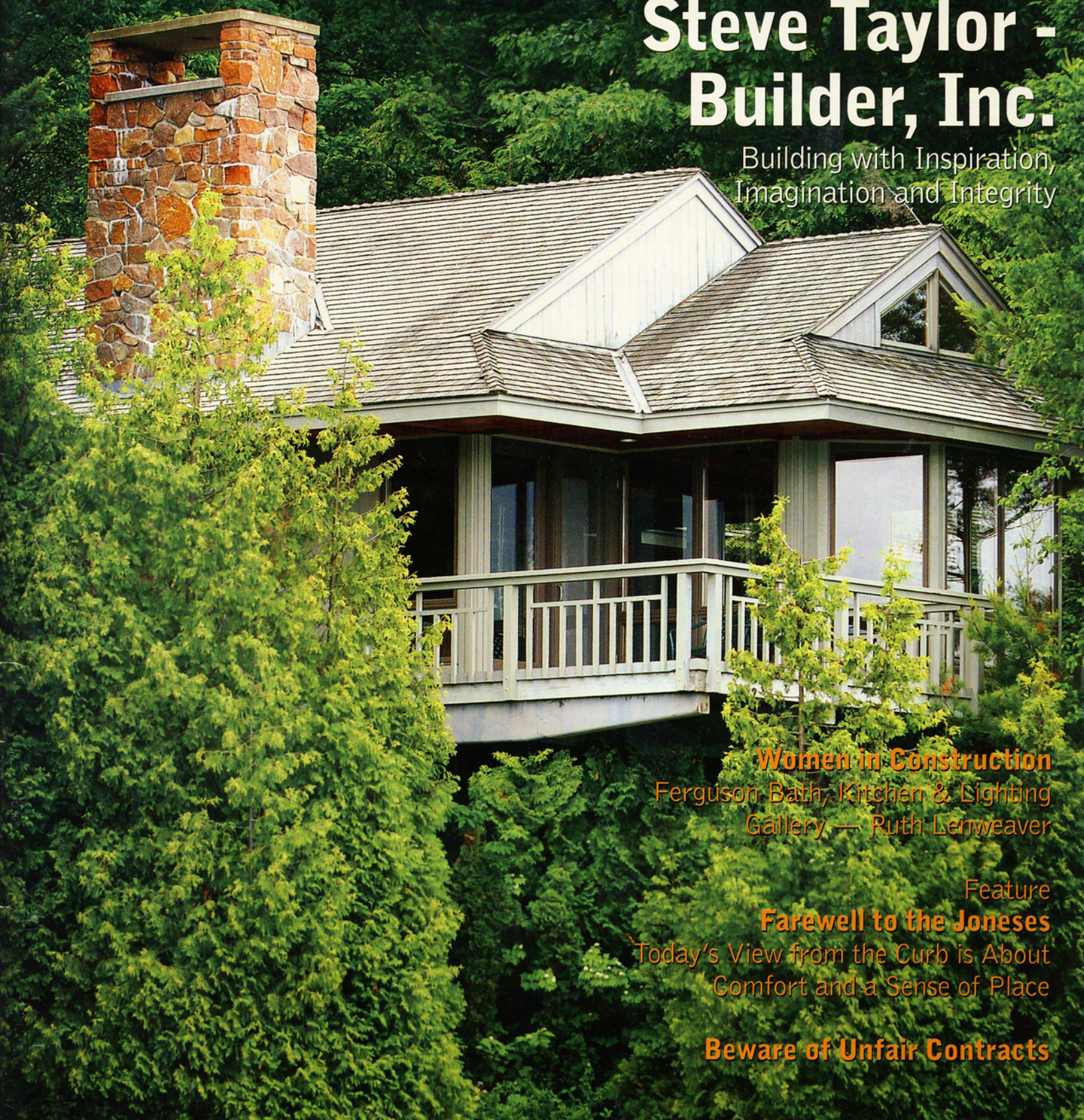


Builder/Architect

Steve Taylor - Builder, Inc.

