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ON THE COVER

A leopard print chair at the home of Jim and Treanna Smoot

PHOTOGRAPH BY LANCE KINNEY



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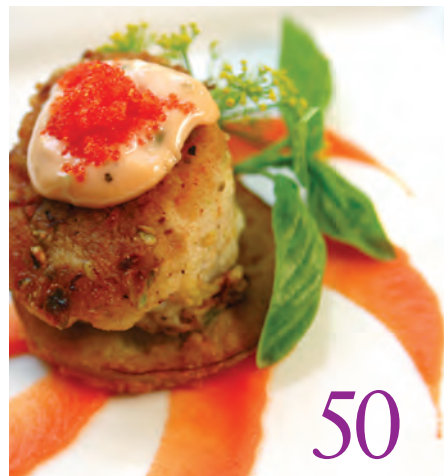


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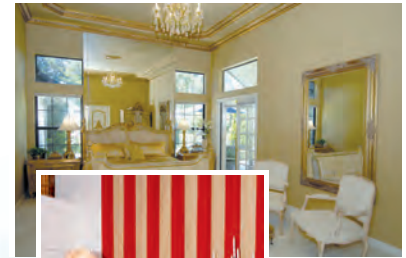
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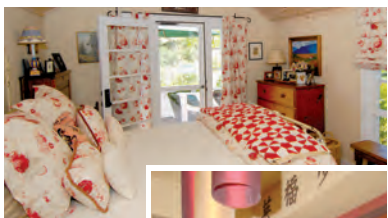
Lance Kinney's photographs appear regularly in both Haven and The Tribune's weekly Home section, and he photographed all but one of our stories this issue. A selection of Kinney's fine art photos is on exhibit at Space Gallery in San Luis Obispo.



Sharon Crawford makes her first appearance in Haven this issue. She writes on David Fross and his Arroyo Grande nursery, Native Sons, which specializes in California and Mediterranean plants ("Indigenous by Design," page 45). Crawford is the author of "Ganna Walska Lotusland: The Garden and its Creators."



Pat Pemberton is a features writer for The Tribune's Central Coast Living section. In this issue, he gives readers a tour of Sue Casa, a hacienda-style home on 70 acres in Templeton ("A Spanish villa in Templeton," page 31).



Rebecca Juretic, whose articles anchor The Tribune's weekly Home section, writes on three homes of varying styles in this issue: a sumptuous wine country chateau, a renovated farmhouse and a Mediterranean home with Asian influences.

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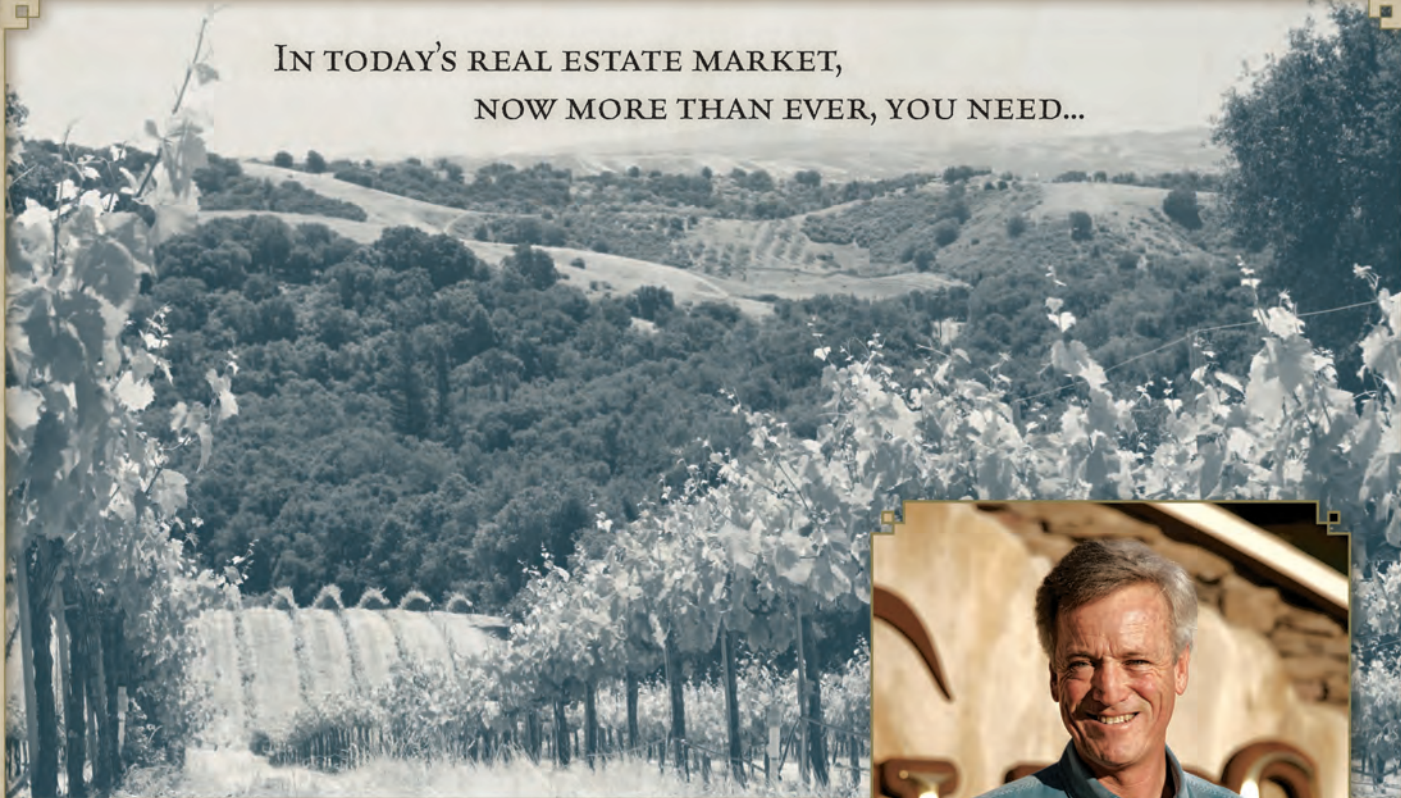
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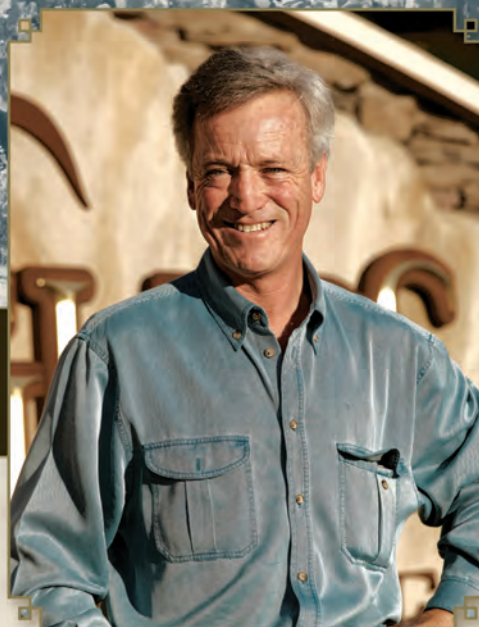
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The Grand Life

