

The Saga of the Fireplace

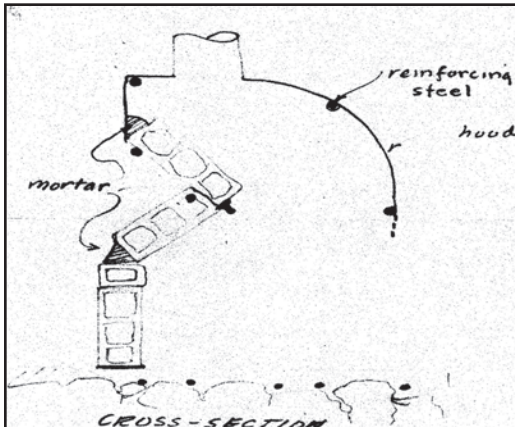
By Luna Leopold

The old one smoked. That in itself is sufficiently a reason to build a new fireplace. More over, the shack is getting ritzy and the old hearth just wasn't up to snuff. So early in June the idea became fact and we started scouting for a stone because this time it was going to be a high class job with no monkeying around.

Elfner introduced me to a talkative old foreman who wanted to give me the whole quarry. We settled on a slab of limestone which was exposed but not quarried. The rock came from a stratus about five or six feet below the regular level of the quarry floor - "new" Madison quarry.

With due ceremony Dad and I supervised as the CC boys had the rock in the trailer, and the work had begun.

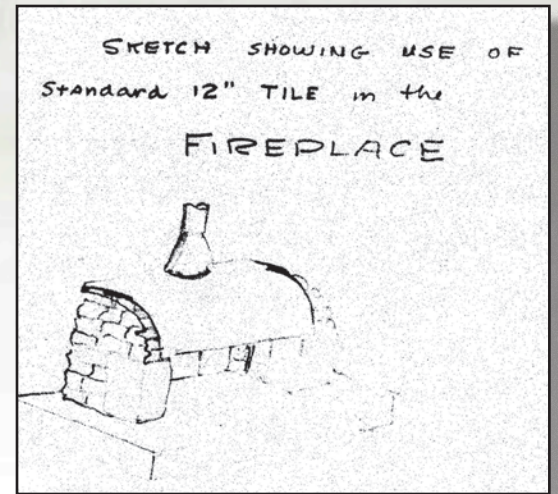
The old hood and side rocks were dissembled with no compunction, the place behind the old backwall cleared, tile knocked out, and we laid plans for the renovation. The first thing on the agendum was to build forms for a reinforced concrete back wall and throat, and it was a bigger job than it sounds. The face of the backwall was formed by a large piece of sheet tin bent to form the curve up to the throat and supported by wooden sidewalls.



Drawing by Luna Leopold

While Dad completed the form, Jean and I scouted for gravel. After a search and much jumping in sand piles at the old gravel pit, we loaded up the trailer with the gravel on highway T - with complements of the county. However they might have been considerate enough to use clean material. As it was we had to wash it, and I as chief engineer had to figure out a way to do it with no screen and a hand pump. We made a screen from what was left after we got through with windows and chocolate-cake-flour sifters. The aforesaid screen rested on the saw-buck under the pump, the water drained through to the ground, and the washed gravel rolled into a collection basin made from the sink of the kitchen of the old house. Nina pumped, Jean shoveled from the trailer, Estella the gravel coming into the sink, and I mixed concrete for Dad to tamp into place behind the form. And we poured concrete in mass production comparable to six Companies, Inc.

The concrete set, the reinforcing steel was bent back and the channels put in to support the chimney, the parapets and abutments for the big rock were hard, we were ready to go.



Drawing by Luna Leopold



Photograph by Carl Leopold



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stone slipped about three inches and stopped about one millimeter from knocking the whole parapet loose. Next time we dug the fulcrum into the log support and it swung up as pretty as could be. The next excitement came when the jack had the stone lifted clear of the logs and the stone balanced on one pint began to waver and quake like Flick in a duck-blind. We nearly lost her that time. The jack was then discarded entirely and we made the crowbar do the trick.

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Photograph by Carl Leopold

The trailer had been rolled to the door and the monolith rolled down across the threshold and it rested in everyone's way in the middle of the floor. I had to turn artisan in rock and shape the ends and edges. With practice I got pretty good at taking off the right amount at every blow. We cut about three inches off the length.

The woodpile was then dissembled and a log frame was begun on the hearth, held together with spikes, and built strong enough to hold a pyramid. The theory was to lift one end with a crowbar until another log was forced in place and the theory was fine. It even worked until the rock started sliding, but the upshot is that at the end of a full morning the stone rested close to the abutments and two inches above. Now we planned to tip it up, having it still rest on the log support. With a jack under it, we could remove the logs and let it down slowly on to the mortar bed.

First - to tip it up at 45 degrees - then 500 lbs of lime-

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Before the sun was saying that the trout would rise to a fly, we sat sipping a drink to the slab of stone which had moved from the bottom of an unseen sea to firm abutments on a fireplace; around that stone we shall shoot ducks, miss foxes, and hum our tunes many times when the snow sifts down the chimney and under the door. The red cedar mantle piece will turn light brown, and we shall dump sourdough bread on it from a hot dutch -



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