



The image shows a rustic interior space, likely a living room or den. The walls are painted a vibrant red. The ceiling is made of dark wood with exposed beams. A large stone fireplace is visible on the right side. There are several windows with wooden frames and blinds, looking out onto a snowy landscape. A plaid chair is in the foreground. The lighting is warm and ambient.

an inseparable whole:

The McDonald Residence

by Dennis E. Zirbel, Architect

Sound building design responds not only to the desires of a homeowner, but also to the dictates of a property and the spirit of a region. With these three objectives clearly in mind, an architect can create a home uniquely suited to a particular site, one that is rich with contextual references to history and customs, and one which allows its owners to enjoy spaces that once resided only in their minds.

Too often the character of a town or community is lost by haphazard, thoughtless building design. Structures seem to pop up overnight in response to consumer demand and poor planning. When architects and contractors incorporate native historic symbols and building traditions into the design and construction of a home, it becomes firmly grounded within its local context. It appears as if it could not have been placed anywhere else. The character of the building weaves a story about local traditions and historic customs. A small thread of continuity extends the past into the future, creating a true sense of timelessness.

When an architect listens to what the land beckons for, when the land is given importance equal to a client's desires, a structure results that reflects the



site's true essence. The building becomes a natural extension of the land - not an abstract construct imposed on it. The McDonald residence, located in the Truckee/Tahoe area, represents a design that blends history, land and personality into an inseparable whole.

On this site, there existed natural pockets of space, juxtaposed to the adjacent landscape. These natural pockets communicate various emotions and inspired the creation of small interconnected areas of the home. Designing pockets of building to fit into pockets of landscape also satisfied the test of history. Long ago, the practice of adding space to an existing structure prevailed in this region.

Buildings grew as offsprings of a main structure, both in business and in residential construction. Segmenting the house makes it appear as if sections were constructed at different times, yet the structure forms a cohesive, synergistic whole, in total harmony with its surroundings.

The larger site was used to its full potential in pulling the house away from the street. The main house has been shielded from the road by preserving an existing grove of trees and as much of the vegetation as possible. The drive curving through this vegetation helps hide the garage from street view. This home invites guests into a comfortable, human-scale entry. Although a grand house with a great deal of square footage, it does not feel large, inside or out. Plate heights, overhangs, and room sizes were kept on a personal scale.

The northern point of the site provides shelter and afforded an intimate space away from the more public areas. Two guest bedrooms, nestled amongst the trees here, share a common outdoor patio.

To the southwest, the site climbs onto a plateau, communicating a sense of grandeur. This area was used to explore the massing of the building. Windows were placed in a historic pattern and sized to maximize sun exposure and views of the landscape.

The southeast portion of the site is situated on a declining plateau. This area is smaller in scale, with intimate spaces formed by the existing vegetation. The building, too, steps down into this area and allows the owners a wonderful panorama. The building is broken up to give the master suite its own reclusive identity. The master sits alone with a transparent connection to the rest of the house. The small stone patio with a built-in, landscaped spa contributes to this tranquil and intimate setting. Natural vegetation, preserved during construction, lends the suite an additional protected feeling.

To the south, the building opens up for maximum sun exposure. The design capitalizes on the orientation by placing larger public rooms - and windows - in this area. The light presents a daytime vitality that carries on into evening.

The majority of the home is recessed into existing grades, which creates a naturally rooted building. Indigenous stone walls have been incorporated into the garden. Historically accurate stone chimneys and walls give this home a grounded, site-grown look and feel. Substantial eaves and overhangs, with large structural members and handcrafted trusses, produce a sense of shelter from the mountain elements. They

mimic the grand specimen trees of Cedar, Sugar and Jeffery Pines found in the Tahoe Basin.

Interior finishes reflect the natural beauty of the land as well. The fireplace stone, indigenous to the site, anchors the interior in its surroundings. Stone patios continue inside as a floor finish, extending rooms to the outdoors and bringing the outside in.

Traditional craftsmanship, of local historic origin, provides a vital link to the past and weaves the home into the historic fabric of the area. Darker colors, stone floors and heavy wood detailing all speak a traditional language of rustic protection from the harsh mountain environment. Decorative metal finishes, historic light fixtures and tall wood wainscoting contribute to the rustic character. Wood gables and ceilings with exposed rafters, joists, beams and trusses create intimate spaces by appearing to lower ceiling heights to a cozier scale.

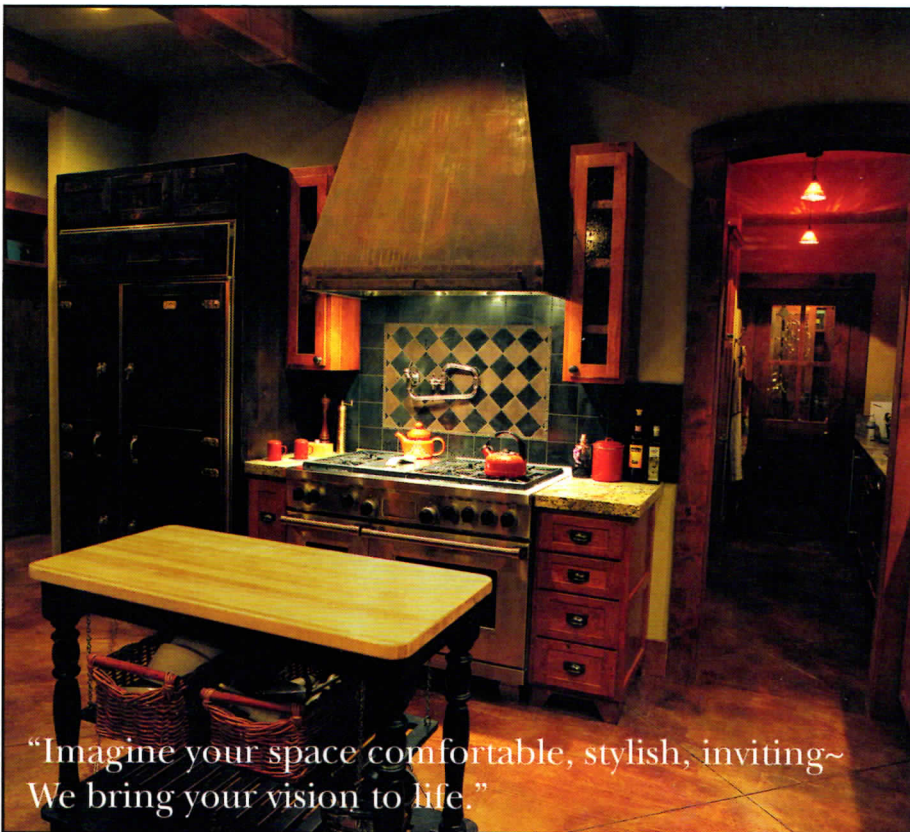
Each element of this home - the way it is designed to the site, the use of historically referenced materials and detailing, and the interior finishes - grant the entire project its unique character. But at the same time, it does not stand alone in time or place. No building does. It exists on a specific piece of land, in a specific region of the country. It is part of a larger community, rich with history, culture and emotions. What came before this building, on this site and in this

particular region, should be honored and respected. The land's attributes and the region's history should not diminish as a result of new construction. To do so would be to diminish its very spirit.

Buildings must remain rooted to the site and to the history of the region, strengthening our ties with the past, reminding us that although time passes and change is constant, there exists an eternal thread which connects us all. ««

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Photos Courtesy of: Vance Fox Photography



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