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# Focus on: Custom Homes



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**Our Focus on Custom Homes** this month takes a look at a very unique custom home project for local Salt Lake architect Bob Eaton. Eaton admits that as an architect, he was probably one of the most demanding clients for the general contractor, Jar-Con, Inc.

**We also take a look at innovations and trends with fireplaces and mantles for high-end custom homes.**

**Bob Eaton:** Salt Lake architect has his dream home built. **Page 68**

**Fireplaces:** From rustic to elegant, fireplaces add appeal. **Page 74**

## Over-the-Top

Unique design elements translate into construction challenges

By Lu Valentin



Salt Lake architect Bob Eaton's home contains some unique features, including a radius staircase that traverses all four floors, complemented by radius walls.

**Doug Jardine** has a large vocabulary. The reporter's dream delivers quotes with words that sound like he stayed up late at night finding them.

"It is a beautiful setting just because of the vistas and views that come about from the site, looking out into the Salt Lake Valley, clear out into the Great Salt Lake and up into the granite foothills of the Wasatch Front," the owner of Jar-Con, Inc. a construction company in South Jordan, Utah, says as he describes the view from the custom home he just finished for architect Bob Eaton.

The design is called Powderhorn, and it is Eaton's own home. "We bought the land in 1998," says Eaton, a purchase that started a 10-year project and a new high-end custom home business venture for Salt Lake-based Eaton Architecture and Jar-Con. >>

Above: Vaulted ceilings help highlight the Eaton residence. Right: Views at dusk. (all photos courtesy Bob Eaton and Jar-Con Construction)



Above: Views of the kitchen and living areas. Bottom: An exterior view at night.

The home is atop the Suncrest subdivision off Traverse Road in Draper and capitalizes on the steep, sloping lot. Jardine credits his team of subcontractors with making the project a success.

“The first thing was having the right survey crew to make sure everything was laid out in relationship to the way Bob had laid out the house on the site,” Jardine adds.

Noel Evans from John Francom Associates of Bountiful, Utah provided the surveying services on the lot, which sported a 45 ft. grade change.

Jardine hesitates before describing the next subcontractor. “Danny Haws was the excavator and he had the skills necessary to step this house down the side of the mountain with such precision that it was amazing. Unfortunately, Danny passed away during this project.”

He knew Haws had not been feeling well, but when he heard the talented excavator in his mid-50’s had died of heart failure, he was shocked. The house stands as a tribute.

“When you do these projects, you are working with real people,” Jardine says. “It is not like you are working with inanimate objects. In building you think about wood and steel and concrete, but the reality is that building a home is about working with people.”

He makes it clear his work is really about building relationships. “What I’m proud of is that I’ve got a team of subcontractors that have worked with me for so many years,” Jardine says. “They are incredible craftsmen.”

His tone becomes large as he talks about the yeoman work done on the foundation

by his concrete crew from Ford Concrete of Bluffdale, Utah. “We had ominous 20- to 22-foot vertical concrete walls,” Jardine adds. “There’s not a handful of guys in the residential market that have the experience and the skill necessary to build walls of this magnitude. A huge double mat of steel was erected with No. 5 bar – 23 ft. plus. The pictures would blow your mind.”

Extraordinary skills sets were required not only due to site challenges but because of the floor plan, which featured a spiral staircase traversing all four levels, a loft, three-car garage, wrap-around decks and a patio in addition to spacious living and entertainment areas. Bob does not consider the house to be of cutting-edge design, due to design restrictions at Suncrest. The entry features a southwest style medallion surrounded by warm travertine tile. >>



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Collected artworks from the southwest compliment the ambiance of this rustic home, as well as exposed beams and trusses and a massive rock fireplace.

"It was a five-year design process, mostly at night," says Eaton, admitting that as an architect designing his own house, he was his worst client.

"You really have to sort through it because you have all these palettes of design ideas running through your mind. Of course you want it to be nice, but you also want it to be affordable. The house kept expanding and I kept forcing it back, pushing and pulling. I could see that we had a 7,000-sq ft home and a 4,500-sq ft budget, so I would squeeze it back."

Jardine says he was patient with the owner/architect. He chuckles when describ-

ing aspects of Eaton's over-the-top design.

"He put his mechanical room into a concrete vault," Jardine adds. "We had some horrendous challenges in figuring out how we were going to get all the mechanical out of this concrete vault, underneath the garage and distributed out to the house."

