

COLORADO HISTORICAL SOCIETY

COLORADO STATE REGISTER OF HISTORIC PROPERTIES NOMINATION FORM

SECTION I

Name of Property

Historic Name Nelson House

Other Names _____

Address of Property

[] address not for publication

Street Address 1818 Baseline Road

City Boulder

County Boulder

Zip 80302

Present Owner of Property

(for multiple ownership, list the names and addresses of each owner on one or more continuation sheets)

Name Jim & Estella Cole

Address P.O. Box 19737

Phone _____

City Boulder

State Colorado

Zip 80308-2737

Owner Consent for Nomination

(attach signed consent from each owner of property - see attached form)

Preparer of Nomination

Name Estella Cole

Date 20 August 2005

Organization _____

Address P.O. Box 19737

Phone _____

City Boulder

State Colorado

Zip 80308-2737

FOR OFFICIAL USE:

Site Number 5BL.8232

8/22/2005 Nomination Received

Senate # _____

House # _____

11/18/2005 Review Board Recommendation

12/16/2005 CHS Board State Register Listing

Approval Denial

Approved Denied

Certification of Listing: President, Colorado Historical Society

Date

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SECTION II

Local Historic Designation

Has the property received local historic designation?

no

yes --- individually designated designated as part of a historic district

Date designated _____

Designated by _____ (Name of municipality or county)

Use of Property

Historic Single Dwelling

Current Single Dwelling

Original Owner Monell V. and Helen M. Nelson

Source of Information original plans and abstract of title

Year of Construction 1951

Source of Information original plans

Architect, Builder, Engineer, Artist or Designer James M. Hunter, architect

Source of Information original plans

Locational Status

Original location of structure(s)

Structure(s) moved to current location

Date of move _____

SECTION III

Description and Alterations

(describe the current and original appearance of the property and any alterations on one or more continuation sheets)

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SECTION IV

Significance of Property

Nomination Criteria

- A** - property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to history
- B** - property is connected with persons significant in history
- C** - property has distinctive characteristics of a type, period, method of construction or artisan
- D** - property is of geographic importance
- E** - property contains the possibility of important discoveries related to prehistory or history

Areas of Significance

- | | | |
|---|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Agriculture | <input type="checkbox"/> Economics | <input type="checkbox"/> Landscape |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Architecture | <input type="checkbox"/> Education | <input type="checkbox"/> Architecture |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Archaeology –
prehistoric | <input type="checkbox"/> Engineering | <input type="checkbox"/> Law |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Archaeology –
historic | <input type="checkbox"/> Entertainment/
Recreation | <input type="checkbox"/> Literature |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Art | <input type="checkbox"/> Ethnic Heritage | <input type="checkbox"/> Military |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Commerce | <input type="checkbox"/> Exploration/
Settlement | <input type="checkbox"/> Performing Arts |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Communications | <input type="checkbox"/> Geography/
Community Identity | <input type="checkbox"/> Politics/
Government |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Community
Planning and
Development | <input type="checkbox"/> Health/Medicine | <input type="checkbox"/> Religion |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Conservation | <input type="checkbox"/> Industry | <input type="checkbox"/> Science |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> Invention | <input type="checkbox"/> Social History |
| | | <input type="checkbox"/> Transportation |

Significance Statement

(explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets)

Bibliography

(cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets)

SECTION V

Locational Information

Lot(s) W 10 ft of Lot 3 & all Lot 4 & E 25 ft of Lot 5 Block 2 Addition Floral Park

USGS Topographic Quad Map Eldorado Springs

Verbal Boundary Description of Nominated Property

(describe the boundaries of the nominated property on a continuation sheet)

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SECTION VI

Photograph Log for Black and White Photographs

(prepare a photograph log on one or more continuation sheets)

SECTION VII

ADDITIONAL MATERIALS TO ACCOMPANY NOMINATION

Owner Consent Form

Black and White Photographs

Color Slides

Sketch Map(s)