in Paso Robles

WRITTEN BY REBECCA JURETIC
PHOTOGRAPHED BY LANCE KINNEY

TREANNA SMOOT wanted her home on 40 acres in Paso Robles wine country “to look old, like it had been here a long time. Like something in a vineyard in France,” she said.



pretty, elegant things

Jim and Treanna Smoot wanted a residence that would integrate seamlessly into the 40 acres of wine grapes they farm just east of Paso Robles. “I wanted it to look old, like it had been here a long time. Like something in a vineyard in France,” said Treanna.

With its stone façade and wood shingle roof, the Smoot home seems to fulfill their aspirations.

Beyond its rustic front door, however, the home is more Paris apartment than French farmhouse. Treanna designed the house with the help of daughter and general contractor Robin Bowser, finding inspiration by leafing various publications. She consulted high-end design magazines like *Veranda* and *Architectural Digest*, but she also sought magazines that specialize in southern design, such as *Southern Accents*, which tend to feature formal, European-inspired homes. The look she achieved is formal but might also be called “dressy,” as Treanna’s decorating sense runs a close parallel to her fashion sense. “I like to dress in an elegant way, and so I like pretty, elegant things in my home,” she explained.

The architecture of the house set the stage for her formal, European

(continued on page 18)

A CRYSTAL CHANDELIER

in the foyer, above, provides an elegant welcome. Earthy Spanish floor tiles hide any dust tracked in from the vineyard.

BEYOND THE FRONT DOOR, the Smoot home is more Paris apartment than French farmhouse with an artful mix of European styles as seen in the living room, right.





IN THE DINING ROOM, above top, crystal adds sparkle and a mirror set into a faux archway lends an air of both formality and festivity to the space. Patio doors, above, give ready access to the home's many outdoor garden areas.



A GUEST BEDROOM, above, exudes European elegance with its carved bedstead and rich red and gold tapestry spread.

LEOPARD PRINTS, right, are a signature look for Treanna Smoot, both in her wardrobe and home decor. Marble, gilt and burnished gold touches add a sense of luxury and refinement.

JIM AND TREANNA SMOOT, inset. At far right, a vignette from the guest bedroom.





LOFTY CEILINGS, FAUX MARBLE COLUMNS, gilt moldings and French doors are most notable in the sumptuous master bath and bedroom, above center and right. Furniture is a mix of European-style reproductions and vintage pieces.

(from previous page)

style. Lofty ceilings, faux marble columns, elegant moldings and several sets of French doors bring in views of the elaborate formal gardens that surround the home.

Decorating with an air of opulence, Treanna selected furniture and accessories possessing elegant lines and ornate carvings. Crystal adds sparkle – in chandeliers, vases and a collection of decanters. She added gilt and burnished gold accents with a generous hand to give the home an aura of richness.

What Treanna did not want was for elegance to cross the line into glitz. So a neutral palette keeps all of the opulence under control. “I used cream with gold and black accents, and just a few punches of cardinal red,” she explained. “They’re soft, warm colors that don’t jar the senses.”

The furniture the couple purchased is a mix of European-style reproductions and a few vintage pieces. Pedigree was no issue for Treanna, who combined a 1920s credenza and cabinet from Spain with a new dining table purchased

at the Los Angeles Design Center plus accent pieces from local shops. “I’ve bought things everywhere, from Ross to the highest end stores,” she said.

Even with all of this richness, the Smoot house offers up reminders of its rural setting. Earthy Spanish tiles ground the luxurious space and, on a practical note, make dust brought in from the vineyards easy to clean. And while Treanna would have loved to decorate with silks, sturdy fabrics like brocades and tapestries stand up to daily use and the area’s intense sunlight.

She also enjoys injecting her own unique personality into the house. Her favorite signature is animal prints – a zebra skin under kitchen table and leopard print chairs in the living room. Again, she derives inspiration from her closet. “I’ve been wearing animal prints since I was 16, she said. “I like the feeling of richness they give.”

The house has inspired the Smoots to entertain, often on a grand scale. They host large, elegant dinner parties in the open, airy living room and capacious dining room that comfortably seats 12. A large mirror set within an arch in the dining room heightens the formality and drama of the room. It adds to the festive feel of a dinner party when a crowd is reflected and seemingly doubled.

Despite its formality and elegance, the Smoot home is clearly one that puts guests at ease. Treanna sums it up: “Dressy, casual, comfortable – these are the three things I strive for in my home.”



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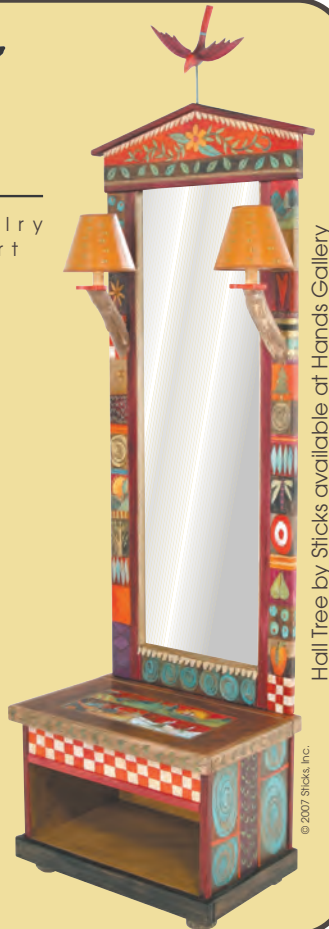


