

A "Sweeping" View of Lake Tahoe

By Aaron Zambrana
A to Z Chimney Sweep
Lincoln, California
www.AtoZChimneys.com

"An inaccessible, very tall chimney surrounded by ice, snow, and a steep, wood shake roof. What more could a chimney sweep ask for in a reline job? I'm gonna die."

These are the thoughts that ran through my head as we drove two hours northeast to Tahoe City, California, where we were scheduled to reline Sunnyside Resort's massive main chimney, the focal point of its impressive lodge-style lobby.

A month prior, the hotel's chimney experienced a massive chimney fire which lasted about two hours. A video scan of the flue revealed that the terra cotta flue tiles were damaged extensively throughout, and the chimney was no longer suitable for use in its current state.

Being a rather upscale lakeside resort in the midst of its busy ski season, the owners and managers were eager to get

their fireplace going again as of yesterday, but they couldn't find anyone willing or qualified to do the job, let alone in the middle of winter, due to the height and difficult access of the chimney.

In addition, Sunnyside did not want to have their main lobby encroached upon for weeks on end while a crew of grubby chimney sweep guys made a noisy mess. What to do?

Janet Gregor, the Lodge Manager, tracked my company down and asked if I would be willing to make the two hour trip from Sacramento to take a look – not only a paid Level 2 inspection, but a weekend's stay with my lovely wife in a romantic room overlooking Lake Tahoe – ah, the perks of being a chimney sweep! As luck would have it, I was already heading up to Lake Tahoe to speak at the American Institute of Inspectors' (AII) annual convention at the Reno Hilton. What could I say other than, "Where do I sign up?!"

But now that the contract was signed and the deposit paid, Sunnyside's chimney was my problem, my headache, my baby. I had never done a job with scaffolding before, let alone scaffolding set up on a steep wood shake roof covered in snow and ice! What was I thinking?! But it was too late to turn back now, and I was focusing intently on the job at hand.

Day 1 – Monday, New Year's Day

We arrived Monday, January 1st about 10am. My guys were a little grumpy due to the fact that I forbade them to enjoy themselves too much on New Year's Eve the night before. Steep roof and dangerous conditions require a clear head, and we didn't want to take any unnecessary risks.

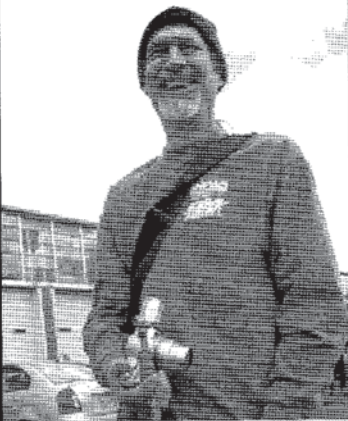


Aaron Zambrana (A to Z Chimney Sweep, Lincoln, CA) on the roof at the Sunnyside Resort in Tahoe City, California.



Neal Hooper enjoys the beautiful view of Lake Tahoe from 45 feet in the air.

EDITOR'S CORNER



Dear Readers,

In this issue we continue with the second part of Chris Prior's step-by-step description of restoring a shallow, formerly coal-burning fireplace and turning it into a functioning woodburning system. This is an example of what you can do when you have mastered the skills of our trade.

We know that most of you aren't going to rush out and tackle a job like this using only the knowledge you'll acquire from this article. Rather, the ability to do this kind of project is the culmination of years of experience as well as accumulation of a lot of "book" knowledge, including past fireplace restoration articles presented in *The Chimney Sweep News*. Of course, some of you already have that knowledge and capability and can take this article and run with it.

As Chris points out, a pre-cast Rosin firebox, such as Bellfires or Ahren-Fire, is a good choice in fireplace replacement for those who don't wish to invest the time in, or don't yet have the skills for, rebuilding the fireplace and smoke chamber with brick and mortar. Thanks, Chris!

Also in this issue, Sooty Bob describes an easy and fun educational technique: visit and work with another chimney professional. Visiting the brilliant and interesting people in the service and supply businesses of our industry is one of my favorite things to do as your editor and correspondent. We encourage you to do it, too. Thanks, Sooty!

Thanks also to Aaron Zambrana for his description of tackling a big job near Lake Tahoe, and to Toby Brown and John Rousseau for their letters and photos, including the cover photo. Please send your e-mails, letters and photos!

Have a great summer,

Chimney Jim



Jared "Hoss" Nielson rebuilding Sunnyside Resort's massive firebox.

New Year's Day was mostly consumed with the scaffold erection and getting all the equipment in place. Surprisingly, work on the ice covered roof proved to be a little easier than anticipated. With corker spike studded shoes and sunshine that brought temperatures well above freezing, the scaffolding erection went very smoothly, and by day's end, we had arrived at the chimney's peak. The view overlooking the lake from about 65 feet above the ground was breathtaking!

The various planks, roof leveling jacks and pieces of plywood anchored the scaffolding firmly to the rooftop and gave us a safe platform on which to work. At the top, we secured the scaffolding to the chimney with ratcheting tie down straps. On the back side of the chimney was a rather large cricket-like structure on which we set up a Little Giant A-frame ladder and tied it off onto the chimney as

well. A block pulley and rope helped us hoist buckets full of tools to the top deck safely. With all ladders and equipment where we needed them, we were ready for day two.