Photocopy of USGS Map Section

Optional Materials

For Office Use Only

Property Type: building(s) district site structure object area

Architectural Style/Engineering Type: Modern Movements/ Usonian

Period of Significance: 1951

Level of Significance: Local State National

Acreage less than one

P.M. 6th Township 1S Range 70W Section 6 Quarter Sections NW, NW, NW, NE

UTM Reference: Zone 13 Easting 477048 Northing 4427570

Site Elevation: 5450 feet

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DESCRIPTION and ALTERATIONS

The 1951 Nelson House sits on an oversized lot in a Boulder residential neighborhood noted for its association with the faculty of the University of Colorado. The house faces north onto Baseline Road and is aligned east-west on its site and with the street. It was designed to minimize the noise from Baseline Road and to maximize solar gain as well as views of the foothills to the south and west. The site is essentially flat, and the house is currently surrounded by various trees, shrubs, and a lawn in both the front and back yards. The property is in good condition and has had few alterations since its construction, the most notable being the compatible rear addition completed in 1970/1971.

The 1951 Usonian style house is constructed of roman brick with a flat roof and deep overhanging eaves that emphasize the horizontality of the design. Similar construction was incorporated in the 1970 addition. The broad eaves provide protection from summer sun and are an integral part of the passive solar design incorporated into the 1951 residence, reflecting the architect's interest in this (then) new technology. There is no basement; the floors are concrete slab-on-grade with radiant in-floor heat; this construction was also used in the 1970 addition. Most interior walls are wood frame and all ceilings are faced with acoustic tile to mitigate noise.

The plan of the original 1951 building is roughly H-shaped: a single car garage, kitchen, and "recreation room" are located in the east leg of the H, two bedrooms and one bath are in the west leg. The living room and study, separated by the native stone fireplace, form the cross bar of the H. This native stone fireplace extends through the rear wall of the house to emphasize the integration of interior and exterior space: "... seeing thru and beyond can be pleasant" (James M. Hunter and Associates firm brochure). In 1970/1971, an 800 square foot addition was constructed that runs south off the recreation room creating a more L-shaped plan. The addition is of compatible design and materials replicating the 4'-0" by 4'-0" grid, narrow (although not identical) brick, and dual-paned direct set windows that characterize the 1951 house. The addition contains two rooms with closets that share a bath. A hallway without windows runs along the east side of the addition.

The north facade is primarily brick with few openings to buffer the residence from the traffic and noise of Baseline Road. On the east side of this elevation, an asphalt drive leads to an attached single car garage. High hopper windows at the kitchen and direct set windows at the entry are east of the front door, which appears to be replaced. The remainder of this elevation is the original roman brick with no openings.

The east elevation, including the east side of the addition, is wholly roman brick with no openings save a door at the approximate mid-point of this elevation. A 3'-0" wide concrete walk runs from the southeast corner of the addition to this door. North of the door, there is scrub planting in the side yard setback.

When viewing the house from the south (the backyard), the design concept of opening the residence to the sun, the private back yard, and views to the south and west is apparent. The south wall of the 1951 house is primarily glass. The original recreation room, living room, study, and bedroom have direct set windows that allow views to the back yard and the foothills beyond. Screened openings below these windows allow cross ventilation in these areas. At the study and living room, operable clerestory windows exist on the north to allow the expulsion of warm air from the living spaces. The west wall of the 1970 addition utilizes design elements from the 1951 residence. The two large rooms have direct set windows with screened openings below mirroring the construction in the 1951 house. The bathroom has the same high hopper windows found in the original building. The south wall of the addition is wholly roman brick with no openings.

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The west elevation of the house is primarily roman brick construction with direct set windows and screens below in the northernmost bedroom and operable hopper windows in the bathroom. The west wall of the southernmost bedroom is wholly brick.

