



TQ

OUTSTANDING



Story by ELISABETH KORB | Photos by ETHAN ROHLOFF

Simple Alchemy

A mountain-modern home is greater than the sum of its parts.

ARCHITECT:

David Horan—Ryan Group Architects

BUILDER:

Loveverde Builders, Inc.

INTERIOR DESIGN:

David Horan—Ryan Group Architects

LANDSCAPE DESIGN:

Tom Blide—Blide Brothers

Landscape Design & Construction

YEAR COMPLETED: 2007 | SQUARE FEET: 4,044

A restrained palette of materials keeps this Northstar home consistent and clean. Trees felled onsite during construction returned post-mill to form concrete walls (this image) and floor joists.



The home's kitchen and main living spaces comprise the upper floor, allowing the owners to live on one level when kids and guests are not in town.

Some homes achieve excellence via exotic materials, mind-bending design and death-defying craftsmanship. And others just have it. "It's the fourth dimension, if you will," says Ryan Group Architects managing principal Scott Ryan of this year's Outstanding award winner. "It goes beyond product or process to an experiential quality."

Indeed, you may drive past this Northstar house (dubbed Capercaillie, Gaelic for "horse of the woods," by its owners) without a second look. But step into its 4,044 square feet and it's clear: Every detail, every space, is sharp, clean, connected, well done—yet not overdone.

The home's owners, a couple from Marin County who prefer to remain anonymous, purchased the lot in 2004. "We've had a relationship with the region all our lives," says the homeowner, noting that his great-grandfather had property in Truckee, his grandfather owned a cabin in Cedar Flat and he helped build his parents' vacation home in Agate Bay. "We knew it was time to be here, and this lot enabled us to leave a vehicle and walk three minutes to the Northstar slopes."

Viewed from its exterior, the home hugs a centerpiece of pines; a garage adjoins diagonally to the left, and another detached single garage with second-story guest

“There’s a theme of respect and truthfulness throughout. All the concrete has the fingerprint of the trees that once stood where our house is now.”

—the homeowner

suite sits to the right. All three are angled toward the center of the lot. “It’s a separation of masses in a relatively small envelope,” says David Horan, Ryan Group principal and the project’s lead architect, of the one third-acre homesite. “It creates a sense of place that’s respectful to the community.”

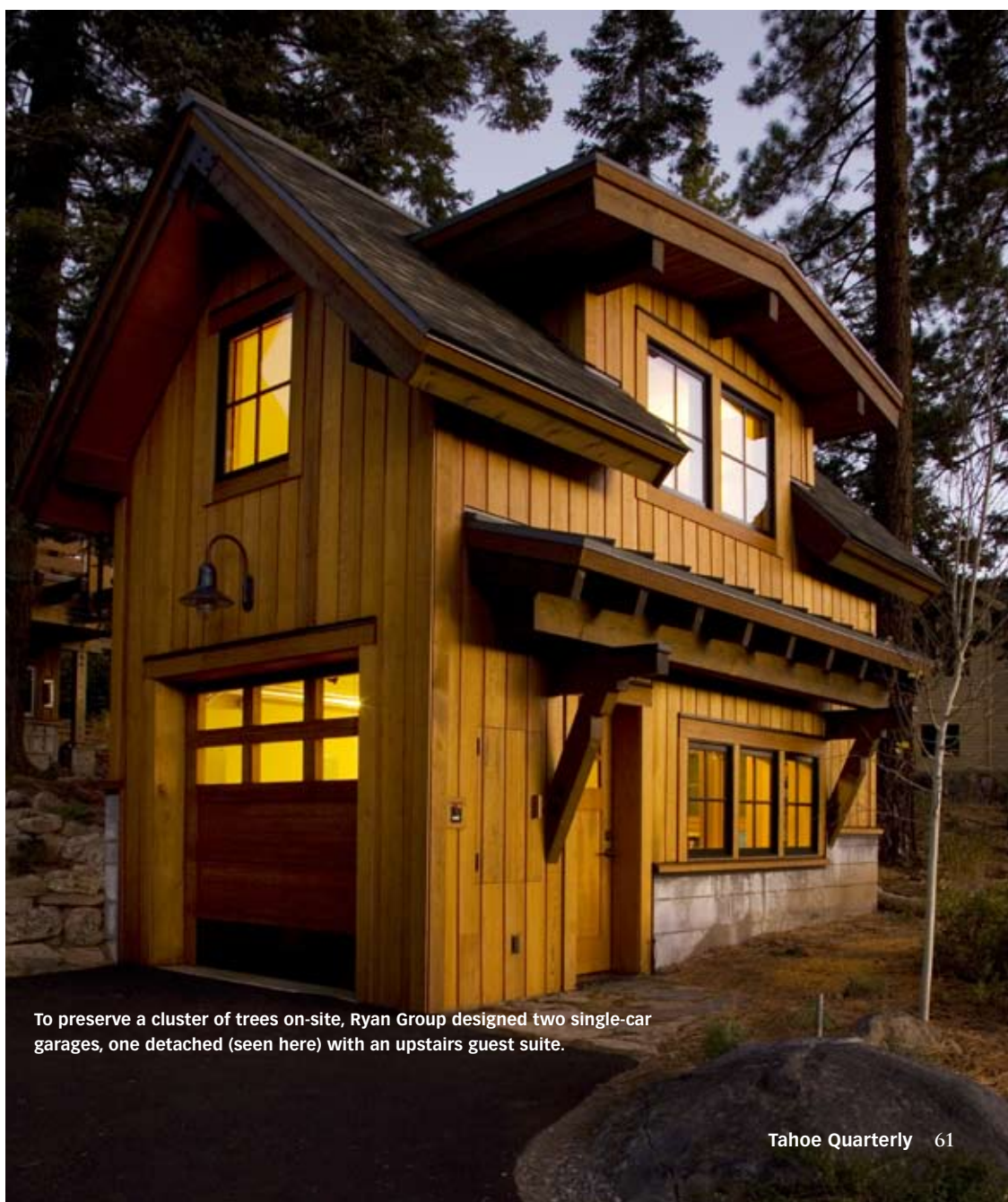
If the design has a single concept, it’s form follows function. Put simply, “the owners didn’t want to create the unnecessary,” says Horan, citing the garages as an example. The couple opted for two one-car garages to save the cluster of trees that are now the focal point of the property. They were adamant about keeping felled trees on-site, milling the wood locally, then using the boards to form the home’s exposed concrete walls and floor joists. “There’s a theme of respect and truthfulness throughout,” says the homeowner. “All the concrete has the fingerprint of the trees that once stood where our house is now.”

