

mountain retreat

# Finding Zen

STORY BY Elisabeth Korb



**5TH ANNUAL TAHOE QUARTERLY MOUNTAIN HOME AWARDS**

**ARCHITECT:** Faulkner Architects **BUILDER:** Ethan Allen Construction



At one with nature, the home wraps around a front courtyard with two Jeffrey pines (facing page). Inside, comfort and feng shui evolve from an open floorplan and warm woods (this page). Photos by Vance Fox



INTERIOR DESIGN: Owner YEAR COMPLETED: 2006 SQUARE FEET: 5,660





The Lord family, who claim to be much better at collecting art than furniture, chose a modern mobile and nontraditional plaster fireplace for the living room. Photo by Vance Fox

Warm wood and neutral tones define this modern house, defying the stark stereotype of many contemporary homes.

A merry band of children is running circles around the open floor plan of the Lord family's Lahontan home. And for owner Coltrane Lord, this is Zen. "For my family and me, Zen means a combination of things," she says. "It is the perfect balance of peace and joy. We wanted everyone who walked in the door to let loose a big sigh—sort of how one would feel at a day spa, but not so quiet!"

For 14 years, Coltrane and her husband, Chris, had been coming to Tahoe for family vacations with their large extended family and, more recently, their two young sons (Coltrane's two boys and seven nieces and nephews are all under the age of nine). So in 1998, after years of renting and ski leasing, they decided it was time for a place of their own and purchased the acre lot in Lahontan. The Lords lead very busy lives in San Francisco—Coltrane as a couture designer, Chris working in finance. They wanted their Tahoe home to not only facilitate vacation antics but to serve as a space of utter retreat. Coltrane recalled their honeymoon resort when conjuring up the design parameters.

"We went to Amanpuri resort in Thailand," she says. "Amanpuri was unlike any hotel I had ever been to—it very much respected the natural environment and culture, working with and around it."

It was with the Amanpuri vision and ideas of retreat, comfort and feng shui that the Lords approached Faulkner Architects. While the firm has designed everything from

mountain cabins to modern homes, this was the first project they had undertaken with such a theme.

Upon entering the home, you are immediately greeted by a piece from the Lords' extensive art collection: "Family," an aptly named sculpture created from naturally fallen wood. Radiant heated concrete floors—laced with lines of walnut and steel—wide halls and a relatively low ceiling spread out the home's mass, inviting visitors to explore the spaces.

The downstairs area circles around an open kitchen and an enclosed pantry, which has become the home's brain center of sorts. As there are no televisions and few electronics in the home, the pantry "was designed to keep all the wires in one place," Coltrane says. The home's sole



telephone resides here alongside a jar of essential brain food: an endless supply of double-stuffed Oreos.

The living and dining areas adjoining the kitchen take warmth from the wood tones of the Douglas fir ceiling and walnut floors. Steel-framed windows keep the look clean and modern; a nontraditional off-white plaster fireplace “has a big presence but makes a quiet statement,” says Coltrane. From this large open space, massive south-facing windows afford sweeping views of Martis Valley meadow and Lookout Mountain. The roofline here pitches up to the view, “opening like a flower to the sun,” says lead architect Greg Faulkner. “The home responds to something farther away than the street.”

A sense of continuity is maintained throughout with details like flat-topped cedar moldings above each door and

window that not only enforce the home’s horizontal scheme but also function as shelves. Other wooden elements, especially tree branches, are incorporated into much of the home’s décor. A lovely example is the glass-topped dining room table with one leg a cluster of gathered branches. Additionally, white walls throughout the home create a blank slate for a variety of artwork.

Each bathroom is like a mini retreat with soothing backsplashes, tiles and color schemes. “I wanted the bathrooms to feel very organic and spa-like,” says Coltrane, who used concrete countertops and primarily stone tile on the floors and walls to achieve a warm feel. In the powder room, tiny green square tiles cover the wall behind the sink while much bigger, muted green square tiles line the floor for a subtle contrast. The master bath

boasts a stainless steel Japanese soaking tub surrounded by smooth grey stones; it is filled by a stream of water falling from a spout in the ceiling. Most of the showers in the house are doorless, maintaining a clean, simple style.

Viewed from outside, the home’s profile is organic and site-driven. Aside from the rear roof pitch that rises slightly to capture the view, the rest of the rooflines lay low, settling the home into the landscape.

The Lahontan Covenants Commission, the committee of community association members that reviews submissions for new neighborhood home designs, had initial concerns with such low pitches, fearing the roof design would appear “unarticulated and overly horizontal,” according to John Stewart, Lahontan’s design review administrator. The neighborhood’s 180-page community

As seen from the back deck, the home’s roofline pitches up to views of Martis Valley meadow and Lookout Mountain. Photo by Vance Flox






Wide halls and white walls serve as a foil for the family's organically inspired art collection. *Photo by Tom Zikas*



The owners wanted their Tahoe home to not only facilitate vacation antics but to serve as a space of utter retreat.

design book details design parameters that encourage character and variety, yet discourage strong contrasts from one homesite to the next. But since the home is perched on a triangular corner lot, with the lot's back and longest side sloping down to the neighborhood's main street, the massing of the lower-pitched roof actually makes the house less obtrusive to the neighborhood aesthetic.

The finished product came off so well that others in Lahontan are following suit: Stewart says they've since approved four other homes with a similar approach to massing.

The themes of Zen and retreat resonate through this home, but it's not just the older generation that can enjoy a peaceful place. In fact, Coltrane recently contacted Faulkner for another project: designing a tree house for her sons. Although the space for the boys may lend itself more to outdoor games than quiet reflection, it will most certainly follow the priorities the Lords maintain in the main residence: family, nature and just being at home. 

Filled from the ceiling, the master bath's Japanese soaking tub makes the retreat complete. *Photo by Tom Zikas*