The public areas of the residence feature a somewhat open floor plan that focuses on the rear yard through the expanse of windows on the south and west elevations. A woven wood screen that stood between the entry door and the living room was removed by the realtor when the house was for sale in 2004. The two bedrooms on the west side of the 1951 house are effectively screened from the public areas of the house and from Baseline Road. The "recreation room", kitchen, living room and study all open to the concrete patio and outdoor area to the south and west. The concrete is laid in 4'-0" by 4'-0" slabs, mirroring the grid of the "pergola" and grid that underlies the design of the house. The native stone fireplace that separates the "living room" from the "study" continues through the south wall to the patio and enhances the integration of interior and exterior spaces. This integration is also reinforced by the use of roman brick for interior walls as well. Built-in cupboards and cabinetry, all with touch-latch hardware, provide storage as well as separating spaces such as the kitchen from the recreation room.

The 1970s addition includes a bedroom, bathroom, and room of indeterminate purpose. While the exterior of the addition is compatible with the design and materials of the original building, the interior spaces do not embody the same high degree of design clarity experienced in the original 1951 portion of the residence.

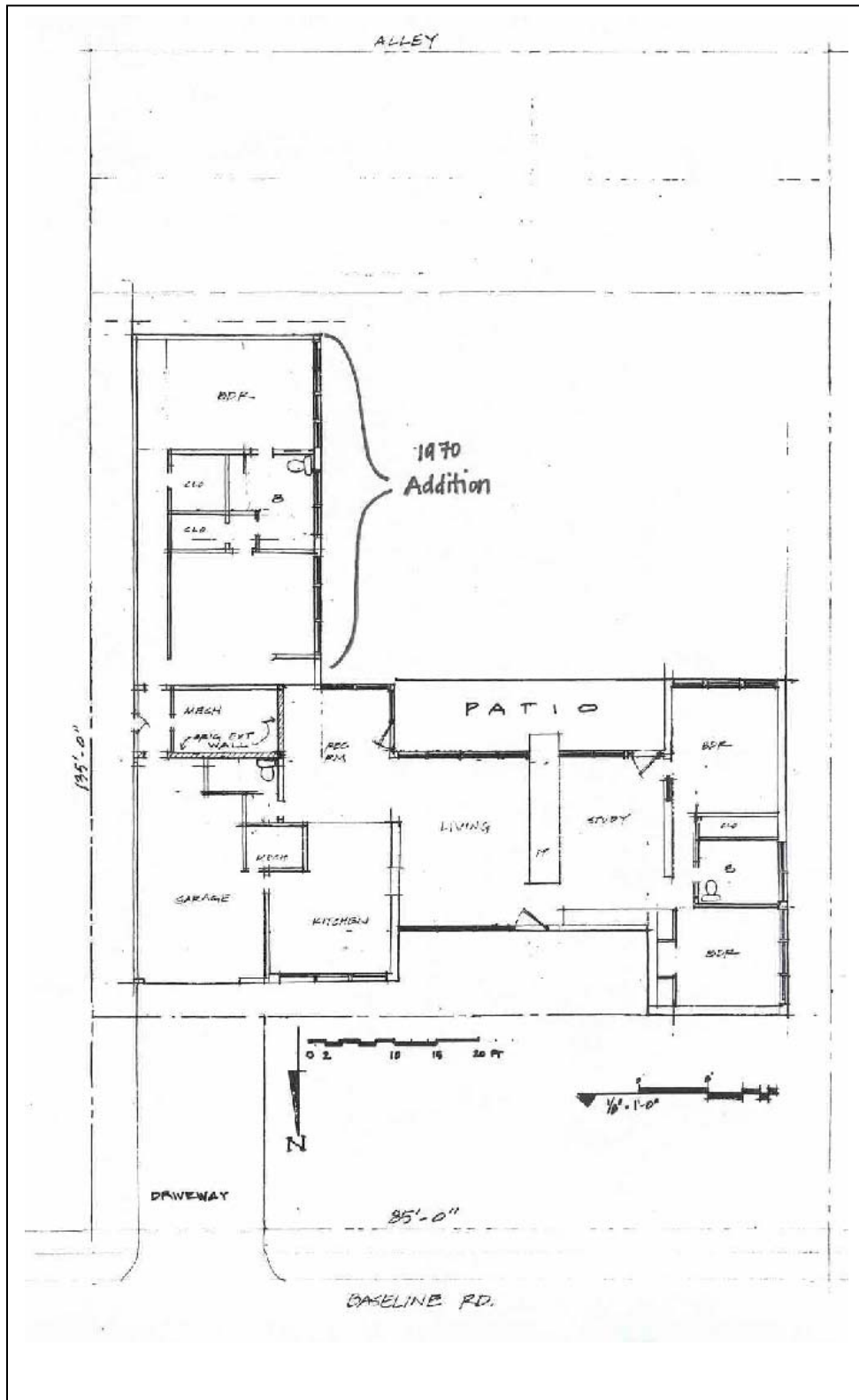
1953 View of Nelson House

Image courtesy of Boulder Carnegie Library



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Footprint



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SIGNIFICANCE STATEMENT

The Nelson House is eligible for listing on the Colorado State Register of Historic Properties under Criterion C in the area of Architecture. It is an excellent example of the Usonian style, displaying such characteristic elements as large eave overhangs, the integration of indoor and outdoor space, and an emphasis on horizontality, enhanced by the use of the flat roof and ribbon windows. Most of the original elements remain intact on both the interior and exterior. Interior elements typical of Usonian style include built-in components in the kitchen, original fixtures, indirect lighting, and a central stone fireplace, all seen in the Nelson House. A compatible 1970 rear addition is not visible from the street and does not detract from the integrity of the house.

Usonian Style

