

Al Tahoe homeowners open their doors to look at the past

AAUW home tour focuses on old cabins

By Jessie Marchesseau

Original old Tahoe cabins all over the area. The little box-like ones clad in weathered wood siding or just plain logs. It's hard not to wonder what those little gems look like inside and what they looked like way back when.

Saturday's American Association of University Women Home Tour provided an opportunity to find out.

The tour is a biennial event and past tours have been in the Angora burn area, Cascade Properties, the Tahoe Keys and other prominent South Shore neighborhoods. This year's tour, entitled At Home in Al Tahoe: Historic Retreats at The Lake, featured eight cabins in South Lake Tahoe's oldest neighborhood. The cabins, all built between the 1920s and 1940s, have been extensively maintained, restored, updated and upgraded by their respective owners.



The AAUW home tour in Al Tahoe on June 23 was sold-out. Photo/Jessie Marchesseau

The self-guided tour started on Cave Rock Avenue at a cabin built in 1937. The front deck is almost as big as the cabin. A step inside revealed that this was one that had been more restored than upgraded. The beams, though redone, still showed signs of the bark that had been left in place when the cabin was erected. The steep log staircase leading to a loft above looked more like a ladder than an actual stairway and made many tour-goers more than a little nervous on the descent. A stove against the wall and refrigerator in the corner were the only real indications of where the kitchen area was in the big room that served as kitchen, living and dining space.

Carolyn MacRae, interior designer and owner of The Design Shoppe in South Lake Tahoe, purchased the cabin for her father in 2003. She took on the task of redoing some of the previous remodel work to make it appear more original and creating a space for her father to house his extensive collection of Native American artifacts, including a totem pole standing proudly in the living room.

“One of the goals with it is to make the setting feel like the collection feels, and like it’s always been here,” MacRae said.

But not all the cabins on the tour were redone with the

intension of making them look and feel original.

Some still had logs or wood paneling for walls, while others had been upgraded to sheet rock. Nearly all have experienced some sort of expansion, as the tiny footprint of these cabins does not leave much room for modern conveniences. Some additions were designed to blend seamlessly with the original architecture, but others had details such as granite countertops and two-person Jacuzzi bathtubs which were dead giveaways of modern upgrades.



Many cabins in Tahoe have the same footprint as when they were built decades ago. Photo/Provided

Barb Childs, president of AAUW South Lake Tahoe branch since 2010, said part of her criteria in choosing the cabins for the tour were that they had been not so much remodeled as restored, maintaining the original integrity of the era.

Though some cabins flaunted more contemporary updates than others, they all managed to maintain original elements that make it almost immediately known to any visitor that this home has a story to tell. All of the cabins displayed a great deal of wood; from floors to walls, ceilings to cabinetry, the warm ambience of natural wood prevailed. Nearly all the homeowners managed to work some antlers into their décor and there was no shortage of the obligatory pinecones, bears and photos from

the TV show "Bonanza" – which was filmed in Lake Tahoe.

Janet De La Motte of San Luis Obispo attended the tour with her daughter. As the owner of an Al Tahoe cabin built in 1939, something that has been in her family since the day it was built, De La Motte said she loved the rustic charm displayed by all the homes.

"It shows you that you don't have to go and remodel as soon as you buy a vintage home," she said, noting that on HGTV the first thing anyone does when they buy an older property is completely gut it.

De La Motte and her daughter, Janelle, gathered some ideas for their cabin from the tour and were delighted that they were able to walk the entire route, a detail that was no accident.

Childs said with the opening of Lakeview Commons, the AAUW, in addition to their focus on a historical tour, wanted to do something to encourage people to bike, walk and enjoy the entire area.

As the final stop, refreshments and silent auction items were available to attendees at Pichetti Winery.

The event, which is always well-attended, sold-out of the 350 available tickets on Friday. Tickets were \$20 in advance.

One hundred percent of the proceeds from the event go toward AAUW's scholarship funds. The group awards scholarship to women transferring from LTCC to four-year universities, as well as to middle school girls who wish to attend Tech Trek, a science, math and computer summer camp at UC Davis. AAUW focuses on advancing equity for women and girls.

"You can't change the world," said Kay Henderson, chairman for this year's Home Tour, "but sometimes you can change a little part of it."