

By Kimberly Pivov

# Inspired DESIGN

Four renowned architects reinvent mountain architecture at Lake Tahoe's Martis Camp, giving owners an unprecedented opportunity to branch out with home design

Lake Tahoe's natural wonders have long inspired architects' imaginations. It's a place where snow falls softly upon a canopy of pines. A community where the lakeside beaches embrace sapphire blue and emerald green waters. A lightly populated spot, despite its world-class restaurants, skiing and nightlife.

Many of Lake Tahoe's most creative homes fall under the category of western U.S. mountain architecture. This "Old Tahoe" style — with its smaller windows, steep gable roofs and dark interiors — predominates. While much of this work is stunning, one Tahoe-area luxury community is on the verge of unveiling some exciting new architectural wonders.

From the same development team that created North Lake Tahoe's only private residential golf community, Lahontan — featuring championship golf designed by Tom Weiskopf — comes Martis Camp, which is emerging in Truckee, Calif., just 12 miles north of Lake Tahoe. The project's two principals, DMB Associates and Highlands Management Group, have a well-established record of

**...one Tahoe-area luxury community is on the verge of unveiling some exciting new architectural wonders.**

success and achievement, both separately and together, for creating some of the most impressive master-planned golf communities in the western U.S.

Working with a team of innovative architects, DMB/Highlands Group envisions a more global perspective of mountain architecture at Martis Camp; a community where diverse architectural influences truly captivate the imagination.

At Martis Camp, homes with northern European and Asian influences will live harmoniously next to homes with an Adirondack and upper Appalachian flair, and contemporary homes will coexist with structures that retain an "Old Tahoe" feel.

"We welcome interesting architecture that goes to the edge," explains Martis Camp Executive Vice President and General Manager Mark Johnson. "As long as the home respects mountain architecture considerations — as dictated by the weather, the site and the environment — we think that diverse architecture will fit here."

And yet, these concepts will all enjoy one common thread: unparalleled luxury.

## A GRAND VISION

Tucked among the pines and firs, between 5,900 and 7,100 feet above sea level, Martis Camp will revolve around the Tom Fazio-designed 18-hole private golf course, a family barn, events area, and an outdoor lifestyle that includes skiing, hiking and so much more. The clubhouse will serve as the activity center, with a panoramic view of the Carson Mountain Range, Mt. Rose, Lookout Mountain, Mount Pluto and the Sierra Crest. The project is presently planned to include approximately 150 cottages or smaller homes on one-third acre homesites.

But it's the roughly 500 single-family custom homes on 1- to 4-acre homesites that will turn the community into a showplace for some of the world's finest architects.

To achieve this goal, Ron Todd, a consulting architect and land planner for the Martis Camp project, along with Highlands Management Group principals Jim Bartlett and Nick Hackstock, hand picked some of the most respected mountain architects to collaborate on



creating a truly creative set of architectural guidelines: John Sather of Swaback Partners in Scottsdale, Ariz., Scott Ryan of the Truckee-based Ryan Group along with Todd and Design Coordinator Keith Franke. Once this group created these architectural guidelines, four architects — including Sather and Ryan — were then commissioned to envision conceptual designs for four Martis Camp homesites.

**John Sather**, AIA, AICP, of Swaback Partners PLLC in Scottsdale, Ariz., is a graduate of the Frank Lloyd Wright School of Architecture and has worked on some of the most environmentally sensitive projects in the western U.S.

**Jim Morter**, FAIA, of Vail-based Morter Architects, is known for producing architecture that is both respectful and sensitive to its surroundings. He was also awarded 1996 Colorado Architect of the Year.

**Tim Hagman**, AIA, of Aspen Colorado-based Hagman Architects. His dynamic and far-sighted approach to design has created functional, unique and timeless architecture that has been recognized throughout the western U.S., Canada, Baja Mexico, Japan and Europe.

**Scott Ryan**, AIA, of the Truckee-based Ryan Group, has imparted his architectural flair onto a number of homes in the Tahoe area at distinctive communities including Lahontan.

DMB/Highlands Group selected these architects for their experience in mountain architecture, quality work, abundant use of environmentally friendly materials and energy-efficient designs. This means their homes would meld seamlessly into Martis Camp — an environmentally respectful community. For instance, Martis Camp minimizes light pollution, monitors Martis Creek's water quality and designs golf holes around the community's towering sugar pines.

Each architect was asked to choose a Martis Camp homesite and create a conceptual design

of a home for that site. These concepts, to be showcased in an on-site architectural studio, as well as during an IMI-hosted reception this summer, will serve not as a basis for model homes, but rather, to create a sense of the distinctive possibilities that exist in this one-of-a-kind luxury community.