Typically associated with modern architecture of the 1940s, 50s and 60s, Usonia as a concept actually goes back to the turn of the 20th century. Conceived by Frank Lloyd Wright around 1900, Usonia was a design philosophy that evolved over many years, coming to fruition in the 1930s. "He aspired to create a democratic, distinctly American style that was affordable for the 'common people'" (Craven internet article). As his commissions for large, grand houses dropped off with the onset of the Depression, Wright looked for a way to address the need for affordable middle-class housing while employing a simple design. The result was an architecture he termed "Usonian," which focused on the residents of a culturally reformed United States of North America. The Usonian houses were smaller than his sprawling Prairie style residences, contained little ornamentation and lacked basements or attics. These houses were set up into zones, typically with three areas: living space, small bedrooms, and a kitchen-dining area. Built-in components and furniture allowed homeowners to appreciate the simpler, integrated space Wright intended.

Alvin Rosenbaum, who grew up in an Alabama Usonian house Wright designed for his parents in 1939, noted that:

Usonia was Frank Lloyd Wright's vision for America, a place where design commingled with nature, expanding the idea of architecture to include a civilization, a utopian ideal that integrated spiritual harmony and material prosperity across a seamless, unspoiled landscape. Usonia was a state of mind, combining an evolving prescription for the elimination of high-density American cities and their replacement by pastoral communities organized around modern transportation and communications technology with a new type of home for middle-income families (Rosenbaum 13).

The idea behind Usonia was about more than just designing smaller houses. It was about planning, nature, and simple design on a human scale. Wright's concept for Usonia came about due to his increasing focus on community, planning, and serving human needs. He was interested in setting up decentralized communities with commercial, residential, educational, industrial, cultural, and recreational facilities. While his early concepts of these communities remained just that, many of the components were applied in a handful of places across the country, though not on the scale he originally envisioned. As Wright did with the Prairie style of his earlier fame, he incorporated the smaller Usonian house with the site. Wright integrated the house with the landscape and nature in an attempt to get away from box-like structures. Walls extended beyond the interior to the outside, intermingling the two. Large windows brought the outside in. Natural materials blended the house with the site and warm colors on the interior further contributed to the feeling of bringing the outdoors inside. Usonian houses were quite unlike the boxy, stark International Style houses that appeared to be

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dropped onto, rather than a part of, their location.