Building with Inspiration,
Imagination and Integrity



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Farewell to the Joneses

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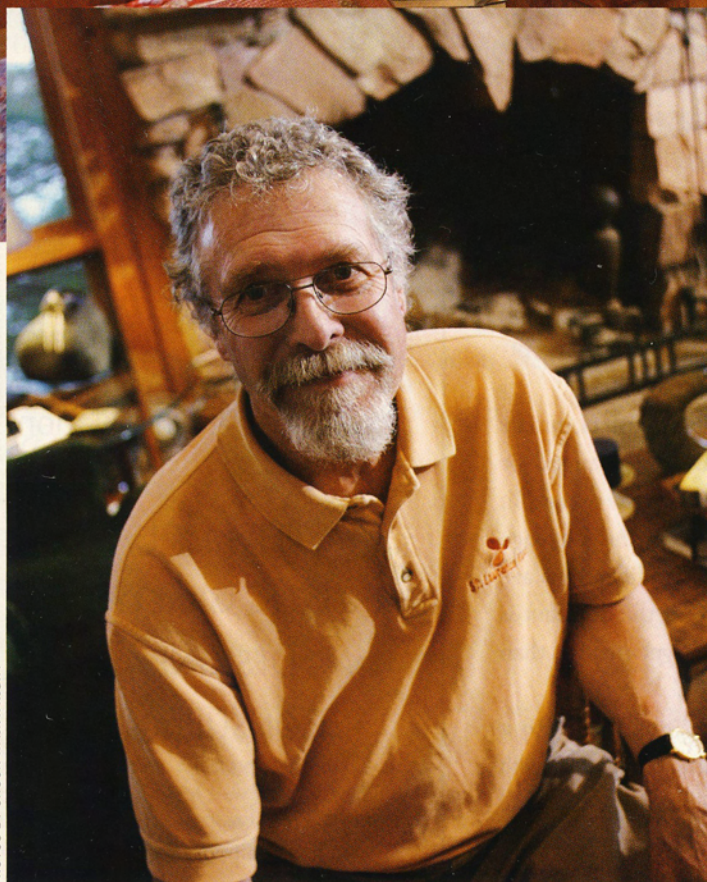
Building with Inspiration, Imagination and Integrity

By Michael T. Brigandi



Above: This Bluff Island master bedroom offers pine paneling with a Douglas fir structured ceiling. The room is further highlighted by the custom-angled windows designed and built by Steve Taylor - Builder.

Left: Steve Taylor, President of Steve Taylor - Builder, Inc.



This story takes place on and because of the St. Lawrence River and, in particular, its majestic headwaters. Here, for a stretch of 60 miles, waters from the Great Lakes flow around more than 1,500 islands en route to the sea. These granite islands, formed during the close of the last Ice Age, are home to hardwoods and softwoods, summer sun and winter ice. Today, the islands and the river have become the border between New York state and Ontario, Canada.

And making his mark on these historic islands is Steve Taylor of Steve Taylor - Builder, Inc. Steve was born in Syracuse, NY, and raised in Cleveland, OH, yet was fortunate enough to spend his summers in the islands. After attending college in rural Ohio as a philosophy major, Steve

joined the Peace Corps, where he served in Morocco. Upon leaving Morocco and accepting the fact there was a limited demand for philosophers, Steve gravitated back to the islands, where he married his wife Nellie and worked with his father-in-law, Tommy Mitchell, of Thomas Mitchell & Son, a local contractor. There, Steve picked up many of the trade skills necessary to become a successful builder on the islands.

However, Steve tells us it was his mentor and friend, James A. (Arch) Kerr, who was his true inspiration to continue in the building trades. Arch Kerr was a gifted and sensitive architect and designer. Steve and Arch worked together on several projects, where he learned the possibilities of design in collaboration with nature. "He opened my eyes on the potential of design and the use of imagination," said Steve.

In 1975 Steve founded his company. His first major project was on Grindstone Island where he built a bungalow-style home on a steep site. Steve and his team of craftsmen work year round on many projects, which include two to four houses a year ranging in price from \$300,000 to \$2.5 million. Steve tells us building on the islands in the north country can be fun, but it isn't always easy, especially when you work year round.

Steve and Nellie live three seasons a year on a small island, where he commutes daily by boat to the office and then continues on by boat or truck to the job sites. His office and shop are situated next to a small

Located on Hub Island, this Steve Taylor custom-built stair system is made of spruce, yellow pine and fir. It offers just the right interior look with the appropriate clean lines to a home with an exterior designed like a steam boat.



PHOTOS BY CHUCK WAINWRIGHT

This second-story reading room on Pine Island is the perfect location to enjoy a good book or just a relaxing day watching the river go by. The room features a hipped Douglas fir structured ceiling and windows that surround the entire room.

dock on Wellesley Island, which is connected by bridges to the United States and Canadian mainlands. During most of the year they use a scow, a flat-bottomed boat with square ends, and several smaller work boats for transporting workers and building materials to island job sites. For transporting heavy equipment and other hefty loads, they hire Navy-surplus landing crafts.