## INTRIGUE AND IMAGINATION

In many mountain communities, design guidelines can limit creativity by specifying things like roofline length and window heights. In Martis Camp, architects are instead asked to consider 12 general design principles that include proportion, rhythm, balance and appropriateness in artistic endeavor. Incorporating these principles, these distinguished architects can do what they do best: create luxurious and distinctive homes that reflect their genius, creativity and innovation.

"It's an architect's dream to be told by the client to have fun and let your hair down a little," explains Morter.

The folks at Martis Camp are also taking steps to prevent one home style from clashing with another. Out of the forest, they carved large estate homesites with expansive 60-foot side setbacks, creating the illusion that homeowners are alone in the woods.







**Behind the design**  
 With each design offered up for the architectural showcase at Martis Camp came unique inspiration, as well. Architects explain their ideas in their own words.

**SCOTT RYAN** AIA, Ryan Group, Truckee, California

“Ryan Group’s concept house brings into play the simple, functional needs of shelter alongside the complex set of specific human needs in a way that shows that shelter can not only be sensible and responsible, but also fun to inhabit. Site context was the principle generator of form here. The placement of spaces responds heavily to the promontory site. The home opens to the east, south and west — the sides that welcome sun and have access to unobstructed views. Simple geometries with low-pitched roofs create intimate spaces on the interior and beget exterior volumes that are responsive to the horizontal site.

Also, the materials we’ve proposed are resource-responsible. As can be seen in centuries-old structures, we’re continuing to understand that shelter can be designed responsibly, again.

The charge here was not to illustrate the customary — we all know what that looks and feels like. While Martis Camp allows for the familiar, we believe the excitement embodied here lies in the ability to create our best thinking for what is responsible mountain architecture.”

Hagman, Ryan, Morter and Sather have taken advantage of the large land areas in the creation of their architectural concepts that will make these homes unique and distinctive. For example, Hagman’s site slopes gradually from north to south — with impressive views of Northstar-at-Tahoe ski resort to the south, and he designed the north side of the home partially underground with gables rising from the sod roof. This not only adds architectural intrigue, but it improves energy efficiency on the north side, which is most susceptible to heat loss.

The homesite Ryan chose to model his concept boasts a granite cliff that will employ cutting-edge mountain designs, with features such as a lower pitched roof form, which is both quiet and environmentally responsible. Although design review committees in more traditional

**This not only adds architectural intrigue, but it improves energy efficiency...**

Tahoe communities would likely reject a low-pitched roof because it’s not an “Old Tahoe” architectural approach, Ryan says “in Martis Camp the response would be if it works on the site, if the materials are correct, the proportion’s right, the scale’s right, it would likely be approved.”

Like Ryan, Sather is also playing with the idea of unconventional roof lines. When he first visited Martis Camp during a fall snowstorm, he noticed how the flakes collected on each pine needle cluster. He was so inspired that he created a collage of smaller roof forms to hold snow in the same way as these pine branches.







**JIM MORTER** FAIA, Morter Architects, Vail, Colorado

“The design of my home is about expressing the beauty of simplicity. I believe that by creating simplicity in the design of the structure, the structure will never compete with the natural beauty of the land where the home is located.

I also considered how best to capture natural daylight on a site that has its primary views and orientation to the north and the east, with the sun being positioned in the south. Equally important in this particular home design was how to accommodate and indeed benefit from the prevailing westerly winds. The end result is a home design that is both elegant and extremely respectful of the majestic surroundings at Martis Camp.

I also gave great thought toward how to minimize and actually improve the impact of the home to its site by literally merging the home and land with a green-living roof. Finally, by creating a very horizontal structure, this home design sets a base for the verticality of the trees, rather than competing and conflicting with them, placing the final, crowning touch on what is truly an inspired-by-nature home design.”

**TIM HAGMAN** AIA, Hagman Architects, Aspen, Colorado

“This home demonstrates that you can have really quality design and very responsible design, at the same time. We’ve done green building for years and years, and it just seemed natural to include that as a part of our thinking.

With this project we also considered why people want to come to this area, and we determined that Martis Camp is an escape ideal that is also quite civilized. It evokes the feelings you get when you’re on a back-country trip; you’re in the mountains; it feels wild. The setting is beautifully natural and there’s a real emotional connection there.

This design builds upon the natural and retreat aspects by taking advantage of the lay of the land. One of the strong, characterizing aspects of what you would see when you approach our home site is all the trees. That is how we came up with the idea of an earthen roof — it’s a re-creation of the forest floor, bringing that back into the home’s design, so it’s as if the roof tilted off the forest floor. We also proposed a re-created geology on the land through the construction of rammed earthen walls. It’s a natural, understated feel that has a kind of friendly presence. It wasn’t trying to shout out, “Look at me!” It had a little humility. It is a good neighbor.”