Also called Wrightian, the Usonian style has been adopted and adapted by numerous architects across the country. Houses in this style are seen from New York to California, Michigan to Alabama, and everywhere in between. Not much is known about these houses as they are of more recent vintage and often have not been surveyed. Usonian is a recognized style found in such books as *How to Complete the Ohio Historic Inventory* and *House Styles in America*, *The Old House Journal Guide to the Architecture of American Homes*. Given the architect's notoriety, popularity, and strong association with Usonian architecture, most of the available resources relate to Wright's designs, concepts, and thoughts.

The Usonian style has many character-defining elements. In *Frank Lloyd Wright's Usonian Houses*, author Carla Lind lists both the interior and exterior features typically associated with the style. They are:

Exterior

- Dominant horizontal lines*
- Flat roofs with large overhangs*
- Standardized natural materials*
- Unit system walls
- Integrated windows*
- Organic siting (a private side and an open side, usually facing south)*
- Carports
- Modules*
- Zoned plans (three primary living areas: living spaces, kitchen-dining areas at the intersection, and small bedrooms)*
- Open living areas*
- Adjacent cooking-dining areas*
- Service cores*
- Concrete slab floors*
- Integral gravity heating (in-floor radiant heat)*

Interior

- Simplicity above all*
- Integral decoration*
- Modular furniture
- Built-in components*
- Freestanding pieces
- Inexpensive materials
- Inside-outside walls*
- Perforated wood screens*
- Central hearths*
- Warm colors*
- Indirect lighting*
- Simple textiles
- Accessories (limited decorative objects)

(* indicates feature found in the Nelson House)

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The Nelson House possesses most of the key features found in Usonian houses, exhibiting 12 of 14 exterior and 8 of 13 interior elements. On the exterior, a flat roof with extensive overhanging eaves, dominant horizontal lines, integrated windows that contribute to the open floor plan, and organic siting are all present. The private rear side of the house opens to the south and provides spectacular views of the Flatirons. Concrete slab floors with integral gravity (in-floor radiant) heating run throughout. The floor plan is based on a grid system, stemming from Wright's childhood Froebel blocks (termed modules in the list of features). Though the house does not have a carport, it does have a garage, possibly an adaptation made by the local architect for Colorado's climate. Off the garage, two mechanical rooms grouped together make up the service core.

On the inside, the kitchen/dining area is adjacent to the living space, an example of the open floor plans common for the style. Built-in cupboards in the kitchen as well as the hallways and bedrooms were made specifically for the house and constructed in wood, another natural material used in the house. The large stone fireplace that serves both the living room and the study further links the indoors with the outdoors: the stone wall extends beyond the rear wall of the house onto the private patio. Looking at the footprint shows the zoned plan, a key component of the Usonian house: small bedrooms grouped together, living areas in another area, and the kitchen/dining space rounding out the space. Even the 1970 addition groups the rooms together off the living area. Warm colors of nature and indirect lighting complete the interior of this modern residence. The Nelson House is, without question, a classic example of the style as designed by a local architect who well understood Wright's Usonian concepts.

Historical Background- James M. Hunter

James M. Hunter, prominent Boulder architect and Fellow, American Institute of Architects, designed the house at 1818 Baseline Road for Monell V. Nelson, a professor at the University of Colorado, and his wife, Helen M. Nelson, in 1950-1951. The Nelsons had one daughter, Donalda, who was living in 2005.

Born in 1908 in Omaha, Nebraska, Hunter studied architectural engineering at Iowa State University and received his degree from the University of Illinois in 1936. That same year he came to Boulder to work as a draftsman for Glen H. Huntington. By 1940 Harold Stuart Jones had joined him and the firm Huntington, Jones and Hunter was born, remaining active until 1945. They designed a number of buildings in that short time, including the Citizens National Bank Building in Boulder as well as a number of houses in the Floral Park subdivision.