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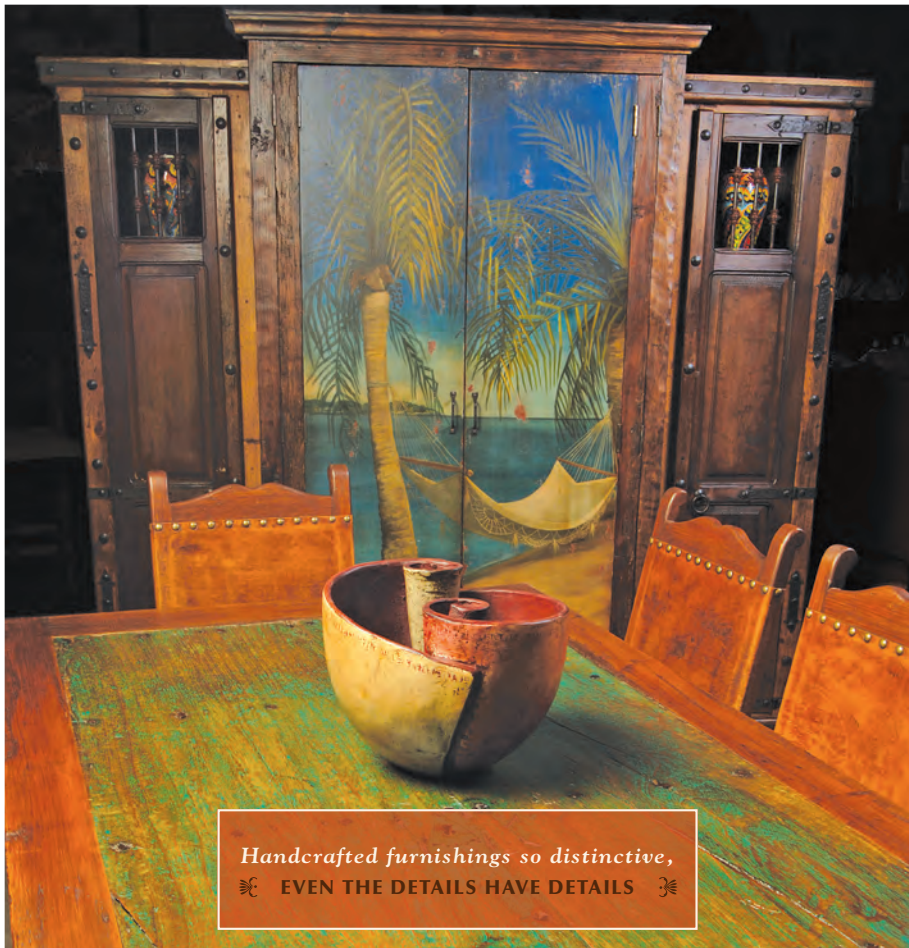
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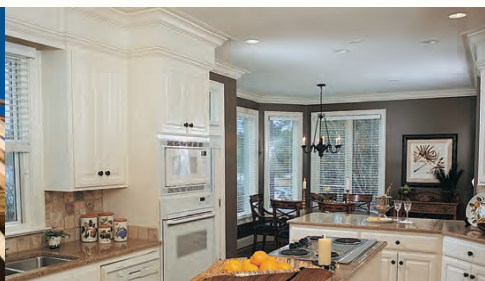
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WRITTEN BY REBECCA JURETIC • PHOTOGRAPHED BY LANCE KINNEY



Renovating a farmhouse, with feeling

Robert and Sherry Gilson always liked the idea of a family compound, where relatives could gather, recreate and strengthen familial bonds.

When they finally resolved to establish their own compound, it happened in what some would consider an unlikely place: an old, dilapidated Mennonite farmhouse on the rural outskirts of Paso Robles.

They found the property in 1998 and immediately saw potential in its sprawling 40 acres. They also liked that there were two separate structures: a 1,200 square foot farm house, which was built in 1897, and a 2,500-square-foot dairy barn which they believe was built in the area's very last Mennonite barn-raising, probably in

the 1910s.

Getting the property in shape would be no small task. The farmhouse was completely gutted and would need everything from new wiring and plumbing to windows and doors. The dairy barn, previously used as a rental, required cosmetic updates in addition to earthquake retrofitting and foundation repairs.

Landscaping on the property was nonexistent. "It was just a dirt pile with weeds," Sherry recalled.

Initially, family and friends were not optimistic. "A lot of people said we should just tear it all down and build new," she said.

(continued on next page)

PRESERVING THE CHARACTER of the old Mennonite property was foremost to Robert and Sherry Gilson. They renovated a dairy barn for a family guesthouse rather than change the small main dwelling, above. At right, a view from the kitchen.





(from previous page)

But the Gilsons have a well-known affection for historic buildings. As real estate developers, they were responsible for renovating many of the historic structures in downtown Paso Robles.

“It’s so easy to tear down and rebuild,” said Sherry. “It takes more time, effort and money to maintain the integrity of the building, to keep what’s there and make it better. But it preserves the character and quaintness of the area.”

Sherry is also an interior designer who pulled together the country European-style décor of Paso Robles’ upscale Hotel Cheval.

Naturally she was eager to lend her skills to the renovation of the newly acquired family compound.

The Gilsons selected materials that maintained the structure’s historic authenticity. They covered floors in wire-brushed wide-plank fir. For walls, they used a combination of pine paneling and bead board. They selected wood windows in a design that Sherry said is “reminiscent of the 1800s and early 1900s.”

One of Sherry’s trademark techniques is using traditional materials in unusual ways, what she calls putting a “twist” on a space. In this spirit, she used bead board on a coffered ceiling in the farmhouse and tin ceiling

panels on the kitchen walls.

Other upgrades were chosen for the family’s comfort. To the barn house-turned-guest house, they added a sun porch as well as a bunk house with pool table and bunk beds – now a favorite hangout for the younger set. A pool house was built to include a wine room and a dining room that seats 20.

Sherry designed the interior in a style she calls “California country;” her updated interpretation of country farmhouse style. Her rustic furniture, mainly American, English and French country antiques, has clean lines and few fussy details. Sea grass rugs allude to

(continued on page 26)

TIN CEILING PANELS are an inventive touch on kitchen walls in the original farmhouse, top. To maintain the structure’s historical authenticity, the Gilsons sacrificed the convenience of large modern appliances like Sub-Zero refrigerators. At top right is a view of the barn house living area; at right, the dining room in the farmhouse.





CHINTZ IN A BEDROOM and chickens in the yard recall the origins of the original Mennonite property, now renovated as a family compound for the Gilsons.