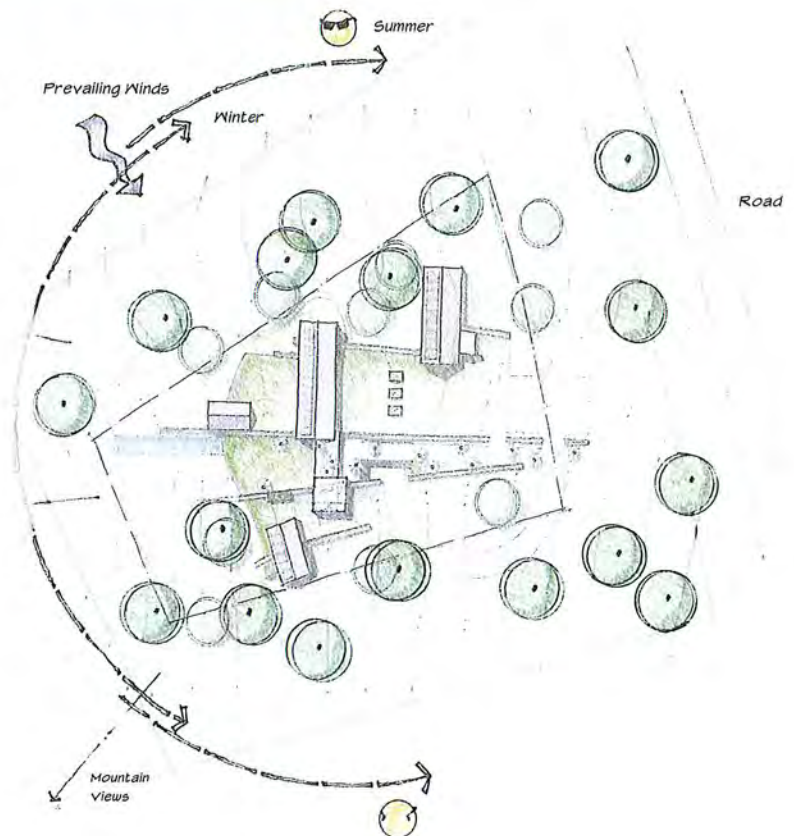






Illustration from the Martis Camp Architectural Handbook

Martis Camp homes will be held to the highest level of design integrity, a component of which will be “balance” in the proportion of the window area to the wall mass.

### MATERIALS MATTER

Martis Camp building materials are another departure. Morter, for example, is considering an earthen retaining wall on the site he selected.

Builders create these walls by constructing the forms they would normally use to pour concrete. But rather than concrete, layers of material from the soil are pressed into the forms, creating beautiful striations of earthtones. The result, Morter says, is “more elegant than the most expensive marble.”

Ryan would like to use more steel and stone on the exterior south and west exposures, which are washed in sunlight, rather than the wood that is typically used in the area. This would prevent re-oiling the wood every couple of years. Morter hopes to use metal roofing, while Sather is considering the use of titanium in his concepts. Says Sather: “Use simple materials in uncommon ways.”

### THE NEW MOUNTAIN ARCHITECTURE

Family estates, similar to those found in the eastern U.S. and the Adirondacks, are being encouraged at Martis Camp. Homeowners can purchase two side-by-side parcels to create a family of estate buildings rather than one massive structure. With this philosophy in mind, Sather’s design, straddling two lots, calls for a central gathering area, picnic and meditation pavilions, and other lodging structures for an extended family.

Greater design freedom should allow homeowners to become more involved in the design process while also meeting the demands of those who want to redefine mountain living.

Martis Camp has successfully tapped into the demand for fresh concepts. As Ron Todd noted: “If we do our job well, 15, 20 years from now, college architecture professors will want to bring their classes to observe Martis Camp’s diverse architectural design.” ■

**JOHN SATHER AIA, AICP**  
Swaback Partners PLLC, Scottsdale, Arizona

“What seems to have been missing in so many mountain homes is a seamless transition between the indoors and outdoors. That is why this idea has become an essential part of my design — a design about the sculpted space to be lived in, and not simply what it appears like from the outside. It is about freedom of the eye to go where it wants, and not stop at the walls. It is about free-flowing movement within and logical, spatial relationships.

This is a design that also takes advantage of all the views, solar orientation, trees and the land, and in doing so creates a magical place. A summer pavilion, an observatory, an enchanted garden walkway animated by sculpture, a guest sanctuary and a grand entry drive all act in harmony with forms that make a composition of artistry; a composition for a magnificent lifestyle.

The concept of organic architecture is also prevalent through my design. This is a natural building using natural materials; a building of the land, not on the land. Philosophically, I like to think this design represents art and architecture as one.”