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aTree runs through it

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Idaho artist creates one-of-a-kind fireplace in a Tamarack home.

Staff

It's not unusual for someone to incorporate art into their home design-- an abstract painting here, a stained glass window there.

But then there are homeowners Jeri and Rod Walz . When they imagined a fireplace at the center of their new home, artist and metal sculptor Irene Deely envisioned something more.

"When they described the space, I just had a vision of a tree that happened to be a fireplace," Deely said.

Deely's work is the artistic centerpiece for a home design that puts the accent on natural elements.

Throughout the 5,000-square-foot, two-story structure, you'll find cool, smooth granite in chocolate, black and gold tones, honeyed pine logs, sparkly flagstone and slate floors, mountain-style accents, and some clever design touches including pine cone-style hardware from Five Rivers in Boise in the upstairs bathroom and wrought iron banisters inside and out.

The result is a mountain-style retreat, said interior designer Judi Kieffer of Kieffer Design Group.

"It has an elegant nature that uses the elements that surround the house itself: stone and wood plus metal to create a beautiful balance," Kieffer said. "Working with Jeri, we've created a cohesive theme that runs from outside into the interior that complements nature and the architecture."

Having a "tree" in the home is a source of extreme pleasure for the couple, Rod Walz said.

When they drew up the original house plans with architect Kevin McKee, it was situated near a creek that runs through the property. The idea was to preserve old massive pines growing nearby. But they moved it farther back because it was too close to the creek to meet code. So the trees came down.

"This is a true memorial to those trees through art," Rod said.

The Walzes, from California, bought the lot when they retired from the day-to-day business of their company, which makes certified mail forms used by large corporations. They started building their dream house a year and a half ago .

They worked side by side with Kieffer and McKee, Jeri Walz said, and she invested much of herself in the project. When they began pulling together the interior, she knew she wanted a large, freestanding fire pit in the great room.

To find a special piece, Kieffer suggested contacting Deely to see about building something custom. They decided on the tree design after seeing a metal sculpture of eagles perched on a tree that Deely did for the city of Eagle.

When they received Deely ´s proposal, the question wasn ´t why, Jeri Walz said. "It was why not have this? It ´s just amazing."

The end result is less about utility and more about art. The fireplace stretches 30 feet from its flaming base to the top of the ceiling, creating a dramatic focal point for the great room.

Deely formed more than a half ton of steel into the trunk, which also is the chimney. The surface was heated, shaped and textured to resemble bark.

Its earthy, rich chemical patina subtly shimmers in the flood of natural light from the wall of windows that surrounds it. Bright silver spot welds shine, adding texture to the trunk. Metal branches and leaves reach out into the surrounding space.

"I think there are like 250,000 spot welds," Deely said. She and her assistant, Carol Sue Byers, have worked more than 1,000 hours on the project since it was commissioned in August.

The tree ´s roots form the hood of the gas fireplace. Layers of natural stone create a circular hearth that sits on top of a six-foot deep concrete support.

Deely created two speaker cubbyholes covered with sculpted fungus, the kind you find growing on the sides of trees.

'Woman of Steel'

Soft-spoken and fashionable, Deely bills herself as the "Woman of Steel," the name of the gallery and welding studio she owns on Chinden Boulevard in Garden City.

Deely ´s love of welding was sparked when she went to Boise State University to earn an art degree in 1999. She found herself drawn to metal because of the strength of the material, she said.

Doing this size project for a home is new for Deely.

"It ´s been quite an experience," she said. She created it in her studio in five separate pieces, like stages of a rocket. She trucked them to the house and spent five days climbing up and down scaffolding to put it

together. It took three men to help set the pieces in place.

"She didn't get to see it put together until it was finished," Rod Walz remembered. "So when she finished, we had sort of an unveiling."

The house

The Walzes do most of their living in the downstairs of the home, along with their two Corgie terriers, Carmie, 10, and Shasta, 8.

The ground floor has the great room, a TV alcove, Euro-style kitchen, walk-in larder and breakfast nook, front- and back-door mud rooms, laundry room and powder room.

The master suite, also on the first level, has an office and walk-in closets. There also is a patio with a wood-burning fireplace outdoors.

Upstairs is a game and entertainment room, plus a second master suite, two guest bedrooms that include a log bedroom, a Jack-^o-Jill bathroom and a guest powder room.

Tree by the numbers

1,000 The number of hours it took to make the fireplace.