(from page 24)

the coast. Wrought iron fixtures hint at the Tuscan influence in this area's wine country.

Sherry accessorized the two buildings, especially the barn house, with a lighthearted approach. She picked up an old demonstration cow, used to teach novice milkmaids, to adorn a living room console table. Antique gaming wheels sit on a ledge above the front door. A lampshade depicting an assemblage of Harvey girls, the famous train station waitresses of the 1800s, is a tribute to Sherry's grandfather, who was a chef at the Union Train Station in Los Angeles.

She believes that creating a fun, playful space is an important part of building good memories for her family. "It's more interesting, more family-friendly, and it shows your personality," she said.

Landscaping was equally important to the Gilsons. In addition to their pool, they installed extensive gardens, including an organic vegetable garden that now contributes to many family meals. They also built a pen for their four Barbados lambs and an elaborate French-style coop that houses 60 chickens and two turkeys.

"I love chickens. They're just hysterical to

watch, and our guests can go out and pick eggs," said Sherry.

To preserve the historic character of the house, the Gilsons made some sacrifices. Most notably, they kept the two kitchens small and vintage in design, resisting the urge to make room for a Sub-Zero refrigerator and professional range, which would have made large family meals more manageable. "We couldn't go in and put in a super modern kitchen. It would destroy what the house is," Sherry explained.

Nine months after starting work on the property, the family compound was ready for hosting the intimate gatherings and raucous reunions the Gilsons had always envisioned. Thanksgiving has now become a much-anticipated family tradition, with more than 20 relatives arriving from around the country. "I have this big Italian family, three generations with kids running around. It gets really loud," said Sherry.

The Gilsons have also hosted two family weddings on the property. To them, it is evidence that fond memories have already been built. "The younger generation is growing attached to it," she said. "You stay in touch with your aunts and uncles, grandparents and great grandparents. It's just a nice tradition."



HUMOROUS NOSTALGIC TOUCHES include a lampshade depicting the famous Harvey Girls of the 19th century, top left, a tribute to Sherry's grandfather who was a chef at Los Angeles' Union Station, and an old demonstration cow used to teach milkmaids on a living room console table, left.



DECIDEDLY NOT PART of the old property is a new pool, a popular spot at Gilson family gatherings.



THE RENOVATED DAIRY BARN holds a table to seat 20. Sherry Gilson used bead board on the vaulted ceiling for a historic look.



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A Spanish villa in Templeton

ONCE AN 1,800-SQUARE-FOOT COUNTRY HOUSE, an 18-month remodel project has transformed Derek Brook's home into a 5,000-square-foot hacienda on 70 acres in Templeton. Brook and his late wife were inspired by area missions and 1930s homes in Santa Barbara County.

WRITTEN BY PATRICK PEMBERTON • PHOTOGRAPHED BY STEPHANIE LAIRD

The centerpiece of Derek Brook's hacienda-style home is a small tower that peers over the rest of the house.

Once considered for a spacious entryway, the tower is now a 2-story structure, the top floor reserved as a shrine for Brook's wife, who died of cancer while the couple was building their dream home.

"She made me promise absolutely that I'd go ahead with it, even though she knew she wouldn't see the finished product," Brook said. "And I wasn't sure I would, but I prom-

ised her, and I held my promise."

Sue Brook never got to see her house completed. But the 5,000-square-foot villa has her touch all over it. Inspired by California's missions and homes built in Montecito and Santa Barbara in the 1930s, the home is a throwback to days gone by – an elegant yet rustic nod to the state's Spanish roots.

Derek and Sue Brook were living in Edna Valley when they bought the property 10 years ago. Brook, a veterinarian specializing in horses, needed more acreage. (He owned a

horse plasma/blood donor business, which he has since sold.) So they found a 70-acre ranch in Templeton with an 1,800-square-foot country house built in the 1980s.

The Brooks knew they wanted to remodel the home, and they wanted to make it substantially bigger. And they knew they wanted to model their home after area missions they had visited. So they went on a shopping spree, visiting a variety of local businesses to fulfill their vision.

(continued on next page)





BRITS WHO LIVE in foreign countries tend to seek each other out, said Brook, who relocated from England 30 years ago. The artwork on the reading room fireplace (top far left) was created by a British artist living in Santa Barbara.

BROOK'S HOME CONTRIBUTED NICELY to the local economy. The Italian style found in much of the house was purchased at Artisan Tile & Marble in San Luis Obispo. The brickwork around the oven was completed by Shell Beach resident Tony Heaton. Cabinets were bought from Sligh Cabinets in Paso Robles.

EVEN NEW ITEMS in Brook's home look rustic. Sandblasters and chainsaws made the ceiling beams look aged. (Brook himself ground the wood.) The kitchen table is new but features a rustic touch (bottom far left).

WITH NO BUDGET WORRIES, Brook said he and his wife, Sue, had lots of fun shopping for items for their new house. Some items, though, including old paintings, were actually family heirlooms from Brook's home in England.



(from previous page)

"You know how the inside of the old (San Luis Obispo) mission looks," Brook said. "It's a bit crumbly and some of the paint is falling off and faded. That was the effect we were trying to get."

While they wanted something that looked both old and Spanish, there had to be compromises. Much of the furniture looks old but is actually newer. And some of the old things Brook introduced to the house – like paintings that date back two and three centuries – are family heirlooms from his native England. But somehow it blends together.

"It's a bit eclectic, but when you mix anything old it tends to work," Brook said. "It's all country rustic."

With a fairly clear idea of what they wanted at the outset, the Brooks enlisted Shell Beach architect Steve Puglisi to see it through.

"We pretty much designed it, and we told him to make it legal," Brook said.

Ames Construction of Santa Margarita built the residence, and much of the interior décor came from local businesses. Floor tiles were purchased from Artisan Tile & Marble in San Luis Obispo. Some of the carpets were found at Old World Rugs in San Luis Obispo. Kitchen cabinetry came from Sligh Cabinets in Paso Robles, and light fixtures were purchased from Paso Robles Iron Works.

Things that weren't old, like the wood ceiling beams, were altered to appear aged.

"We took new Douglas fir, and we distressed it with things like a chainsaw and sandblasting," Brook said.

The process was actually pretty fun, and the more imprecise the beams, the better they looked, he added.

"We didn't want anything smooth and shiny."

The brick used in walkways and fire-

places, purchased near the Mexican border, also fits that bill. Like the roof tiles, they weren't machine-made so there is little uniformity.

