hotel at

THE CANYONS
PARK CITY, UTAH

"The Cabin is no ordinary hotel dining experience. Luxurious yet comfortable. the ambiance mirrors the area's pristine surroundings... offers a well-appointed respite from any season's mountain adventure."
Entrée Magazine

"Presentations are almost as pretty as the esteemed Utah powder falling outside."
Ski Magazine

"At The Cabin... one can experience Montana-esque, old-fashioned frontier elegance... A fine Western way to restore oneself after a long ski day."
Salt Lake Magazine

For reservations, please call 435-615-8060. www.thecanyons.com