250,000 The number of spot welds on the trunk.

1/2 ton The weight of the metal it took to make the fireplace.

1/2 mile The length of 9-gauge wire in the detail work.

5 The number of sections the piece was built in.

Late winter is prime time for putting overgrown shrubs back into prime shape Rejuvenation pruning

The ideal time to perk up your shaggy, overgrown shrubs is in late winter or early spring, when the plants are still dormant, says Dan Barney, University of Idaho Extension horticulturist.

Rejuvenation pruning is right for multiple-stemmed shrubs that send up at least several new shoots from the ground or collar each year, rather than shrubs that produce most of their new shoots from an existing stem. Among the most promising candidates are honeysuckle, alpine currant, barberry, bayberry, spirea, potentilla, forsythia, weigela, privet and hydrangea.

You can rejuvenate those old shrubs with grab sharpened loppers, saws and shovels, Barney says.

Rejuvenation pruning involves cutting off all of a shrub's stems about 1 inch above the ground, or 2 inches for very old shrubs, says Barney. Then carefully dig out or cut off any unwanted suckers and underground stems that may have spread from the shrub's center.

"Cut through as few of the roots as possible and avoid wrenching and pulling on the suckers and roots,"

says Barney. "You should end up with a small, neat cluster of short stems centered where you want the shrub to grow."

This seemingly severe surgery works because much of a plant's mass is below the ground, Barney says. When rejuvenation pruning is done right, very little damage occurs to roots, which quickly supply the plant with fresh, vigorous and uniform new stems and foliage. To ensure continued healthy regrowth, remember to water and fertilize regularly.

Renewal pruning

Renewal pruning is a somewhat gentler approach that works best for lilacs, cotoneaster and gray and red-osier dogwood. Done correctly, it renovates the plant over the course of three years rather than all at once, says Barney.

Here's how renewal pruning works: During each of three consecutive late winters or early springs, cut one-third of the shrub's oldest stems to an inch from the ground.

"Renewal pruning allows the new shoots to develop over three years, reducing the shock to the plant," says Barney.

To avoid future drastic renovations, Barney recommends renewal-pruning about a fifth to a third of the stems at this time of year. Make an annual date to cut out the oldest, least vigorous stems and to remove suckers that sprout away from where you'd like the shrub to be centered.

-- University of Idaho HomeWise

To offer story ideas or comments, contact reporter Dana Oland at dolandidahostatesman.com or 377-6442.

Cutline: Metal sculptor Irene Deely, owner of the Woman of Steel Gallery in Garden City, spent about 1,000 hours creating this 30-foot sculpted gas fireplace in a private home at Tamarack Resort.

Cutline: This moose-antler lamp is one of several that hang in the stairwell. Jeri Walz found them at Light House in McCall. Idaho artisan Keith Keyser in Kooskia made them using natural material, including the antlers shed from the animal and rawhide.

Cutline: The idea of the tree is carried inside and outside of the house with these branch-designed banisters made by Thunder Mountain Iron Works in Cascade.

The fireplace rests on a 6-foot deep, reinforced concrete foundation that runs beneath the house. The three granite stones the base rests on were pulled from the property. Log accents give the home a sense of "mountain elegance," said interior designer Judi Kieffer of Kieffer Design Group.

Cutline: Winter is a wonderful time to appreciate a plant's bark. Stewartia bark is a beautiful patchwork of colors and can reveal its beauty and interest under closer inspection.

In this downstairs powder room, gold flagstone from Idaho's Oakley Valley covers the floor and flows midway up the wall. Jeri Walz had the base of the podium-style sink crafted by Rustic Elegance of McCall. They found the wood in Arizona. Walz culled the stone counter from a Boise quarry, and the stone bowl sink

is made of South American granite. The faucet has a living finish, an oil-rubbed bronze patina that will deepen and change with use.

Cutline:The idea of the tree is carried inside and outside of the house with these branch-designed banisters made by Thunder Mountain Iron Works in Cascade.

Cutline:"We had to have at least one log room," Jeri Walz said. This upstairs guest room features double log beds with built-in storage underneath. They were made by the Cabin Company in Boise.

Cutline:Snow piles up on the outside of Jeri and Rod Walz 's Tamarack home. When they built it they were forced to cut down two trees. Having the tree sculpture fireplace is an artistic memorial to them, Rod said.

Rod and Jeri Walz built their dream home at Tamarack and made room for a 30-foot sculpted fireplace.

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