



NEWS FROM HAVERFIELD PARK

MASONRY: A WEIGHTY DECISION

By Barbara Caswell



Reprinted from the Petaluma Post, October 2002

Even though I've learned to admire the American ingenuity that creates an affordable box to house a family, my job is just the opposite: to set high quality standards for upscale, custom homes.

In a cost-cutting subdivision, traditional masonry is one of the first trades to get cut. Walls can even be fabricated off site, but bricks are still laid by hand, one at a time, and the height of a chimney means that the mason must transport heavy material to the top of a towering scaffold.

Because our goal is to create mansion quality homes in a country setting, we allowed a large budget for both real brick and real stone. Certainly, the latest synthetic stones look natural enough, but if you are truly planning a classic home that will withstand the test of time, real

stone and brick tend to age differently. Fake stone veneers, even if you manage to keep them unchipped, often have a sterile appearance, where the real thing will be darkening and growing mosses.

Petaluma's finest mansions have beautiful, real masonry chimneys and fireplaces, built by hand, and each house will have individual touches to its own tower of bricks. The benefit, of course, to building a "new old house," is that I can have the traditional look I want with modern engineering for earthquakes. In California, brick chimneys are now built as anchored masonry veneers over a plywood structure.

When a new house first appears in the landscape, it has an unpleasantly raw look. Without the foundation plantings that blend it visually into the garden, a tall



Although this bridge is only a year old, it could have well been here since the Civil War, just about the time our farms were built here. To alleviate the problem of construction scarring in the landscape, I planted some quick annual gourd seeds to cover raw edges until the more permanent plantings have time to take hold.

structure just pokes out of the ground like a submarine periscope bursting out of water.

This is especially true for multi-storied buildings. In the case of Haverfield Park, I am constructing two-story homes to preserve as much open land as possible, and with high ceilings and a steep pitched roof, we quickly reached the maximum height limit allowed in our West Petaluma area.

I like to reproduce classic American out-buildings, since they are picturesque in the extreme: ice houses, poultry coops, smokehouses, stables and smaller animal shelters.

But, height is a great advantage here. To look out at a flat garden can be pleasing, but the same garden, spread out before you on a grassy platter, becomes dazzling! And I like high ceilings in my rooms, to allow room for artwork and tall windows that bring the sky indoors.

However, from an esthetic point of view, a tall house could look out of place, so my design concept called for lots of masonry to add weight and substance to the structure.



I tend to use brick where I want something to “pop,” since the orangey pink hues are directly opposite the green of the lawn on the color wheel. I use Sonoma County field-stone in places where I want an aged look, so a structure can look as if it had settled in place for centuries.

Haverfield Park’s most unusual feature is that it incorporates wildlife zones in its design. We have zones designed for people, and zones designed for nature and wildlife. I tend to use stone for wildlife areas, since it mellows into the landscape, and I reserve brick, a man-made material, for spots intended for use by human families. I like to mix the two occasionally, since many years ago when American life was more primitive, craftsmen used whatever materials were at hand for patching.

In this case, brick appears on the bookend chimneys, giving the house a solid look despite its great height, and also on the wide porch, foundation and walkways,



Most chimneys these days are just covered with siding to cut costs, but if your goal is a truly custom home, only real masonry is appropriate. A classic Petaluma treasure deserves the real thing.

creating a bright colored spot for visitors to approach as they enter. Brick has a civilized look, perfectly appropriate for a formal house built for guests, and an antiqued brick with some clinkers mixed in ages the chimneys in appearance.

BOTH PROJECTS:

Concept: Designs of the Times

Masonry: Joe Cuneo for KG Masonry