"This brick aged rather quickly and rather well," Brook said, "which is what I wanted. A lot of the brick walkways now have a bit of moss on them, which I think looks great. They look like they've been here 60 years, rather than six years."

That rustic look even comes up in a few surprising spots, like the shower in the guest bathroom. Where one might typically find a glass shower door, there's a wooden one.

"I just don't like glass because it never looks clean," he said.

Brook found the wood door with an Indian flair at Habitat Furniture in San Luis Obispo. "It looks like going into an old saloon," he said.

(continued on next page)



SINCE BROOK OFTEN VISITS his home in England, he offers his house as a bed and breakfast, called Sue Casa, while away. The master bathroom, pictured left, offers unobstructed views of the 70-acre ranch.



DEREK BROOK



WARM TEMPLETON NIGHTS make for a cozy outdoor dinner at the Brook house. Mulberry trees provide shade while a full-sized pool offers a chance to get wet. For cooler nights, or just ambience, there's also an outdoor fireplace.



WOOD DOORS ARE FEATURED throughout the Brook house, including the guest bedroom and guest bathroom, pictured above. The guest bathroom features wood, saloon-like doors on the shower. This Mexican-style painted sink – one of two in the bathroom – was obtained at Totally Tile in Paso Robles.

(from previous page)

Templeton's evenings remain fairly warm, and the Brook home takes advantage of that balmy climate with a comfortable outdoor environment. An outdoor fireplace and barbecue pit sits near a heated swimming pool. Fruitless mulberry trees shade for the patio.

While the pool provides for a relaxing environment, the home's tower became the place for deep thought, although it didn't start out that way.

"Originally, it was going to be a big open space with a very high ceiling," Brook said.

Initial plans called for a wrought iron chandelier, but the high ceiling seemed like a waste of space. So someone suggested they put in a floor. The cylinder is too small for a staircase, though, so the tower can only be accessed through an external stairway.

The bottom of the tower still serves as the home's entrance. But the top now acts as somewhat of a shrine for Sue, with photos plus her saddle, tennis racket and other items. Brook goes there "when I'm a bit depressed," he said.

"When I can't find another decent girlfriend, I go up and talk to her," he joked.

Brook lived in the home while it was being

remodeled, and he often invited people working on the home to stay at his place during the construction.

Even after its completion, Brook continues to offer his home to others.

"I go back to England a lot," he said, "and people can come and stay here while I'm gone." He's beginning to rent the house as a bed and breakfast in his absences, calling the venture Sue Casa at Oakbrook (www.suecasa.com).

With the residence finished and his business sold, Brook has time on his hands. "I could do with building another one," he kidded. "I'm bored."

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an asian affair

Asian-Mediterranean fusion may be as old as the days when Marco Polo traversed the Silk Road, but local interior designer Stephen Patrick has put a new spin on the idea, fearlessly melding Tuscan and Asian elements in the opulent Edna Valley home he shares with his partner, Todd LeMay.

Patrick is part owner of Atmospheres, a San Luis Obispo home décor store and interior design studio. In drawing up the plans for the residence, he collaborated with Nipomo draftsman Amy Henry. The two chose to stay with tried-and-true Mediterranean architecture, designing a structure that Patrick calls “simple and unobtrusive.”

“It’s what’s happening in the area, with the beautiful vineyards here,” he said, adding that the three-story height and an enclosed courtyard were classic Mediterranean features that appealed to him.

But step through the courtyard and, as Patrick puts it, “that’s when the surprises start happening.”

The drama of Asian design suits Patrick’s preference for high style. “I like things more dressed up, not casual,” he said. “In Asian design, colors are strong, rich and vivid. The look is very regal and imperial.”

In Patrick’s opinion, the warm, earthy quality of Mediterranean materials provides the perfect backdrop for splashy, bold Asian accents. “Mediterranean colors are softer, more muted – the caramels, tans and slate found in stone,” he said. “Asian has the vivid reds and oranges, golds and metallics. Put them together and they blend beautifully, they play off each other.”

The home’s courtyard is purely Tuscan, as is the foyer with its latte-hued travertine floors inlaid with marble and iron, color-washed sienna walls, muted tapestry fabrics and wrought-iron embellishments. This coolly welcoming space offers a gentle transition from the staid exterior of the house to the bolder elements found within.

Just beyond the foyer, Patrick introduces the first hints of scarlet and gold. And then you arrive at the nucleus of his bold vision: the formal living room.

(continued on page 41)

THE “TATAMI ROOM” with its traditional Japanese dining table offers views of the Tuscan-style courtyard. Simpler lines and less ornamentation was meant to be more restful. The art is by Patrick’s decorative painter, artist Steve Leal. The low table was hand-carved in Japan.

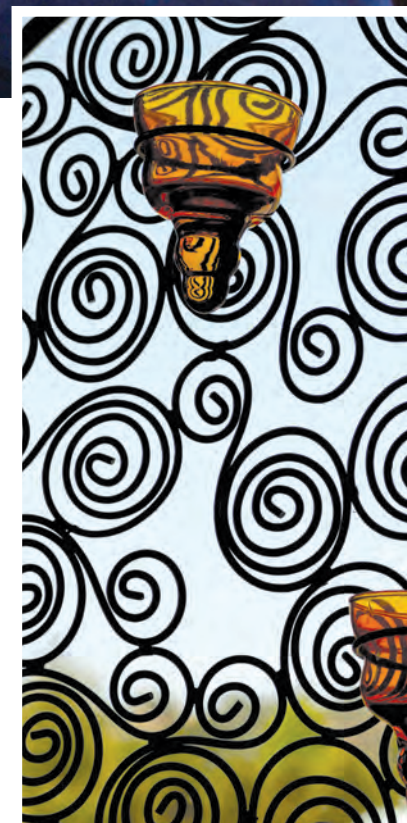
WRITTEN BY REBECCA JURETIC • PHOTOGRAPHED BY LANCE KINNEY

英 袖

英 志
強 情



万事如意



THE FORMAL LIVING ROOM is Patrick's boldest example of Asian-Mediterranean fusion. The coffee table is made from a Tibetan door, and the carved panel above the fireplace is from Thailand. The concrete floors were stained by HA LeMay Concrete of Grover Beach.



THE MASTER BEDROOM IS A COMBINATION of Mediterranean and modern elements. Decorative painter Steve Leal of San Luis Obispo executed the design on the ceiling (as well as a color wash in the home's foyer). Below left is a close-up of the sculpture on the right side of the bedroom.

