

Merit Award:

by Kim Pryor A Grand Great Room

Now here's a room with charisma! Great rooms have become signature elements of larger Tahoe homes, usually square or rectangular in shape with a tall ceiling, rock fireplace and a wall of glass. But this great room's personality was so unforgettable that it moved the judges to create a special merit award in its honor.

"Of all the homes we visited, that great room was the most dramatic, the best space," said judge and architect Rob Rogers.

Architect Kurt Reinkens of MWA modeled this great room after the dining room of the recently restored and reopened Glen Alpine Springs Resort, located behind South Shore's Fallen Leaf Lake. Built in 1921, the Glen Alpine dining room was designed by architect Bernard Maybeck. Its unique truss rafters, supported on massive stone buttresses, inspired Reinkens to create a modern-day version in a new Lahontan home.

Before designing the home — originally a spec project — Reinkens searched for an idea to match the developer's vision of a grand Tahoe estate. "We really studied old Tahoe architecture," he says. "I have a lot of respect for Maybeck's work, and I was flipping through one of his books trying to get inspired when I came across this building, which I thought was very appropriate and well done."

The great room created by Reinkens and Harry Kimbrough of Sierra Valley Builders contains 12 native basalt stone buttresses speckled with lichen and moss. These stone columns support Douglas fir trusses and rafters that lead the eye from the floor to the ceiling in a pleasing display of architectural ingenuity. The effect creates the illu-

sion of a room leaning inward. Sugar pine is used throughout the interior.

Reinkens added elements inspired by Yosemite's Ahwahnee Hotel. "When they were designing the Ahwahnee, they were down in the valley floor and everything around it was so vertical," says Reinkens. "They wanted to bring that verticality into the space. We had the same philosophy in that the trees are very tall around the property. If one were to have windows only going up to seven or eight feet, you'd be slicing off the trees and see only a swath of bark. My philosophy is to get the windows up to 12 feet or more so that if you're sitting on a comfortable couch, you can take in the whole tree and see to what I call the 'forest horizon.'" The tall windows help create a warm atmosphere with light spilling in from the three sides.

The fireplace and its faux-finish chimney chase divide the room into two sections. Larger gatherings take place in the rectangular front of the room. The raised hearth provides a cozy resting spot for anyone who wants to socialize with guests seated on the lower couches. The back of the room, behind the fireplace, suits more intimate conversations. Here curved walls wrap around guests as they relax in two oversized chairs.

"This room has the resort feeling for which many homes aim but most fall short of achieving," says judge Alan Heoney of Prudential Realty. "The image of that great room stayed with all of us."

Year completed: 1997

Architect: MWA Kurt Reinkens

Builder: Sierra Valley Builder

Interior Designer: Cathy Nason



The architecture and interior design of this wing of a Lahontan home created this year's "most spectacular space," said the judges. Photo courtesy MWA