These boats aren't of much use in the winter when the St. Lawrence River typically freezes over. That's when they use hovercrafts, air-boats, snowmobiles and sleds depending on the condition of the river. Hovercrafts and air-boats are used when they will likely encounter both open water and ice. Snowmobiles and sleds are used in colder conditions.

Steve says all of his clients have one thing in common: they are attracted to life in the rugged islands for its promise of recreation and fun, and its call for self-reliance and independence with the thrills and challenges of living intimately with nature and her forces. "Most of the families in this river community have been coming here for generations," says Steve. "There is something unspoken, which we all share here. For lack of a better phrase, I will call it a love of the river and her islands. This love quietly transcends all of our differences, making this an especially friendly community."

The living room to the Bluff Island guest house offers a completely open look with Douglas fir bents supporting a spruce roof deck.



Steve's primary market is the islands; therefore, most of his clients are repeat clients. And, living in and being a part of this small community means his clients are also his friends. It is not always easy working for friends, but this does not bother Steve, for he says it is his integrity that takes him from project to project. He says, "My clients pay once, if corrections or adjustments are to be made, we pay for them."

Persistence in getting things done right and always seeking better ways to do things, both in design and construction, are just two of the qualities Steve possesses. It is also quite apparent he really enjoys designing projects that allow him to use his imagination - ideas, which flow freely with nature and offer a relaxed look with the river.

Designing houses on and for the river is and can be quite inspirational. First, you are designing around Mother Nature and the best it has to offer regardless of the season. And second, you are designing around history and the challenges of maintaining the rich architectural heritage of the area. Many of the finest homes on the islands were built around the turn of the century. They feature native-granite fireplaces, weathered or stained wood siding and cedar shingle roofing, and the interiors are typically wood paneled with beaded yellow pine or fir. These are very common materials to the surroundings and Steve and his team like to use them in contemporary ways to maintain the flavor of the area.

Many of Steve's clients come to him because of his loose, imaginative

Right: Providing warmth on those cool autumn nights, this fireplace can be found in the main house on Bluff Island. It is made of local granite surrounded by Douglas fir walls, floors and ceiling.

Below: This Mosquito Island cottage is made of stucco and wood, and is modeled after the 18th century block houses, which were used to defend the area during the English-American wars.



PHOTOS BY CHUCK WAINWRIGHT



Resting in the morning sun is the Thousand Island Park Pavilion. This restoration project was designed by Steve Taylor in conjunction with Grater Architects.

work. They are challenged to life on the river, yet are looking for that special place to relax in comfort with privacy. Working together, Steve will first ask his clients, "How do you imagine your house?" And then, with continued dialogue, Steve finds a creative way of fulfilling all their needs.

The great American architect, Louis Kahn, once wrote, "Design ... through consulting nature - because nature is the maker of everything. Nature is the giver of presences." And this is how Steve likes to approach

all of his projects - using natural materials, building homes that nestle into the landscape with tranquility. Steve is a free thinker and truly enjoys expressing his love for the natural qualities of the area. These thoughts were echoed by Stuart Rishe of Rishe's Custom Hardwood Flooring, "It's a joy working with someone who takes so much pride in the quality of their work and the level of craftsmanship that Steve Taylor and his crew provide. Any customer who is lucky enough to obtain Steve as their general contractor can expect a level of craftsmanship that may be considered second to none."

When not working, Steve enjoys reading, hiking and traveling - he has traveled to Italy, Spain and throughout much of the Southwest United States, where he and his wife have a strong affinity to Native American influences. He is also a founding member of the environmental group, *Save the River*. And, he and his family continue to work hard for local institutions.

Steve tells us he awakes each morning thinking of new ideas and possibilities, and how to come up with new and creative ways to fulfill them. "We have found that a house is most successful when it is designed with an appreciation for the land itself, along with an understanding of people's values, needs and wishes. The home can then become a sanctuary for the spirit," says Steve. And, he concluded with, "Luis Barragan, the great Mexican master said, 'Any work of architecture which does not express serenity is a mistake.'" ■

The Pine Island boat canopy provides a covered mooring for two boats alongside a dock that lies parallel to the shoreline. This project won the Award of Excellence, in the residential class, from the Industrial Fabrics Association International, in 1998. The design entails a row of six curved, laminated, wooden columns supporting tapered laminated arches covered by a tensioned weatherproof fabric.



PHOTOS BY JONATHAN TAYLOR