(from page 38)

Here is a room that vibrates with energy, much of it emanating from the colors Patrick has artfully blended – rich reds, golds, and one royal blue couch, thrown in simply for the surprise factor.

The focal point of the room is the mantel wall, proof of Patrick's love for drama. He chose an intricately carved Chinese-style fireplace surround that he had hand-painted in gold and red lacquer. Above it, he combined an imported Chinese medallion with a pair of dragons, all covered in 19-karat gold and encrusted with hand-applied mirrors and semi-precious gems. Flanking the fireplace, two recessed niches, sitting above built-in cabinets, hold silk pendant lamps from Pakistan. "It makes a very strong statement," he observed.

Even here, a Mediterranean influence is evident: in the classic lines and nail head trim of a sofa, in traditional rope molding on cabinets and wrought-iron accents that echo the sinuous curves of Chinese motifs.

Both Mediterranean and Asian styles can be seriously ornate and, when paired, could easily push a room's decor over the top. Patrick realizes this. "You have to give the eye a chance to rest," he said.

The red color scheme, though bold, contributes

to this sense of rest. Whereas one or two red accents would be jarring to the eye, a similar hue on walls, ceiling, furniture and rugs has an overall effect that is more subtle.

Softer Mediterranean elements also come into play as a restful backdrop. Instead of a busy floor tile, Patrick chose concrete with a stain treatment in burnt rust tones highlighted with black, reminiscent of stone. He also chose wrought iron in shades of brown, believing that black Spanish-style iron would come on too strong.

Just as both Asian and Mediterranean elements can be elaborate, they can also be exquisitely serene. Patrick exhibits this side of his design personality in places of repose. The master bedroom, with its melding of Tuscan and modern design, is, according to Patrick, "a little quieter, more pulled back."

In an area he calls the "tatami room," modeled after traditional Japanese dining rooms with seating around a low table, Patrick employed a simpler interpretation of Asian design. This space offers a Zen-like Japanese aesthetic with cleaner lines and softer colors. "There is less gold here, and more burnt red versus bright Chinese red," he explained. Floors are not traditional tatami straw mats but slate tile that is bor-

(continued on next page)





(from page 41)

dered by shiny Japanese river stones laid out in a serpentine pattern, subtly evocative of water.

In a less obvious way, Asian design permeates the house through principles of feng shui. Although Patrick did not follow the ancient Chinese practice of placement and arrangement of space to achieve harmony with the environment to the letter, he believes that harmony comes through incorporation of the five elements: wood (in furniture and cabinetry), fire (in four separate fireplaces and a strong palette of red), earth (in the abundant use of stone), metal (in gold and iron) and water (in fountains and the use of river stones).

When these elements are in balance, the lines between Asian and Mediterranean naturally blur. “There are a lot of products that are man-made, contrived, plasticized. But natural elements lend themselves to comfort and beauty,” said Patrick. “You find all of these elements in both Asian and Mediterranean design. It’s what makes the two styles work together well. It’s what makes them mesh.”

THE TUSCAN-STYLE COURTYARD, above, is sheltered by high walls which offer protection from the wind. The fireplace is from Fordens in SLO.

THE FOYER IS MEDITERRANEAN in style, below, providing a transitional space from the Mediterranean exterior to the more eclectic interior. The floor was done by Baywood Tile Co. in SLO.



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indigenous by design

David Fross didn't intend to become the proprietor of a plant nursery, but after earning a history degree in 1970, he enrolled in a graduate program in geography at San Jose State University where a botany professor introduced him to native flora.

California's indigenous plants were rarely used in home gardens at the time, but Fross decided to try some when he redesigned his personal garden. Neighbors who liked his unusual plantings asked him to design gardens for them, and soon Fross launched a garden design service that he named Native Sons. Increasingly interested in native plants, Fross transferred to Cal Poly to study agriculture, specializing in horticulture and range management.

A year after Fross received his master's degree in 1978, he and his wife, Rainie, established a nursery on an acre southeast of Arroyo Grande, reusing the name Native Sons. Fross hoped to grow and promote the use of California's native plants, which were not then readily available in the trade. His timing was perfect, coinciding with several drought years and with a nationwide environmental movement advocating the use of regional native plants in home gardens.

Today Native Sons supplies landscape professionals and more than 100 retail nurseries from San Diego to Sonoma counties. A new headquarters and plant propagation area was opened

(continued on next page)

A DEMONSTRATION GARDEN at Native Sons nursery includes a tall fountain that attracts birds and other wildlife. Masses of bunching grasses are interspersed with native California and Mediterranean plants.

WRITTEN BY SHARON CRAWFORD

PHOTOGRAPHED BY LANCE KINNEY





(from previous page)

in 2005, and the nursery continues to grow, spreading over adjoining properties. Although the nursery sells solely to the landscape professionals, two demonstration gardens are open to the public with a third in the works.

Over the years, the nursery has expanded to cover more than eight acres. From a distance, the neat rectangular blocks of one-gallon and five-gallon black pots resemble a patchwork quilt with varied textures and colors. The nursery's three original employees have grown to more than 20 full-time workers, many who live nearby, plus part-time help including local high school students.

The area around the Fross home is both a personal outdoor living space and a testament to native flora. A visitor who walks between the masses of bunching grasses interspersed with colorful native Californian and Mediterranean plants, most growing under the shade of tall oaks and pines, will find it hard to believe that all this has grown from bare ground in just 30 years. The garden has such a naturalistic appearance that first-time visitors occasionally remark, "This is very nice – but where's the garden?"

In fact, Fross' garden is an experimental growing ground for new plants and plant combinations. When Fross speaks of giving a new plant "a trial" in his garden, he's serious. He won't sell plants that need to be coddled, so any plant that cannot survive the benign neg-

lect that is his mode of gardening – primarily because he never has enough time – will not be propagated for sale.

"This garden has taught me so much," Fross said recently. "From a barren patch of ground, it has evolved into a shaded woodland. Along the way, many of the original sun-loving plants have succumbed in the shade. Conversely, a large toyon tree that recently blew down opened up a new sunny patch. The greatest lesson I've learned from my garden is to view such losses not as disasters but as opportunities."

