

ARCHITECTURE

# An Inseparable Whole

PHOTOS BY YANCEY FOGG



Each design starts with the client's vision, the land's attributes and the region's history. These three are woven into an inseparable whole. The design responds to the desires of the homeowner, the dictates of the land, and the spirit of the region. With these three objectives clearly in mind, the architect creates a home that is uniquely suited to a particular site, a home rich with contextual references to history and customs, a home that invites its owners to enjoy the spaces that once resided only in their minds.

When the architect and contractor incorporate native historic symbols and building traditions into the design and construction of the structure, it is firmly grounded within its local context. The building looks like it could not have been placed anywhere else. The rich character of the building weaves a story about local building traditions and historic customs. A small thread of continuity extends the past into the future, creating a true sense of timelessness.

Too often the characters of towns and communities are lost by the haphazard, thoughtless building designs that seem to pop up overnight in response to consumer demands and poor planning. Appropriate materials used without careful consideration, coupled with a blatant disregard for the land on which these structures are allowed to rest, results in an obliteration of a region's historic fabric. Architects and builders must listen carefully to the land and choose wisely their materials and apply them appropriately. The massing of structures must be balanced with the land



on which they sit. The buildings must respect the natural features the land provides.

On this site, there existed natural pockets of space, juxtaposed to the adjacent landscape. These natural pockets communicated varied emotions and inspired the creation of small interconnected areas of the home. This also satisfied the allusion to history. Long ago, the practice of adding space to an existing structure prevailed in the Tahoe region. Small buildings grew as offsprings from the main structure, both in business and residential. Utilizing these natural pockets of land, we “broke” the house into parts as if they were constructed at different times, yet forming a cohesive synergistic whole.

We utilized the larger site to its full potential by pulling the house away from the street. The building sits on a portion of the land that had been disturbed years ago.

We preserved as much of the existing vegetation as possible during design and construction. We curved the drive and hid the garage completely from street view. Both the garage and the house are shielded from the road by an existing grove of trees. Backup spaces finished in stone reduce the vehicular reference of asphalt by creating a stone “patio” and pedestrian walk.

The majority of the structure is “cut” into the existing grade, creating a naturally rooted building. We incorporated indigenous, stacked, stone walls in the garden and historically accurate stone chimneys and walls on the building, giving this home a truly grounded, site-grown look and feel. The substantial roof eaves and overhangs with large structural members and hand-crafted trusses create a true sense of shelter from the mountain elements. They mimic the grand specimen trees of Cedar, Sugar and Jeffery Pines found in the Tahoe basin.

(facing page) WOOD GABLES WITH EXPOSED RAFTERS, JOIST BEAMS AND TRUSSES HIGHLIGHT THE LIVING ROOM OF THIS LAHONTAN HOME. (this page top & detail) METAL HARDWARE CAP THE HEAVY TIMBERS ON THE STAIR RAIL (this page bottom) INDIGENOUS STONE AND SUBSTANTIAL ROOF EAVES CREATE A TRUE SENSE OF SHELTER FROM THE MOUNTAIN ELEMENTS.



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A definite sense of entry can be felt from this home. It invites its guests in with a feeling of welcome, by scaling the entrance to a comfortable human size. Although a grand house with a great deal of square footage, it does not feel large, inside or out. Aspects such as plate heights, overhangs, and room sizes were kept on a personal scale.

To the northern point, the site provided shelter and was used to create intimate spaces away from the more public areas. Two guest bedrooms nestled amongst the trees share a common outdoor patio.

To the south, the building opens up for maximum sun exposure. Our design capitalizes on the sunny orientation by allowing the house as much solar gain as possible. We placed the larger public rooms of the house in this area. The sun offers the rooms a natural daytime vitality that naturally exists in social gatherings.

The interior finishes reflect the natural beauty of the land as well. Stone, indigenous to the site, applied to the fireplace, anchors the interior to the site. Stone patios continue inside as a floor finish, extending rooms 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, heavy wood detailing all speak a traditional language of rustic protection from the harsh mountain elements. Decorative custom 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 the ceiling heights to a cozy scale.

Each element of this home, the way it is placed on the land, its historically referenced materials and detailing, and the interior finishes, allow 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.