Day 2 - Tuesday

We made sure to get an early start in order to wake the slumbering guests to what must have sounded somewhat like a machine gun going off in the lobby. While demolishing the MASSIVE firebox, it was quite fun to watch the groggy (and sometimes irritated) guests peek over the balcony railing to see the jerks making all the racket so early in the morning. Hee hee! Yeah, I guess I never outgrew the sheer joy of things that make lots of noise - big engines, big guns, and demolition hammers. MANLY!

While my guys made quick work of the dilapidated firebox, I was outside trying to coax the reluctant



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electricians to get up on the precarious roof so they could wire the Exhausto fan. With much coaxing, assurance, and a little double-dog-daring, one of them finally donned my spiked corkers and got to work while the other guy kept his feet planted safely in the parking lot – big chicken!

With the firebox demolished and smoke chamber cleaned out, and the wiring set for the Exhausto fan, we were ready to winch the liner into position. We dropped our tin down the chimney to assure a hang-up-free liner ascent [See "The Shoe Horn" by Aaron Zambrana in SNEWS – November 2004], and prepped the liner with ceramic wool insulation and a sleeve of ArmorMesh™.

Winching the liner up from the bottom went smooth as silk, and we soon had secured the liner in position on top and bottom.

While my guys worked on getting the liner into position, I was on my hands and knees in the parking lot fabricating and welding steel parts for the large steel chimney cap perched on top of the chimney. It had

been badly damaged from the heat of the fire, and from the firefighters who ripped it apart in an effort to extinguish the chimney fire.

That night dinner was on me in the resort's top-notch steakhouse restaurant overlooking Lake Tahoe with the full moon reflecting off the glassy lake. Too bad it was a dinner with my guys rather than my wife – although that fat slab of tender American prime rib did help some!

Day 3 – Wednesday

By day three, my body was feeling the effects of nonstop ladder and scaffold climbing (and maybe a little too much prime rib the night before)! I think my guys were feeling it too because day three seemed like we were moving in slow motion!

Neal Hooper worked outside on top sanding and painting the repaired cap while Jared Nielson and I reshaped and parged the massive smoke chamber with eight buckets of Chamber Tech 2000. In addition, the decorative facing was sealed to

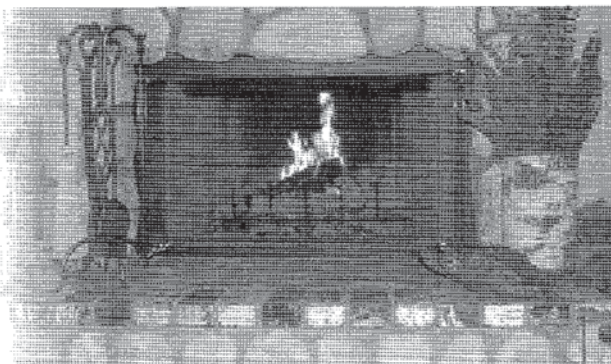


Neal Hooper observes the liner's progress as it is winched up the chimney.

the firebox, and the inside breastwork was smoothed and rounded to provide better airflow and help prevent smoke spillage.

With the chimney cap repaired and donning a fresh coat of high

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Neal Hooper takes a break from sanding and painting the damaged chimney cap.

temperature paint, Neal went to work waterproofing the chimney with ChimneySaver Water Repellant. I was very surprised to discover that ChimneySaver overspray can really make your ladder and scaffold rungs VERY SLIPPERY! I almost learned that the hard way.

Next, Jared and I rebuilt the firebox, which went well into the evening (to the dismay of the restaurant manager

who understandably didn't want us there during the dinner hour).

By the end of Wednesday, I *was* confident that I was gonna die; not from falling but from fatigue! We were pushing hard because we promised to have the job wrapped up before the weekend ski crowd came in on Friday.

Day 4 – Thursday

The weather had turned cold the night before and the winds had really picked up. Temperatures were at freezing, and the lake's choppy white-capped surface testified to the fact that one strong gust could send someone falling off the scaffolding. We elected to work on cleaning up the firebox inside the warm lobby area for a while in the hopes of getting more cooperative weather outside. A few hours later, our prayers were answered and winds and waves receded somewhat.

With a break in the weather, we made haste breaking the scaffolding down and loading our gear into our vans and trailer. Again, I was a bit cautious next to the edge of the ice covered roof handing sections of scaffolding down. When it was all over, I breathed a sigh of relief and gave a small prayer of thanks that the job was done, on time, with no real hiccups or surprises.

All in all, I was eager to take this job on because I saw it as a challenging break from the normal day to day grind

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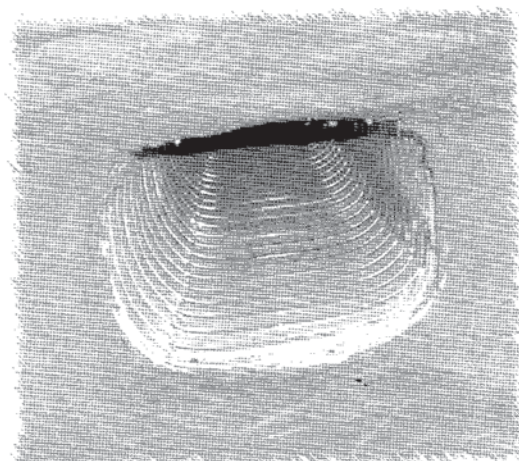


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and I looked forward to adding another feather in my cap. But most of all, relining Sunnyside Resort's massive chimney also gave me a good excuse to buy a nice set of scaffolding, and a new portable Lincoln welder, and various other new tools without wifely repercussions! It doesn't get better than that!