By agreement with a neighbor, a new experimental garden was recently installed beyond a gateway in the wooden fence that separates the two properties. In the neighbor's high, dry and sunny patch, colorful drought-tolerant plants are surrounded by pea gravel mulch. This garden was inspired by Fross's visit to the experimental gravel garden of Beth Chatto, renowned English plantswoman and writer. Fross visits Great Britain regularly to exchange plants and growing tips with several growers who have a new interest in drought-tolerant plants because of recent global climatic changes.

A third demonstration garden is being developed in a newer portion of the nursery across the road. When completed, this large garden will showcase all of the varieties of popular and hardy ceanothus (California lilac) available along with suitable companion plants. A genus with about 60 species and varieties, ceanothus includes trees, shrubs and ground covers. Not coincidentally, Fross co-wrote the 2006 book, "Ceanothus," with Dieter Wilken of the Santa Barbara Botanic Garden. Published by Timber Press, the work was a ten-year enterprise.

Fross is also a co-author of another seminal book, "California Native Plants for the Garden," with Carol Bornstein of the Santa Barbara Botanic Garden and Bart O'Brien of Rancho Santa Ana Botanic Garden, published by Cachuma Press in 2005. Although

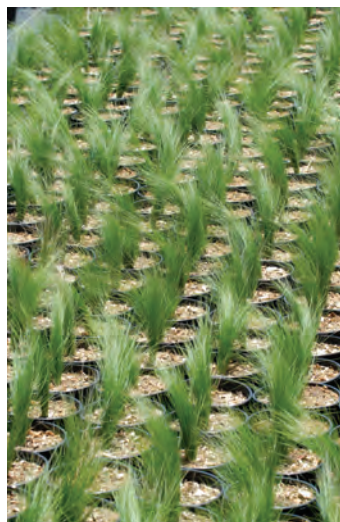
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DAVID FROSS, above, started the Arroyo Grande nursery with his wife, Rainie, in 1979, when drought years were taking their toll on California gardens. Global climate changes have focused increasing attention on Fross' work in propagating native California and Mediterranean flora.





THE NURSERY NOW COVERS 8 acres and from a distance, the neat rectangular blocks of one- and five-gallon black pots resemble a patchwork quilt with various colors and textures. Below, a selection of poppies, flowers and grasses available to professional landscapers and sold at local retail nurseries.





DAVID FROSS tests plants, including the succulents above, in his experimental garden by “benign neglect.” He won’t sell plants that need to be coddled.



A TRADITIONAL COUNCIL RING, a circular sandstone seating wall with a central fire pot, provides a gathering spot for small groups.

(from previous page)

this book was a mere six years in the making, Fross confessed that it was the more difficult project. “When you get three opinionated people who work in diverse growing conditions attempting to reach a consensus on each plant... Well, we had some heat-

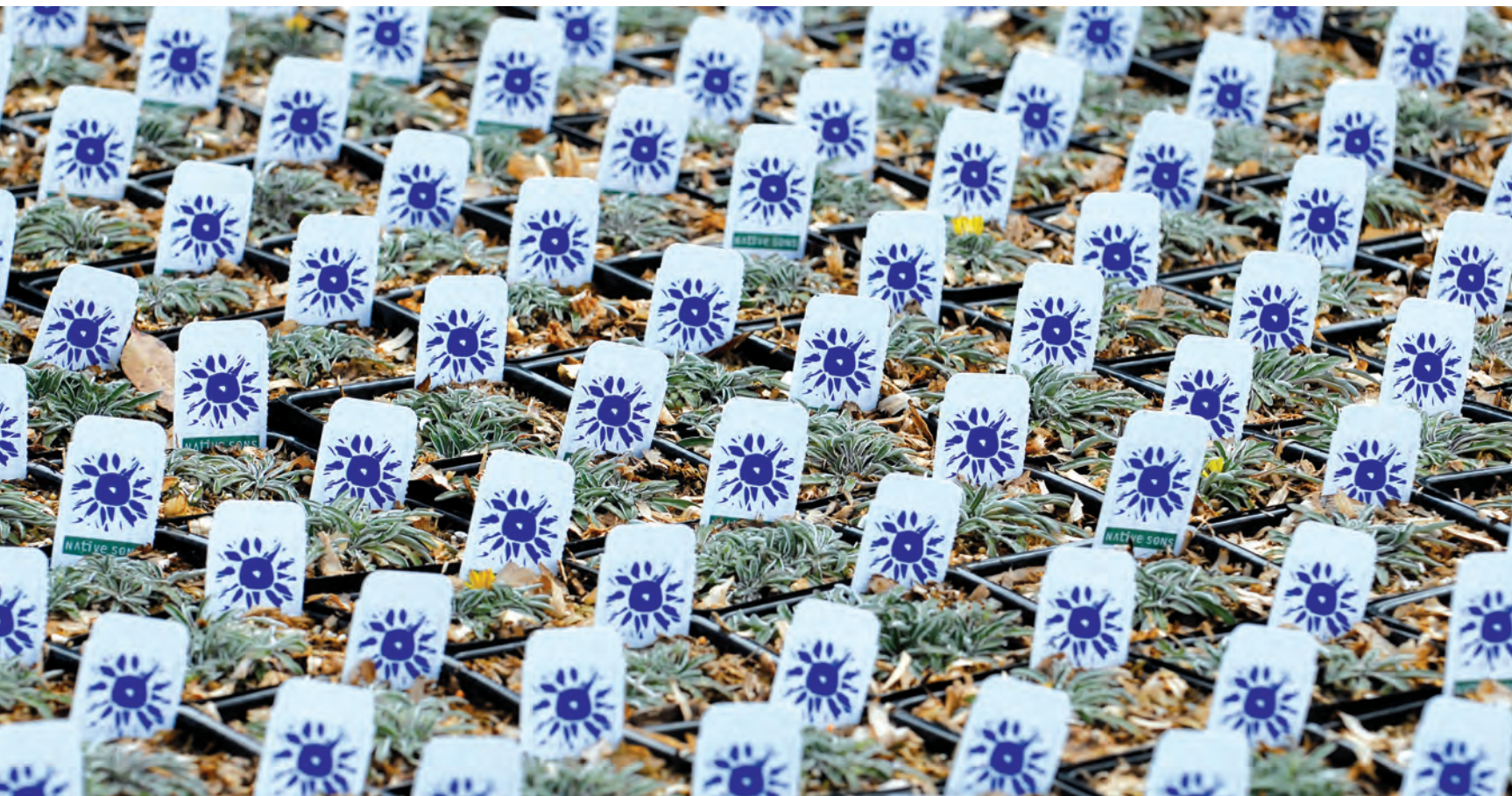
ed discussions,” he recalled.

