

A close-up photograph of several vibrant pink azalea flowers with dark green leaves, serving as the background for the magazine cover.

Idaho HG

H O M E S & G A R D E N S

Spring 2003

FauxFun

10 Minute Tips

for your garden

TROUTNER HOUSE
Gets New Life

P O E T I C E N G I N E E R I N G O N A B L U F F I N T r o u t n e r H o u s e G e t s N e w L i f e T H E F O O T H I L L S

by Alan Minskoff

Architect, engineer, inventor Art Troutner designed a laminated wood support beam that redefined how structures could be supported and changed an industry. In 1960 he co-founded Trus Joist, the engineered wood products company, which is now a part of Weyerhaeuser. Troutner the designer left a lasting imprint on Boise. Examples of his experimental modern architecture include the Boise Little Theater and some extraordinary local houses.

Trained at the University of Idaho, Troutner (who died in 2001) designed four of his own residences: in Boise, Stanley, Hagerman, Idaho, and one in Nevada. One of the most striking in design, setting and site is the house in the Boise foothills that Troutner and his family moved into in 1955. When the Troutners first lived here, on present Troutner Way, they had the foothills to themselves. Kathy Troutner recalls using binoculars to watch her children run around the sage-covered hills. Long before the area became developed, the Troutners' stone, wood and glass house perched atop an outcropping of Boise sandstone above the city, alone amidst the rock, sage and sky.

This house design displays a remarkable sense of innovation in its organic materials and use of the natural setting just beneath Table Rock. Its dramatic design, cantilevered high above the rocks, and its method of construction, using a vertical steel pylon two-feet in diameter embedded in the sandstone with horizontal steel trusses attached, make an example of "poetic engineering." The structure is pure Troutner. The original 16-sided, two-story house hangs horizontally on steel as if it were floating above the sandstone and basalt rocks.

The new owner, Jim Seal, a mining engineer by training, does consulting in the construction industry. The Seals—Jim, his wife Anne and 11-year-old son Nate—lived in the neighborhood and were aware of the Troutner house with its infamous dirigible hangar (that neighbors chipped in to have demolished). The Seals saw an opportunity to own one of the city's most unique homes. The house, which had been badly damaged by fire in September of 2000, had stayed in the Troutner family for more than half a century. The damage from the fire was severe but no reason to destroy an architectural landmark.

The Seals moved into the house earlier this year. They wanted to retain the essence of this modern masterwork but desired additional space. They wisely chose Dwaine Carver of Trout Architects to work on the project, which included a new addition as well as the restoration of the original house. When Jim Seal approached him to design the addition to Troutner's curvilinear house in the foothills, Carver had a formidable design challenge to preserve the original structure and create a complementary new entry and additional living space. The original entry is now the back door to the kitchen with its elegant Oakley stone floor and massive rock wall of Owyhee sandstone. The ceilings throughout the house are all tongue-and-groove-clear vertical grain fir.

Contrary to the dictum that form must follow function, Carver believes that "architecture cannot be static because the use is always changing." He devised a graceful and compatible solution. Carver, who himself lives in a Troutner house, was pleased "to be able to save a piece of modern architecture

helping it be acknowledged as a historical artifact." The challenge on the Troutner site was to achieve the wishes of the client and pay homage to Troutner's ingenious siting of the house and complex design. Trapezoidal windows are not stock items.

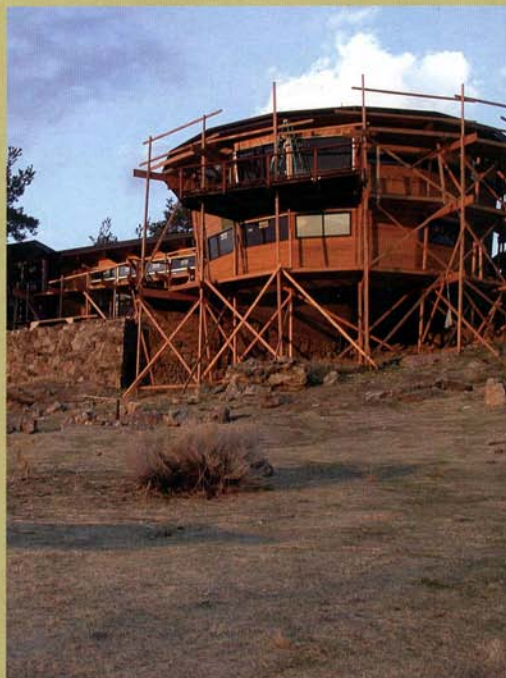
Ground was broken on March 15, 2002. Jim Seals, who acted as his own general contractor, worked to use materials that would extend the life of the building. Double-pane windows had to be fabricated to replace the single panes; the original lap siding was replaced with shiplap cedar siding that was sealed on all sides before it was attached.

Carver's goal was "to extend the geometry of the original house." He united the new rectangular wing with the polygonal original via an understated new entry. The new wing features a clerestory of windows above the sandstone-clad exterior. The rectangular living area feels as if it floats above the rocky outcropping beneath it. Actually it rests on steel beams. The house sits on five acres and is now 3,450 square feet.

The Seals were especially impressed with the mature trees that have grown on the property. So much so that they even cut a hole in the roof for a pine. Despite the location not far from downtown, Jim says, the trees planted four decades ago make the house "feel just like you are out in the woods." The Seals created two pastures where horses will soon graze.

The view is like few others in Boise. According to Jim Seals, on a clear day, you can see 100 miles to Oregon and Ironside Mountain.

Alan Minskoff is the editorial director at Resort Publishing, Inc. This is the first in a series.



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REMARKABLE
SENSE OF INNOVATION
IN ITS ORGANIC MATERIALS
AND USE OF THE
NATURAL
SETTING
JUST BENEATH
TABLE ROCK