This truthfulness extends to virtually every aspect of design and construction. The homeowners selected clear-stained cedar siding and eucalyptus flooring, used nontoxic glues and formaldehyde-free woods and wanted structural fir rafters exposed. “With the rafters and board-formed concrete, we are taking structural elements and expressing them, not hiding them,” says Horan. “So the structure reveals itself and is understandable. There is something right about that.”

The homeowners desired the ability to live on a single level, much like the Marin County residence in which they raised four children over the past 25 years. Thus, Ryan Group placed the main living spaces on the upper floor where

easy outdoor access is possible via balcony and terrace that take advantage of the steeply sloped lot. At lower entry level are the garage, tinkering room (for the owner and his sons to work on a 1975 Toyota Land Cruiser), utilitarian half bath and two guest suites, all with slight steps up or down into their own planes.

A board-formed concrete wall stands just beyond the front door. It acts as a thermal storage for the sun coming through the entry’s large windows, conceals the stairway and sets the tone for the exposed structural walls throughout—one million pounds of concrete in total. Upstairs, an open living, dining and kitchen area connects to the master suite, media room and office wing over the attached garage. Leading to the latter of these spaces is a window-lined passageway the homeowner calls “the link.”



To preserve a cluster of trees on-site, Ryan Group designed two single-car garages, one detached (seen here) with an upstairs guest suite.

“This house is not about materials, but how they are all put together. It’s this alchemy of simple things, the collection of detail after detail.”

—Architect David Horan



A window-lined hallway to the office separates the workspace and connects to a balcony seamlessly by using the same concrete paver pattern.

The Sonoma Cast Stone floor pattern here flows seamlessly outdoors to a balcony. These same concrete pavers are used on the back terrace, master bath and balcony, project room off the kitchen and front entry.

“We strived for a consistency throughout,” says the homeowner. Indeed, only five tile designs, all by Sausalito’s Heath Ceramics, are used in the home, the kitchen’s brick-red color the most dramatic. “We say the red tile expresses that the kitchen is the heart of this house,” says the homeowner’s wife, who is an avid cook. Horan recalls with gusto the first thing she baked for the Ryan Group office: her signature persimmon cookies.

The media room, separated by a custom sliding door from the dining area, houses a table with one very special purpose: dominos. “It’s perfect for a very serious game or two,” says the homeowner, whose Marin residence boasts a one-room structure specifically for the game.

The couple dubbed Capercaillie’s simple detached garage/guest suite “the outstation.” “It’s the nautical equivalent



The ceiling design in the media room—reminiscent of skip sheathing—conceals acoustical panels.

of an outpost,” says the homeowner, an experienced sailor who with friends won the International One Design class in 1999 (and spent a college summer break teaching sailing at Obexer’s Boat Company in Homewood).

As with any outstanding home, Capercaille came to be with much collaboration: among Ryan Group, Loverde Builders superintendant Jay Steinmeyer and the numerous subcontractors who worked on the job. The exceptional difference, though, came with the owners themselves, says Horan.

“They have a strong design sense,” he says. “And with their involvement, our firm became a better firm. They helped us broaden our limits. At the end of the day, it was their intellect, ideas and stick-to-itiveness that brought it all together.”

Horan notes that the couple was involved in all phases of design and construction, from the concrete’s specific mix of lamp black powder to the placement of the garages, for which they ended up in a San Rafael parking lot chalking out

photo by Jonathan Boncek

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The living room exemplifies the interplay between board-formed concrete, wood, steel and glass throughout the home.

the dimensions to assure their car's turning radius would work.

The architect, too, went above and beyond. "I was honored to be so personally involved and discover a level of service that creates great architecture," says Horan, who chose much of the home's finishes, from paint colors to cabinet hardware to countertops. "I'm very passionate, oftentimes intense, and the homeowner can be the same way."

So how did equally zealous homeowner and architect avoid implosion? "You have to respect the passion and commitment of one another," says the homeowner. "When you disagree on something, you just have to work through it. It's not about the individual; it's about what you're trying to do. In my mind, 100 years from now, someone will be enjoying this house. I was building it as much for them as I was for us." **TQ**