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MARKETING SOUTH SHORE • ANOTHER TAHOE OLYMPICS?

This home's woodwork, seen in the mahogany-trimmed sun room (left) and one of several fireplaces (right), highlights superb craftsmanship. The kitchen and master bath (opposite) combine Old Tahoe style with modern convenience. *Photos courtesy of Chase International*



HOME DESIGN OLD TAHOE REVIVAL

by KIMBERLY PRYOR

For many lovers of The Lake, Old Tahoe architecture is as much a part of the scenery as are the granite cliffs surrounding the sapphire-blue water. Architects who recognize this often try to preserve the historic nature of renovated buildings. Sometimes, the results fall short. In the case of South Lake Tahoe's 6,800-square-foot Fleischmann estate, the results are stunning.

When Truckee residential designer Dennis E. Zirbel and Stateline's John Percival of Percival Construction took on the project, they faced a challenge: how to modernize the home and the 900-square-foot guest

house per the current owner's request while staying true to the building's history. A formidable task, considering the home was broken up into small dark spaces, with eight miniscule bedrooms.

"It was uncomfortable space," says Percival. "I always felt like I was being squeezed by the dark colors."

Still, the home was well worth saving. It was built in 1936 for Major Max C. Fleischmann, the son of the founder of the Cincinnati-based Fleischmann Yeast Company, and his wife, Sarah. When the home's original architect, Gordon B. Kaufmann,



asked Sarah if she wanted the home on the lakeshore, she replied "No, I want it up a way." Thanks to her choice in lots, the community where the house sits, next to Glenbrook, Nevada on Tahoe's East Shore, is named Uppaway.

Major Fleischmann was an avid golfer. In the book *Tahoe Heritage: The Bliss Family of Glenbrook, Nevada*, author Sessions S. Wheeler quotes the late author Robert Laxalt, a caddy at Glenbrook's golf course in the 1930s. According to Laxalt, Fleischmann was "not a heavy tipper, but we accepted him — no one resented his tipping... I think he once tipped a quarter and another time a candy bar... (but) he was kind to us kids."

Fleischmann also enjoyed playing cops and robbers. According to an unpublished article written on commission for John

Harrah, son of casino owner William F. Harrah, Fleischmann convinced authorities to swear him in as a deputy sheriff. From then on, he wore his deputy star and carried his pistol as he spent countless hours attempting to root out criminals. The worst offenders Fleischmann encountered were teenagers who let the air out of his tires when his back was turned.

Fleischmann's contributions to the Northern Nevada community are visible even today. His substantial donation to the Carson-Tahoe Hospital allowed the facility to open in 1949. In addition, he donated a portion of the funds used to create the Nevada State Museum in Carson City. His foundation contributed more than \$90 million to Northern Nevada educational institutions and nonprofits, including the

University of Nevada, Reno, before it was dissolved in 1980 — nearly 30 years after his 1951 death.

When Zirbel and Percival were brought into the picture in 2001, they appreciated the late millionaire's finely crafted home and wanted to remain true to its original vision. The result is a renovated home that blends twenty-first century functionality with early 1900s character.

The home's facade is relatively untouched, with ivy crawling up its rock walls and a cedar shake roof hovering over the pine siding. White shutters frame the original steel-framed windows.

The home's inside, however, was beautifully remodeled. An avid yachtsman, Fleischmann brought his shipbuilders to Tahoe to help with construction. Consequently,

HOME DESIGN



Views from the back deck and master bedroom offer a filtered peek of The Lake. Photos courtesy of Chase International



the woodwork is the home's distinguishing characteristic. Percival and crew remilled most of the wood to duplicate the original, including the old-growth knotty sugar pine living room paneling and wainscoting throughout the home.

One of the rooms that showcases the remilled wood and hints at Fleischmann's passion for boats is the second master suite. Lakeview windows are placed low in the wall, reminiscent of ship portholes. Percival Construction replaced the original paneling — a sickly gray-colored wood that surrounded the room — with remilled paneling on one end of the room, leaving the remaining walls white with low wainscoting.

"This way, the room doesn't feel so ponderous," says Percival.

Much of the wood in the home is old-growth sugar pine, with one of the finest examples being the office fireplace mantel. The wood's surface appears to flow, thanks to its tight, wavy growth rings.

"It's a wild piece of wood," Percival says of the mantel. "We chose the old-growth sugar

pine because the structure is so much more pleasing than the newer pieces. The wood is meant to be felt. It's very smooth, very soft."

In the entry foyer, dark-chocolate-colored wood replaces the lighter sugar pine. Stepping through the mahogany front door, visitors are greeted by a filtered view of Lake Tahoe through the sunroom's mahogany-trimmed, double-hung windows. Wrapping around three walls, the windows create an indoor room with the feel of an outdoor patio.

"When this room is staged, it's dynamic," says Clif Chase, of the realty firm Chase International, who is listing the house for \$6.9 million. "The room is almost entirely windows."

A priority in the renovation of the home was to turn cramped spaces into open, flowing areas. Eight bedrooms became five bedroom suites, each with its own bathroom.

The cramped atmosphere of the main master suite has been transformed using

lighter colors and more appropriate lighting. According to Percival, "You can now see where the shipbuilders were at work." The spacious master bath picks up the lighter colors of the bedroom, with travertine floor and counters and white pine trees etched on the glass of the shower stall.

Another reworked space is the dining room, with its picture windows gazing out at Lake Tahoe through a cluster of trees on one side and the landscaped front yard on the other.

"A lot of this stuff was fairly subtle, but it really made a big difference," Zirbel says. "The dining room originally wasn't centered on any axis. We centered the room with the main window looking out toward The Lake, with the fireplace, and with the entrance into the room."

The kitchen underwent the largest transformation. "The kitchen originally was just a kitchen," says Zirbel. "It didn't take in the lake views. We completely reorganized it so that it flows and works a lot better, and you know The Lake is there." Dave Brown



of Three Star Millworks crafted knotty alder cabinets stained in natural pine and rounded the countertop edges by carving columns into the wood. The floor was redone in a classic, Old Tahoe style with three-inch-strip vertical grain fir.

Rather than erase details of the home's history, Percival and Zirbel left behind reminders of the past. In one guest suite, a brick chimney chase is exposed within the wall, adding an element of surprise and a bit of texture. In a stairwell leading to the master suite, nonfunctioning grates from old wall heaters perk up one wall. In the same stairwell, Percival and Zirbel left the original wall standing in order to preserve the handrail that is embedded into it – another shipbuilders' creation.

"We took existing details that we liked and tried to key off of those," explains Percival.

The coffered ceilings are an especially beautiful example of using existing details

as a springboard. Originally, the coffered ceiling existed only in the living room, but Percival and Zirbel decided to carry the theme throughout the house. The bedrooms and the sunroom are now topped off by intersecting beams with softened, rounded angles, adding intrigue to what would normally have been a flat, boring ceiling. In addition, the leaded glass pattern on one original window was duplicated in other windows and doors throughout the house.

The home's grounds have also preserved their timeless feel, but with a modern improvement. One now walks through a landscaped garden, surrounded by towering pines and cedars, on heated walkways.

But there's no doubt that architect and contractor have managed to capture time in a bottle in their remodeling of this historic estate. As Percival says, "You really have the sense of this place being a relic, like a little island in time."