

# Sculptural Retreat

BY LEAH GREENSTEIN  
PHOTOS BY VANCE FOX

## MOUNTAIN MODERN

ARCHITECT: MWA, Inc., Kurt Reinkens

BUILDER: Sunco Homes, Inc.

INTERIOR DESIGNER: Gerry Rodriguez

SQUARE FOOTAGE: 4,000

YEAR COMPLETED: 2002

2006 Tahoe Community  
**MOUNTAIN HOME**  
Awards





The home's ultra-modern interior includes a two-level great room (this page), master bedroom (far left) and a tower-top office (middle).





Imagine a traditional Tahoe home — large timbers, river rock, granite — then peel those expressions of vernacular away, like the rough, rusty skin of a pomegranate.

What you are left with are the underpinnings of a “modern” home

— steel, concrete and glass, engineering and technology. These are the materials, and the ensuing aesthetic that Rosemary and Larry Ward wanted for their home in Truckee’s Lahontan community, and what the Mountain Home Awards judges singled out as this year’s outstanding contemporary home.

The Wards, who live in a mid-century home in Orinda, California, commissioned MWA and interior designer Gerry Rodriguez

*The home is a modern ripple in the smooth fabric of Lahontan.*

to build them a modern home in Lahontan. The couple chose the community for its proximity to skiing and golf and because they had friends with homes there. But they knew that they would face challenges fitting a contemporary design into a community whose vision calls for a “cohesive fabric.”

One of the concerns for Lahontan is

that a house shouldn’t stand out. The community’s architectural guidelines at the time it was built stated that the Lahontan style seeks to combine “the richness of historic Lake Tahoe estates” with “innovative but understated freshness.” As it turns out, the design of the Wards’ home elegantly captures that latter spirit of innovative freshness. With a stunning purity of vision, it is an understated modern, and somewhat post-modern, take on the Tahoe home, from the exterior and throughout its interior.

“Larry and I had been clipping pictures for years of home features in magazines that interested us,” Rosemary says of the inspiration for the home’s design. “We



The home's interior and exterior spaces are blended by the materials that flow between them, including low concrete walls and stone flooring.

wanted something modern, with really clean lines, lots of light and very uncluttered.”

The Ward home accomplishes this while not disrupting the Lahontan streetscape, and does so subtly. Where traditionally you'd expect to see an entry as you drive up, the view is blocked by a large, angular granite pavilion with Douglas fir lattice detailing, supported in one corner by a 12-foot tall volcanic basalt plug. Approaching the entry, the home slowly reveals itself with steel beams where you'd expect timbers, and grey oxidized zinc panels that blend with the home's surroundings of bitterbrush and sage.

But the exterior, however unusual, doesn't

prepare you for the eye-opening interior. Its initial starkness undermines traditional expectations, stating quite definitively that this is “no Paul Bunyan log home,” says architect Kurt Reinkens. “You're entering a realm of art and sculpture.”

Concrete slab floors are bound by a softly lit white wall on the right and a wall of granite on the left. A glinting, stainless steel wall juts diagonally, drawing your gaze down the hall's length to a glimpse of a steel spiral staircase — a fluid feature in this otherwise sharp-lined, geometric space. Also populating the entry are a cardboard chair and a stainless bench set on basalt pillars, both illustrative of the home's tendency to

contrast the modern and man-made with elements rustic and raw.

The spiral stairs lead to Larry's personal retreat — a tower. Perched atop its stainless steel base is a tiny space with just enough room for a desk and a red Poppa Bear Lounge chair by Hans J. Wegner. Out its windows is a 270-degree view of Northstar-at-Tahoe's Lookout Mountain, the 10<sup>th</sup> tee box and a meadow.

But below, the tower's spiral staircase initially draws you down the entry hall. “When we arrive,” says Rosemary, “the first thing we do is light the staircase from below.” But then you encounter a break in the granite wall and are pulled into a jaw-





The entryway (top) resembles a sculpture gallery with a stark stainless steel bench and sinewy spiral staircase that leads up to the tower office. The carport (this image) is adjacent to the front door and blocks the view of the home from the street.

dropping space: a "great room" in Tahoe vernacular, without any of the vernacular. The granite wall from the entry flows into a nearly wall-length hearth; the stainless base of the tower becomes the fireplace. The room is punctuated with color — original orange Wegner lounge chairs, circa 1952, and a Modernica reproduction daybed and

## *Steel and concrete serve both environmental and aesthetic concerns.*

steel grey couch. Graphically imbalanced windows perfectly frame the view. Different muntins on the back window are an homage to Dutch painter Piet Mondrian.

On a slightly higher level are the sleek kitchen and dining room — planes of stainless steel and dark blue Formica. Instead of the familiar huge granite island, the kitchen's long, rectangular shape is mimicked by a narrow, 4-inch butcher-block island, which Rosemary says serves as a buffet/bar for large parties. A drink rail of maple and a small step separate the kitchen from the living room, while still maintaining the room's openness for entertaining. The dining room is large and purposeful, housing a refurbished Wegner table and chairs, which can accommodate 24 for dinner. Windows, which face an outdoor, remote-controllable fire pit, bring the outside in.

The concept of bringing the outside in is repeated throughout the residence. Slate stones from the outside patio are inlaid in the interior floors near the doors of both the great room and the master bedroom. Walls continue from the outside in, eradicating the boundary between interior and exterior. Windows are placed to optimize views. The master bath window frames Lookout Mountain and harnesses the winter sun, but has its sill set high enough to allow for privacy.

Both manmade and natural, the walls act as another of the house's more intellectual themes. This is particularly true of a focal point in the main living area, a deconstructing concrete wall that separates the dining room from the guest powder

room and bedroom. Its crumbling quality and industrial texture, when joined with a steel roof beam overhead that stops before it reaches the far wall, create more of a mental disruption than a physical one. Outside, the walls work in the same fashion. The concrete wall generates a guest patio separate from the breakfast area and fire

pit; basalt benches create walls that make the hot tub space private. The granite wall from the entry extends, creating a private patio from the master

bedroom.

Adult bedrooms are on either end of the home's first floor, with communal spaces in the center. This is replicated upstairs with the children's bedrooms at the ends of the house and an independent living area in the center — a mini-retreat for the kids within the larger retreat.

For all of the home's sculptural, conceptual and intellectual statements, it is still intimate, a place to host family and friends. Rosemary wanted to soften things, says Rodriguez, which they accomplished with color and light. "We experimented a lot with colors and shapes. For instance, the light fixtures are all white but in all different shapes and sizes," says Rosemary. The guest bedroom, for example, is an almost-white shade of mint green and flooded with daytime light. Natural light is important to many of the home's spaces, a feature remarked upon frequently by our judges.

Despite its more industrial look, the home is quite environmentally friendly with ample passive solar heating, paint containing low levels of volatile organic compounds and pre-manufactured trusses that don't require large, old growth trees.

Poured concrete floors, radiant heating and the frequent use of steel make this home modern in every sense of the word. Surprisingly, these features, not generally considered "warm," all add to the welcoming personality of the house. Like good sculpture, the home beautifully balances contrasting elements, emotions and ideas. It is a successful, playful, modern take on the mountain vacation home. ■