



THE MOUNTAIN DECIDES

For Lobo Builders founders Thomas and Annie Wolfe, every Western North Carolina home begins with the land beneath it.

Words By: Samantha Greene



In Western North Carolina, the land rarely offers an easy building site. The ground falls away sharply, rock sits close beneath the soil, and water follows routes established long before a surveyor arrives. For Thomas and Annie Wolfe, founders of Lobo Builders, these conditions are not inconveniences to be engineered out of a project. They are where the design begins. “We don’t build on the mountain,” Thomas says. “We build with it.”

That principle affects the siting of the house, its approach, its foundation, and the way its rooms meet the landscape. Thomas is wary of homes that appear to have been set down without regard for what surrounds them. “You cannot come in like an invasive species,” he says. “The house should not feel like a foreign object stuck on the side of a mountain.”

That reverence also comes from an awareness of the deeper history

beneath these mountains. Western North Carolina is part of the ancestral homeland of the Cherokee people, whose relationship with this landscape long predates contemporary development. Thomas and Annie do not claim Cherokee ancestry; rather, they believe that building here carries a responsibility to acknowledge the history of the land and to approach it with humility.

For Thomas, that means understanding the mountains rather than trying to conquer them and moving through the landscape as lightly as possible. “The mountains will give us everything we need if we abide with them instead of going against them,” he says. “They hold deep wisdom and comfort. There is a feeling of being held.”

Before plans are developed, the Lobo team walks the property. They observe where the ground rises and falls, where water collects, how the trees shape the

light, and which parts of the site feel naturally protected. Annie describes it as a slow process of looking. “We walk it, listen to it, witness it, and see how it moves and flows,” she says. “The land has been here for millions of years. You have to let it speak.”

This often means revisiting the original scheme. Plans conceived for a flat lot seldom transfer easily to the Blue Ridge Mountains. A slope may provide room for another level rather than require extensive grading. A rock outcrop may change the foundation. A stand of mature trees may shift the orientation of the entire house. On a residence for the Clark family, the first design did not sit well on the site, so the house was reconsidered around the terrain.

Mountain construction carries demands that are easy to overlook once a house is complete. Western North Carolina receives substantial rainfall and contends with high humidity,



dense tree cover, steep grades, and complicated drainage conditions. Water management affects nearly every part of the work, from roof runoff and retaining walls to foundation drainage and the placement of the driveway. Clients relocating from Washington, Miami, Atlanta, or Charlotte do not always anticipate how different the building conditions can be. The appearance of the finished house may be calm, but that calm depends on decisions made beneath the ground and behind the walls.

“It is a million details that nobody sees,” Annie says. “The utilities, the moisture control, the drainage, the materials, and the way the house is positioned on the land. Those details must be right.” Lobo gives those hidden elements the same attention as the visible architecture. Thomas and Annie often speak of building for the second and third owners, not only for the first. The idea influences the materials, systems, and methods used throughout the house. Their concern is not simply whether a residence looks finished on the day it is handed over, but whether it remains sound and comfortable years later.

The company’s work does not follow a fixed style. Some projects are contemporary, others more traditional, and some begin with structures never intended to become homes. “All Lobo homes have something artistically unique about them,” Annie says. “There is a signature feeling, but it is never the same house repeated.”

That individuality is particularly suited to Asheville and Western North Carolina, where Arts and Crafts houses, American bungalows, Tudor residences, historic commercial buildings, and the more improvised legacy of the region’s artist community have created an architectural vocabulary that resists easy categorization. Thomas and Annie are mindful that rapid development can flatten those distinctions, replacing regional character with houses that could have been built almost anywhere. Their work does not imitate historic architecture. Instead, it carries forward some of its underlying values: sound materials, skilled craftsmanship, permanence, and an understanding of place.

One of the clearest expressions of that

philosophy is The Treadway, Lobo’s project on Roberts Street in Asheville’s River Arts District. Rather than erase what stood there, Thomas saw an opportunity in a former Pentecostal church with deep roots in the neighborhood. Lobo has transformed the building into six luxury townhomes, preserving a connection to its past while giving the structure an entirely new residential life.

The setting makes that transformation especially compelling. The River Arts District, stretching along the French Broad River near downtown Asheville, has become one of the city’s defining cultural communities—a collection of studios, galleries, workshops, restaurants, and creative spaces shaped in large part by artists who found possibilities in old industrial and commercial buildings. In 2026, the district was voted the No. 1 Best Arts District in the United States in USA TODAY’s 10Best Readers’ Choice Awards, giving national recognition to a neighborhood whose identity has long been rooted in creativity and reinvention. The Treadway participates in that continuing story of reinvention.





Here, Thomas’s interest in historic preservation meets his instinct for mountain design. Rather than approaching the former church as a shell to be stripped of its character, the project allows traces of its earlier life to remain legible. Traditional craftsmanship plays an important role, including the work of skilled stonemasons whose hand-laid material gives the residences a sense of permanence and connection to the mountains surrounding Asheville.

At the same time, The Treadway is unmistakably designed for contemporary life. Its six residences place owners within walking distance of downtown Asheville and the galleries, studios, restaurants, and creative energy of the River Arts District, while views toward the French Broad River reinforce the relationship between architecture and landscape that runs throughout Lobo’s work. The townhomes are also scheduled to appear in Asheville’s Parade of Homes this fall, offering visitors an opportunity to see how adaptive reuse, preservation, craftsmanship, and luxury residential design can coexist

within one of the city’s most culturally significant neighborhoods.

It is a decidedly urban project for a builder known for mountain houses, yet the philosophy is remarkably similar. Whether Thomas is considering a steep forested parcel or the walls of an old church, the question is not simply what can be built. It is what is already there—and what deserves to remain.

Mountain views are handled with similar care in Lobo’s custom homes. Not every room is opened with uninterrupted glass. Privacy, shade, energy performance, and enclosure are considered alongside the view itself. Some openings are broad, while others are more selective. The result is a house that can look outward without feeling exposed.

Many of Lobo’s clients are drawn to Western North Carolina by the possibility of a quieter life, with more time outdoors and a closer relationship to the seasons. Building that life, however, requires more than finding a beautiful parcel. It requires someone who understands how the land

behaves. Thomas and Annie measure success through the durability of the house and the relationship established with the client. Their strongest recommendations often come from owners who have lived through wet summers, cold winters, and the ordinary wear of daily life in a Lobo home.

The best of these houses feel settled rather than imposed. They follow the grade, hold close to the trees, and open toward the mountains without losing their sense of shelter. Even in an adaptive-reuse project such as The Treadway, the same principle holds: listen first, preserve what matters, and allow the architecture to emerge from the particular character of its place. The design begins with what is already there. And sometimes, the mountain decides.

For those considering a home in Western North Carolina, Lobo Builders offers something increasingly rare: an understanding of how architecture, craftsmanship, history, and landscape should work together. To explore the firm’s work and learn more about Thomas and Annie Wolfe’s approach, visit lobobuilders.com. ✈