Jardine presented his challenge to Henry Shen of Shen Engineering of Salt Lake City, who designed block-outs in the upper section of the 20-plus ft. wall to allow for distribution of the mechanical and electrical ductwork. "We had to erect a steel grade beam onsite and crane it into place to create the block-outs," he says.

Jardine says that while the site work and the foundation itself were feats not normally seen in residential construction, the framing also posed challenges.

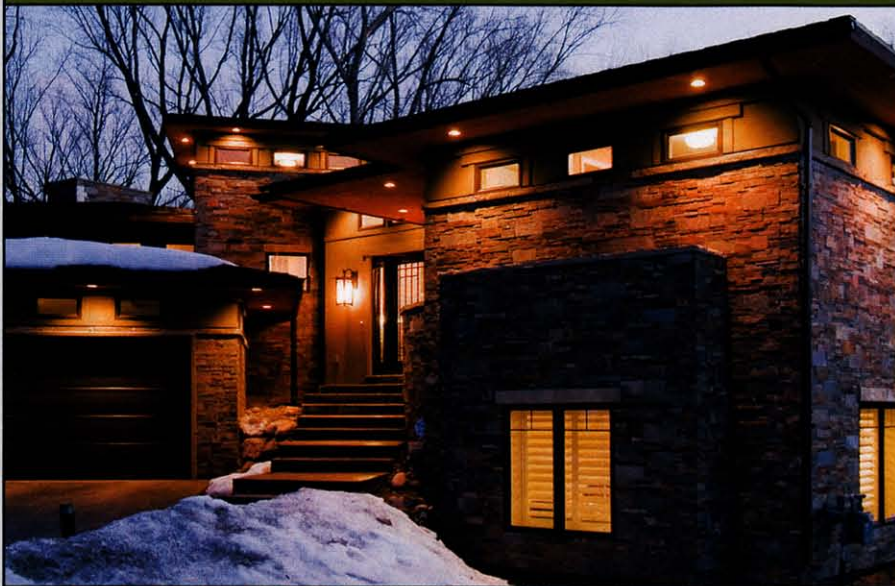
"Bob designed the house with one main beam structure," he says. "It ended up being a 47-ft-long, 42-in.-deep glu lam beam that spanned the entire length of the house. It was a magnificent site seeing that thing craned up into place."

Jardine says one of the hallmark aspects of Eaton's design is the radius staircase that traverses all four floors, complemented by radius walls. "From the basement and within the foundation itself, all the way up through the top loft, there were radius walls everywhere," he says.

The circular stairway was a challenge addressed by Kayle Loertscher of KL Woodworking of Taylorsville, Utah. "They spent a lot of time discussing different ways to make it cost effective, playing with different finishes and materials," >>

**"One of the hallmark aspects of Eaton's design is the radius staircase that traverses all four floors, complemented by radius walls." – Doug Jardine owner, Jar-Con, Inc.**

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A radius staircase traverses all four floors of Eaton's home.

"The result was a vertical-rod stair system that Bob absolutely loves."

The railing design was incorporated not only on the staircase and interior railings, but also reflected on the exterior deck railing. "The neat thing is Bob had the vision and we were able to execute it," Jardine says.

For Eaton, designing his own custom home was a significant departure from his day job at Eaton Architecture, his small firm that specializes in institutional projects in performing arts, airports, higher education and quasi-governmental agencies. Recent clients include the Jordan Valley Water District, Canyonlands National History Association in Moab, Kingsbury Hall and Rose Wagner Performing Arts Center.

"We recently finished a clinic in Monument Valley that won an Intermountain Contractor Award for best architecture," he says, adding that his firm has done a lot of work in the southern and southeastern parts of Utah.

While not a native Utahn, Eaton came to Utah in the 1970s after writing a thesis on ski resort design as a graduate student at the University of New Mexico. He worked with the architectural firm of Brixen and Christopher, which was doing design work for Snowbird, and then went to the design office at Park City Resort. He also spent 10 years at the predecessor firm of MHTN Architects doing airport design.

He says that after working on institutional projects that are highly technical, designing a home has been therapeutic and fun.

"I liked the way he (Jardine) worked, and we liked each other, Eaton says. "Doug has a good system for working on these kinds of projects, and it takes the load off the archi-



tect to be the policeman on the project. We know what to expect from each other."

The team now has three other custom home designs in addition to the Powderhorn. In the past three years of working

together, Eaton Architecture and Jar-Con Construction have completed three custom homes. They have one in construction and three others in design. <<