



# CLASSIC LAKEFRONT:

## *Capturing Old Tahoe*

STORY BY A. ELAINE VAN DER WALL + PHOTOS BY VANCE FOX

**ARCHITECT:** DENNIS E. ZIRBEL ARCHITECT  
**BUILDER:** ED KALBAUGH, MASTERWORKS  
**INTERIOR DESIGN:** AUDREY OWEN DESIGN  
**SQUARE FEET:** 4,683  
**YEAR COMPLETED:** 2001







This lakeshore cabin offers timeless appeal with beaded pine walls and a central granite fireplace.





Bedroom suites were custom-designed for family members, several with private decks overlooking The Lake.

Nothing evokes the spirit of Old Tahoe like a lakeshore timber cabin nestled in the pines, echoing with the laughter of friends and family. When such a 1930s home was destroyed by a fallen tree, architect Dennis Zirbel channeled the spirit of the old

house into a design for a new, twenty-first century retreat, enlarging and enlivening it while keeping a timeless appeal. The home's natural placement on the lot, cozy private spaces and beautiful interior woodwork all

speak the poetry of a classic lakefront estate. The owners, a couple who have spent countless hours at their lakefront home with family, consider themselves lucky to have not been present 10 years ago when drought conditions combined with a heavy

children's rooms were on." Their goals in rebuilding were "to bring back, as much as possible, the feeling of the interior where our children had grown up, which we loved, and to make it more up to date without giving away any of the Old Tahoe feeling."

Our panel judged the end result a notable success, a home that appears to capture all of its owners' desires — a new, classic Tahoe lakefront.

The old home's exterior, pine cut-out detailing has been reworked into the interior, which now consists completely of beaded pine, save for the stone fireplace. Creating the particular look and feel of classic pine boards was far from easy. "Back then, they typically just used a clear lacquer, which over time patinaed into this rich, golden color," says Zirbel. "We worked hard trying to obtain that color right from the very beginning, using complex stain applications." The cabinetry is

## NOOKS, CRANNIES AND FULLY INTEGRATED WOOD DETAILING CREATES A CLASSIC, FAMILY-CENTERED ESCAPE.

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snowstorm to topple a 200-year-old, 200-foot Douglas fir onto their Tahoe home. "Our lives are blessed by the fact that we weren't up there then," they say. "The tree totally demolished the side of the house that our



all sugar pine, specifically the premium and predominant species in the area before it was logged.

This comfortable pine cocoon creates an intimate dining area and kitchen — which was expanded into a “true working kitchen,” says the couple — and flows easily into the vaulted great room. Each stone in the grand fireplace, completely constructed of local granite, was handpicked by the homeowners in conjunction with Brad Dutton Masonry for a subtly colorful effect.

“Pretty much every stone was cut or shaped to look dry stacked, to have minimal joint joints showing,” says builder Ed Kalbaugh of Masterworks.

“When we bought the house, there was a regal elk head mounted on the wall,” add the owners. “Our children named him Oscar, and although we don’t hunt, since he was already there and had not been damaged in

the accident, we put him back.”

The floorplan of the sprawling home is essential to the home’s feeling of retreat. “We really like the feeling of nooks and crannies and corners,” say the owners. “Separate, different spaces.” This idea blossomed into a network of clustered suites set off from the main house at an angle. Each wing is unique, able to be locked off from the central structure, and several have private decks overlooking The Lake. One has a steam room; another has a nook with a captain’s bed and books tucked to the side, referred to as the “snore room.” Cozied up behind the kitchen, the study can double as another guest room even farther removed from the action. On the second floor behind the central chimney is a small reading or game board retreat.

“The house can hold a lot of people,” says Zirbel, “and you won’t even know that they’re there.”

“We wanted to be able to make it a home away from home for our friends, too,” say the owners, “who could come up and be very comfortable, without formality, and have the same advantages we do — sharing some spaces and having real privacy and quiet spaces for themselves as well. Sharing with our friends is an enormous part of Tahoe for us, which it’s always been.”

The home’s angled placement on the lot allows each suite to capture its own view of The Lake, and the front of the home has ample views of cliffs to the west. The exterior’s indigenous landscaping, designed by the homeowners, utilizes native species for easy maintenance, drought resistance and greater integration with the environment. “The home takes advantage of its orientation towards The Lake, yet also nestles nicely into the trees,” says Kalbaugh. “It doesn’t dominate the site.” To prevent another



Referred to as “the barn” by the owners, the detached garage features reclaimed siding and an upstairs living unit.





The downstairs blends kitchen, dining and living areas for a family-friendly flow (this image), and a native plant garden between the main house and garage invites one to stop and smell the flora (below)

## IN ITS MATERIALS AND AMBIANCE, THE HOME COULD HAVE BEEN BUILT 80 YEARS AGO, YET ITS DESIGN IS CLEVER IN EVERY MODERN WAY.

possible disaster, the owners received permission to remove several weakened trees from the site, replacing them with stronger, healthier saplings.

Deeper into the trees in front of the home sits a unique, cabin-like structure used as a garage and family room. The owners call it “the barn,” and for good reason — its original incarnation was as a barn that was torn down and sold for its wood value. What started as a quest to build the garage with reclaimed materials resulted in a beautiful

building with log chinking and historic stonework that looks as if it has existed on the site for 100 years.

Save for adding windows and designing the roof to withstand Tahoe’s snow loads, Zirbel maintained a barn aesthetic. “We brought the roof way down,” he says, “to give the feeling of a one-story structure, and built the living unit in the attic above the garage.” The resulting open-plan family room has its own bath and sitting area, as well as a truncated kitchen counter for

limited food preparation.

The property in its entirety, though slightly larger than the original and with more modern amenities, clearly shows the hours Zirbel spent on location with the owners, developing “the poetry of the place.”

“He brought The Lake right into the house and the house onto The Lake,” say the owners. “Although it’s pretty much on the same site as the former home, it feels more open yet very snug and contained, a little oasis.” 

