



New Alpine Design

A commitment to fit in with the natural surroundings distinguishes a Tahoe second-home community and breaks stereotypes, proving that less *is* more. **BY KEN CASTLE**

In most mountain environments, it is an unspoken rule that second homes should blend seamlessly into the landscape, using local stone, rough-hewn timbers and native plants to avoid sticking out like a sore thumb. But at Lahontan, Lake Tahoe's newest and most upscale resort community, the concept is more than a suggestion. It's a strictly enforced requirement that is backed by a 160-page "design book" and a board of reviewers that can be tougher than any government planning agency.

At first, this sounds like an Orwellian nightmare for owners and architects—a bureaucratic straitjacket that stifles freedom of expression and creativity. And more than a few newcomers to this 860-acre development near Northstar-at-Tahoe find themselves at the boiling

point after being forced to scrap the third version of their blueprints. Among the long list of no-no's at Lahontan: front-facing garages, flat rooflines, conspicuous skylights, vinyl windows, non-native plants and bold exterior colors. It is almost a capital offense to remove any existing tree that is larger than 4 inches in diameter without getting approval from the design police. And contractors are shaking their heads about a fiat that requires them to re-cover any graded or disturbed soil with pine needles and cones.

And yet, Lahontan has not only managed to thrive—virtually all 509 homesites have been sold at prices ranging from \$150,000 to more than \$1 million—but it has become an incubator for a new style of alpine

This meandering, award-winning home by architect Greg Faulkner wraps around a basalt outcropping and large pine trees.

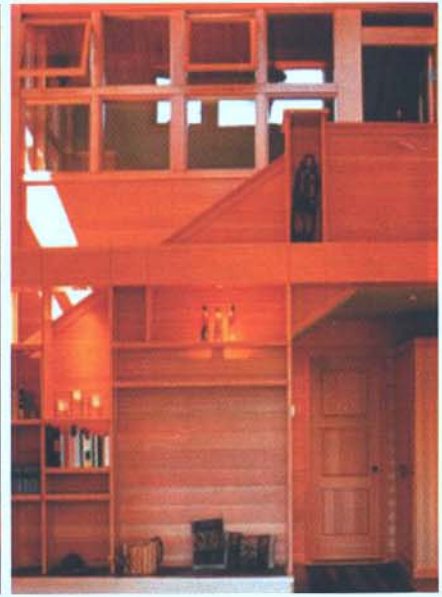
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105 DesignFile
Ski Country Antiques sells ski artifacts from a variety of countries.

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106 HotProperty
Beaver Pond Farm maintains the charm of its farmhouse roots.

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architecture that is attracting national and international attention. Leading the charge are two Truckee architects, Greg Faulkner and Scott Ryan, who wrote the fat book of guidelines for the project and designed several of its homes and common buildings. Both men strive to have their work embody a sense of honesty, with no artificial timbers covering metal beams, and to reflect the spirit of the early 20th century Arts-and-Crafts movement led by innovators Bernard Maybeck and Frank Lloyd Wright. These new/old homes impart a rustic look, but in a contemporary way, and they make liberal use of unconventional building materials.

“Our vision was to make the environment, not the buildings, the primary focus of the community,” says Keith Franke, Lahontan’s design review administrator. “We’ve used historical precedents to provide a continuous reference, but we certainly encourage fresh perspectives and cutting-edge designs,” he says. “We’re not looking for cutesy, cottage-style mountain homes of the Twenties and Thirties, nor are we looking for the kind of river-rock-and-log accents that have been so overdone lately.”

Faulkner and Ryan, who were partners when Lahontan opened in 1997 but now maintain separate practices, say they strive for that most elusive quality—timelessness. “The worst thing that could happen would be for someone 10 or 15 years from now to see these homes and say, ‘Oh, that’s such a Nineties look,’”

Ryan says. He grimaces at granite countertops, cherrywood cabinets, stone wainscotting, wall-to-wall carpeting, polished marble, Mica lamps and fixtures, and just about anything else that you might see at Home Depot, Pottery Barn or Restoration Hardware. In short, clichés be damned.

So what replaces them? The new wave of thinking includes these concepts:

- Instead of large, ponderous mansions with overwhelming facades, strive for the small-scale look by creating a meandering, rather than a tightly condensed, floor plan. The house can be U-shaped to surround boulders and trees, or it can have pods of living space connected with walkways and separated by courtyards.
- Use moss- and lichen-covered, indigenous rock for exterior accents, rather than freshly cut stone that is imported from elsewhere. The new buzz in design circles is “to be vernacular”—or native.
- Windows, so critical to the appearance of a home, should appear as if they are carefully designed into the façade rather than punched into it. Wood or metal trim and components work best.
- Instead of slate, tile or granite floors and walkways, use board-formed concrete that can be stained to give it an aged appearance. With new, in-floor radiant heating systems, concrete need not be a “cold” material.
- Rather than clean-milled wood, use reclaimed or deconstructed lumber, such as barnwood, or even logs with the bark left on them for vertical accents such as

porch columns. That way, they blend more closely with surrounding trees.

● Forget traditional wood shingles for the roof. Look at using corrugated metal that rusts or develops a “patina.” Other materials might include

oversized, cut-tile pavers like those used for patios, sidewalks and balconies.

● Metal, metal everywhere. Interiors can have raw, blue-steel kitchen countertops, aged metal floors, weathered copper door paneling and even steel-coated fireplace shrouds. The operative word is “raw,” which replaces the old Eighties look of polished brass or aluminum.

● Can’t give up on wood interiors? At least give up on oak and old-growth redwood (which isn’t politically correct, anyway) and substitute imperfect woods—those with knots and other irregularities—such as mesquite and hickory, which have character. If you still insist on clean woods, consider a vertical-grain fir, which can impart subdued Scandinavian or Asian influences.

● For floors, mix and match a variety of materials, including cork, slate, wood, concrete and metal. Extremely dark woods and, of course, those once trendy bleached woods, are out of style.

● Sheet rock, perhaps the most ubiquitous element of suburban tract homes, should be used sparingly, if at all, for

Inside the Faulkner design, unique features include a basalt fireplace and hand-forged chandeliers; Ryan employs a honey-colored vertical grain fir (common in saunas) to give this entryway a non-traditional look.