Through the years, the stock at Native Sons Nursery has grown and changed. No longer restricted to the native plants of California, the nursery now offers plants from all the other Mediterranean climates of the world. Rainie Fross maintains the nursery’s informative Web site, as grower, Cal Poly

professor and author, David is steadfast in his commitment to propagate and promote plants that are both beautiful and environmentally sensible.

As Fross expresses on the nursery Web site, (www.nativeson.com), “We offer these plants with a shared regard for the wonder and grace of the natural world.”

A PARADE OF SMALL PLANTS sporting Native Sons labels. These tags give scientific and common names, whether perennial or annual, the mature height and width, origin, flower color and flowering season plus water requirements and hardiness to cold. Four trucks traverse the Central Coast delivering plants.



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WRITTEN BY DAWN WHITE • PHOTOGRAPHED BY DAVID MIDDLECAMP

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Chef Kirk Sowell explains his approach to cooking simply: "Use good ingredients and try not to mess them up."

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As the executive chef at Summerwood Winery & Inn, an upscale boutique property in the Paso Robles wine country, he oversees a constantly changing menu filled with a range of sumptuous ingredients. An inch-high stack of menus show off what



KIRK SOWELL

he's accomplished at the inn over the past few months.

Sowell and Sous Chef Robert Smith serve hors d'oeuvres and desserts daily and prepare four-course dinners every Saturday.

Sowell recommends home cooks prepare his pistachio-encrusted scallops and the phyllo-wrapped raspberries because both dishes are simple, light and versatile.

The scallops can work as an entrée or appetizer. The raspberry phyllo dessert is ideal for a warm evening. Sip some rosé wine between bites and lose yourself in the essence of late summer cuisine.



PISTACHIO CRUSTED SCALLOPS

SERVES 4

Ingredients:

- 8 large scallops**
- 1 cup toasted pistachios**
- 2 cups all purpose flour**
- 1 teaspoon kosher salt**
- 1 cup buttermilk**
- 1 tablespoon tobiko**
(flying fish roe, optional)

Green tomato ingredients:

- 8 3/8" sliced green tomatoes** (best flavor and texture are those just beginning to change color)
- 2 cups all purpose flour**
- 1/2 teaspoon kosher salt**
- 1/2 teaspoon turmeric**
- 1/2 teaspoon California chili powder**
- 1/4 teaspoon garlic powder**

Scallion aioli:

- 1 cup mayonnaise**
- Juice from 1 lemon**
- 1/4 teaspoon black pepper**
- 1 tablespoon Frank's Hot Sauce**
- 2 tablespoon chopped scallions**

Mix scallion aioli ingredients together. Aioli can be refrigerated for a few weeks and used as a condiment on other items.

Scallops:

Soak scallops in buttermilk for 20 minutes. Pulse pistachios in a food processor until they are finely chopped. Combine flour, salt and pistachios in a large bowl. Remove scallops from buttermilk and toss in dry mixture, then press them into the mix. Set aside.

Green Tomatoes:

Mix dry ingredients and toss green tomatoes together. Let sit in dry mix for a few minutes.

Pan fry over medium heat in a non-stick sauté pan with a bit of oil. Flip after edges turn brown.

As soon as tomatoes are done, sauté the scallops in the same oil, turning down the heat a little until pistachios turn brown.

Scallops are done when the center is almost clear and most of the scallop is opaque white.

Assembly:

Set 2 fried tomatoes at the center of a plate, place a scallop on each. Dab a dollop of aioli on top, garnish with a pinch of tobiko and sprig of a basil leaves.

SOWELL in the Summerwood Winery & Inn kitchen, assembling his scallop dish.





PISTACHIO CRUSTED SCALLOPS are served on fried green tomatoes. A dollop of orange Japanese tobiko on the scallion aioli adds an artistic touch, but it's optional for those who don't like fish roe.

RASPBERRY PHYLLO

SERVES 4

Ingredients:

- 1 cup C&H sugar**
(must be cane sugar)
- 1 vanilla bean**
- 3 packages fresh raspberries**
(about 60 berries each)
- 8 tablespoons flour**
- 1 package phyllo dough**
- 1 stick (4 ounces) butter, melted**

Preheat oven to 375 degrees

To make the vanilla sugar:

Place sugar in a sealable container. Slice vanilla bean in half lengthwise and scrape the small back seeds from the pod into the sugar. Add seeds and empty pods to the sugar and seal the container.

Shake the container vigorously until there are no clumps of vanilla seeds left.

To assemble the raspberry dessert:

Mix the flour and vanilla sugar. Toss the raspberries in the mix until coated.

Place one sheet of phyllo on a cutting board and paint lightly with melted butter. Fold in half and then fold in half again to make a 5½ inch by 8½ inch rectangle that has 4 layers to it. Make 4 of these.

Place 12 to 15 raspberries in the center of each square and sprinkle some of the leftover sugar flour mix over the raspberries.

Pull each corner together to make a "bag" and pinch together to keep it together. Paint the outside with a little melted butter and place on a sheet pan lined with a silicone baking sheet or greased with non-stick spray. Do not use parchment paper.

Bake at 375° until brown, about 24 minutes. Let cool for 5 minutes. Serve barely warm or at room temperature.



PHYLLO-WRAPPED raspberries are best served warm or room temperature. And yes, at informal dinners, guests can eat them with their fingers.



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WRITTEN BY ROCHELLE REED • PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF SEEKERS GLASS GALLERY

a touch of glass

Flowers add a welcome touch of color to a room, but they're not always the most practical of accessories, especially for those juggling work and family, traveling or maintaining a second home. We've noticed a new trend: handblown art glass sculptures standing in for floral bouquets.

This handsome vase, *Sunset Forest* by glassblowers Ken and Ingrid Hanson, is from Seekers Glass Gallery, 4090 Burton Drive, Cambria.

927-4352 or www.SeekersGlass.com



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That's why it's so important to find out the "inside story"—what materials were used, how they were put together, and how the manufacturer stands behind it—before you buy any piece of upholstered furniture.

While many manufacturers prefer not to share this kind of information, we couldn't be prouder of the way Donna's upholstered furniture is crafted, and the unmatched durability and comfort it delivers. Not only when it's new, but for decades to come. And we're confident that the more you know about Donna's, the easier your choice will be.



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