

# Our fireplace Love

BEAUTIFUL FIREPLACES MAKE AN ARCHITECTURAL STATEMENT

*by Beth Hawkins*

**P**lanning to build a house in North Idaho? Architects, builders, and longtime locals agree that a fireplace should be at the top of the “must have” list for a variety of reasons. If properly designed, a fireplace can heat the entire house. They also become statement pieces in a home, oftentimes the focal point of one or several rooms. And finally, the comfort of a flickering blaze helps North Idahoans get through the dark, cold winters in cozy fashion.

Architect Eric Owens with SOK Designs in Sandpoint said there are a number of things to consider when planning to build a fireplace, and at the top for most North Idaho clients is the look and design of the fireplace. Instead of the traditional full-rock fireplace that we’re used to seeing,



Owens said the design trend has been moving more towards a mixed medium. "We're using a lot of different materials versus the lodge look, incorporating wood, metal, steel plates, a lot of different tiles, to create more of a clean line."

Because we live in a snowy climate, a primary concern architecturally is roof slope and placement of the chimney. "As a general rule, in our part of the country, the fewer valleys and conflicting rooflines is a better scenario," Owens said. "Being really conscious of that, and how it impacts the roof, is key. You definitely don't want the chimney sheared off."

As an architect who deals with clients from all parts of the U.S., Owens said the choice to go with a wood-burning fireplace or gas is a personal one. "Every homeowner is pretty specific on whether they're a pyro or not, but there's nothing like a real fire burning," he said, adding that the decision has implications on a house's cost. "For a lot of people, the clients we're working with, this is a second home. They want the immediate gratification of flipping a switch."

Another consideration is the placement of the TV within the realm of the fireplace. "That's kind of a big thing," he said. "In spec homes, it just gets plopped above the fireplace. But it puts the TV way too high. And for real wood-burning fireplaces, that puts it right above the heat." Owens said there are several solutions to incorporate the TV in a fireplace, including the creation of hidden pockets in the fireplace to conceal the TV behind doors that swing out and slide back into the cabinet. "Then you can see the TV and equipment when you want it. And it's a challenge as TVs are getting bigger and bigger."

And because we live in such a beautiful and scenic part of the world, Owens advises homeowners to think about the placement of a fireplace when planning their house design. "A lot of people think it needs to be right in the middle of the wall, but most of these people are building in a place with phenomenal views," he said. "But the fireplace doesn't have to be centered. I always push them to think about what you're giving up. There are beautiful views everywhere, even if you're in town on a lot. It's that connectivity to the outdoors that makes for good architecture."

Showcasing the classic masonry craftsmanship we associate with grand lodges is the center-of-the-room fireplace at The Idaho Club golf course's new clubhouse. The fireplace extends 30 feet from floor to ceiling, a prominent feature of the clubhouse's rustic, timber-frame style architecture. "It serves as a centerpiece of the clubhouse lobby and the main dining area," said Bill Haberman, a managing member of Valiant Idaho, the entity that owns The Idaho Club.

The fireplace is made of stacked stone sourced from Montana, and took about four to five months to build by a team of masons with Old World Stone. "They put a lot of time and effort into it," Haberman said. "The appearance of the stacked stone, with more right angles and sharper edges, was intentionally designed to match the lodge homes that have been built along the course."



PREVIOUS PAGE: STONE AND WOOD FACING THIS FIREPLACE COMPLEMENT THE WARREN ISLAND VIEW FROM THE WINDOW. COURTESY SOK DESIGNS. THIS PAGE, ABOVE: THE IDAHO CLUB FIREPLACE FEATURES ITS NOW ICONIC MOOSE. COURTESY IDAHO CLUB. BELOW: BUILDERS TODAY ARE MORE LIKELY TO OPT FOR NON-TRADITIONAL FACING DESIGNS. COURTESY SOK DESIGNS





## *"The fireplace is the center... but it was also designed to be the heater of the whole house."*

In true North Idaho form, a moose head adorns one side of the massive rock fireplace—a nod, perhaps, to the frequent sightings of visiting moose on the golf course. Haberman said that it was donated by a member's friend, and that the rack is about 5.5 feet wide. "It's an impressive moose!" Haberman said. The other side features a moose in metal.

Even though the golf season at The Idaho Club has passed, visitors can still go out and view that grand fireplace for themselves as the clubhouse restaurant will remain open for dinner through winter. "It'll be fired up and on all winter as a way to welcome guests," Haberman said.

The heat factor of a fireplace was what homeowners Brooks and Amy Tessier had in mind when they designed their unique, handcrafted fireplace while building their timber frame home on Sunnyside Road nearly 40 years ago.

"The fireplace is the center of the whole house, but it was also designed to be the heater of the whole house," Brooks said. He hired local longtime mason Ray Crossingham to build the firebox in the Rumford style. According to Wikipedia, a Rumford fireplace is "a tall, shallow fireplace designed by Sir Benjamin Thompson (Count Rumford), a physicist best known for his investigations of heat. Its shallow, angled sides are designed to reflect heat in the room, and its streamlined throat minimizes turbulence, thereby carrying away smoke with little loss of heated room air."

Constructing the Tessiers' fireplace was a two-year process from start to finish, with Brooks hauling in local river rocks from Sand Creek, Schweitzer Creek, and other places that they lived during that time. "It was a big project."

And with big projects come lots of little tweaks along the way. "Over a period of time we took it to a level that I would guess would be about 8 or 9 feet to the top of the mantle," Brooks said. "We have a 25-foot ceiling, though, and I didn't like the sheetrock above the mantle. So we took it another 8 feet. We did that and it was square. And we got it all done and I didn't like it. So I took a sledgehammer to one corner. Everything was too square, so I rounded the corner." And hence, the true character of a handcrafted fireplace had come to life! "I made a real mess when I did that corner, but I really like what we did."

And by adding some dimension, the Tessiers were able to display large pottery pieces, as well as exposing more of the ceiling. They added an eggshell sheen to bring out the natural colors of the river rock—browns, oranges, and purples. "The morning light comes clear across the room and it's very colorful," Brooks said.

By locating the fireplace in the middle of the great room, where the dining area blends into the living room, Brooks said it has become the true centerpiece of the home. "When the fire blazes, there is a feeling you are living in the wilds of the old trapper days. It's warm and cozy and content."

As for firewood, Brooks spends summers on their five acres cutting up dead trees. "I have enough firewood for the rest of my life." Eventually, however, the Tessiers added the convenience and comfort of central heating. And they also now spend their winters in Maui. Perhaps that's the best heat source of all. Aloha! **SM**



ABOVE: THOUGHT MUST ALSO BE GIVEN TO SHEDDING SNOW FROM THE CHIMNEY OUTSIDE. ILLUSTRATING MORE NON-TRADITIONAL DESIGNS IS A TRULY UNIQUE, CENTER-OF-THE-ROOM DESIGN. BOTH PHOTOS COURTESY SOK DESIGNS. BELOW: THE TESSIERS' FIREPLACE WAS BUILT IN THE RUMFORD DESIGN. TESSIER FAMILY PHOTO.