After service in World War II, Hunter formed his own Boulder-based firm and served as planner and architect for Colorado A & M College (now Colorado State University), Fort Collins; Fort Lewis College, Durango, Colorado; Regis College, Denver; and Tarkio College in Missouri. Hunter also was a member of the advisory board of local (Boulder) architects who helped establish an accredited degree program in Architecture at the University of Colorado / Boulder, approved in 1949. The AIA Colorado chapter established the James M. Hunter Scholarship for graduate study or travel within the continental United States specifically for the study of American architecture.

Hunter designed many civic, commercial, organizational, educational, and residential buildings in Boulder, including the original Boulder Public Library, Baseline Junior High School, Boulder Medical Center, and the Boulder Municipal Building. In addition to his practice, Hunter was interested in architectural research, especially solar design, and was highly regarded for his early efforts to use active solar design in his architecture. He served as a consultant on the utilization of solar energy, was a member of the advisory

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board for the Association of Applied Solar Energy, and in collaboration with George Löff, a noted authority on active solar design, designed residences for Löff in Boulder in 1949 and in Denver (Cherry Hills Village) in the early 1950s. The Nelson House at 1818 Baseline Road embodies many of the principles of solar design, albeit passive as opposed to active solar design. Further research is needed in order to better understand Hunter's contributions to solar design and his role in this then-new technology.

Hunter retired from practice in 1973 and died at the age of 75 in 1983 at his home in Boulder. He is interred at Danforth Chapel on the campus at Colorado State University, a building of his own design.

Daily Camera- September 13, 1983

Daily Camera- April 25, 1955



4/25/55
**James Hunter Wins Merit Award
For His Design Of Danforth Chapel**

Daily Camera- November 15, 1955

**Boulder Architect Gains Recognition
In The Field Of Solar-Heated Homes**

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GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

The west 10 ft of Lot 3, all of Lot 4, and the east 25 feet of Lot 5, Block 2, Floral Park addition, City of Boulder.

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PHOTOGRAPH LOG

The following information pertains to photograph numbers 1-26 except as noted:

Name of Property: Nelson House
Location: Boulder County/ Colorado
Photographer: Estella Cole
Date of Photographs: 5 June 2005
Negatives: on CD

<u>Photo No.</u>	<u>Photographic Information</u>
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- | | |
|----|--|
| 1 | North façade, oblique view, camera facing southwest. |
| 2 | North façade, camera facing south. |
| 3 | West side of north façade, camera facing south. |
| 4 | East side of north façade, camera facing south. |
| 5 | Close up of front door, camera facing south. |
| 6 | North façade, camera facing south. |
| 7 | West wall of 1970 addition, camera facing northeast. |
| 8 | South wall, camera facing north. |
| 9 | South wall close up, camera facing north. |
| 10 | South wall, camera facing northwest. |
| 11 | South wall close up, camera facing northwest. |
| 12 | South wall, camera facing northwest. |
| 13 | Interior- fireplace wall in study. |
| 14 | Interior- south bedroom, original portion of house. |
| 15 | Interior, west wall of south bedroom, original portion of house. |
| 16 | Interior- view from living room into recreation room. |
| 17 | Interior- fireplace wall in living room. |
| 18 | Interior- front door, clerestory, and front windows in living room. |
| 19 | Interior- bathroom in west wing, original portion of house. |
| 20 | Interior- built-in cabinets with touch latch system. |
| 21 | Interior- view from recreation room into kitchen. |
| 22 | Interior- view from kitchen into garage. |
| 23 | Interior- kitchen with built in counters and cabinets. |
| 24 | Interior- view from recreation room into living room, clerestory and fireplace wall visible. |
| 25 | Interior- view from kitchen into recreation room, access to addition seen on left. |
| 26 | Interior- view from kitchen into recreation room, back yard seen through large windows. |

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USGS TOPOGRAPHIC MAP
Eldorado Springs Quadrangle, Colorado
7.5 Minute Series

