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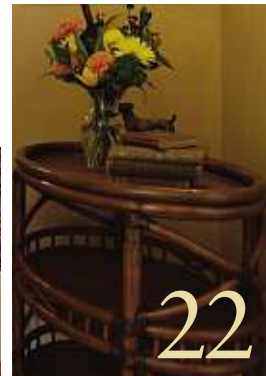
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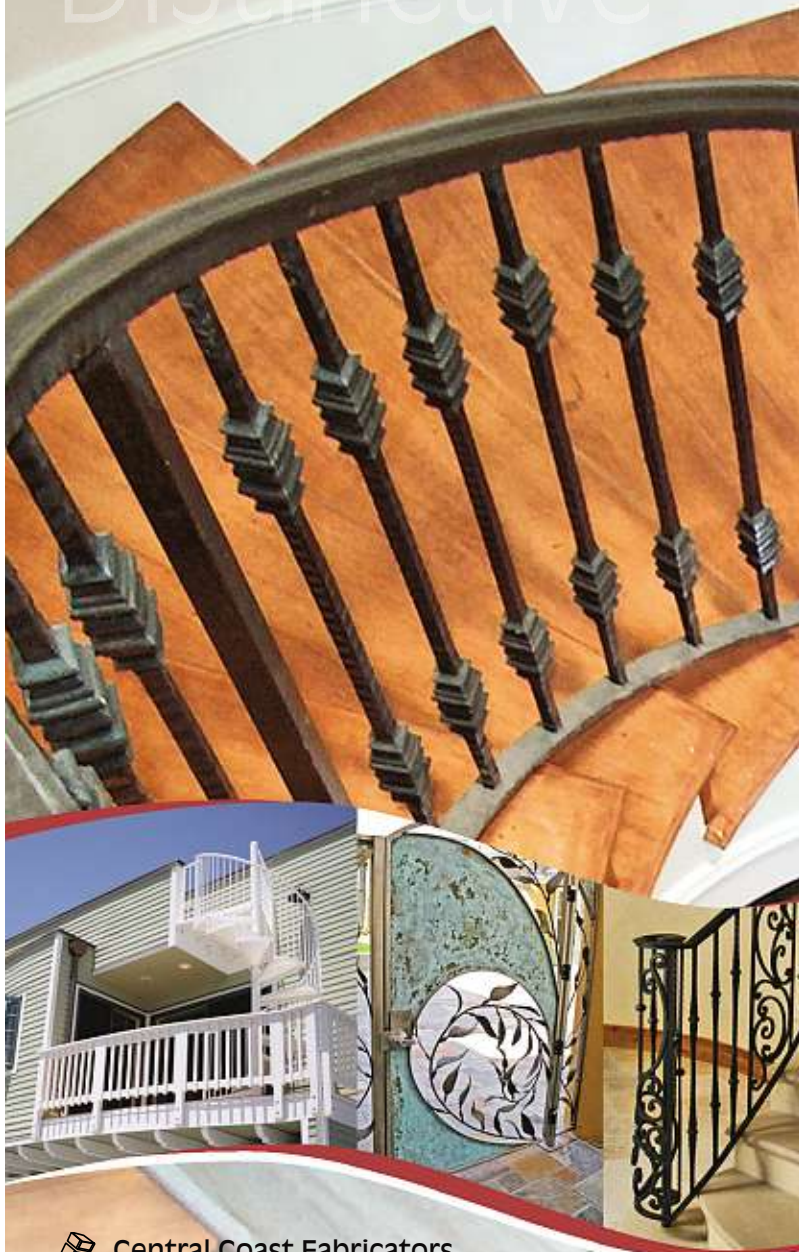
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The kitchen in the home of Clint and Connie Pearce. PHOTOGRAPH BY LANCE KINNEY



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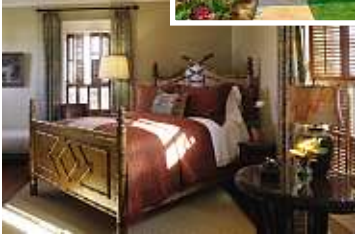


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## our contributors



**Rebecca Juretic** writes a weekly feature on local residences for The Tribune's Home section as well as the section's Design Notebook column. And she writes about three of the five homes featured in this issue of Haven. A native of Paso Robles, Rebecca earned a degree in journalism at the University of California at Santa Barbara. She lives in San Luis Obispo with her husband and 2-year-old son, Garrett.

**Lance Kinney** has an unusual but fitting background for his work as chief photographer for Haven and The Tribune's weekly Home section - he is also a building contractor. From his viewpoint behind the lens of a digital camera, Lance sees both the statement made by a home's designer as well as what a homeowner has brought to the residence via colors and furnishings. You'll see his work on four of the five local homes and gardens shown in this issue.



**Dawn White**, who reports for both the Business and Features desks at The Tribune, discovered that the crisply designed Garcia home ("Simply Elegant" begins on page 14) was actually a happy compromise between the homeowners' different styles, while the owner of an elaborate Pismo Beach property followed her own clear vision ("A Garden of Beauty and Splendor," page 38). Dawn also interviewed chef David McWilliam of the Gardens of Avila restaurant at Sycamore Mineral Springs for our Gatherings holiday recipes feature on page 50.

**Joe Johnston**, Tribune staffer who photographed The Cass House ("A New Lease on Life," page 22, paddled right by the newly restored inn and restaurant on a six-day, 98-mile kayak trip down the coast of San Luis Obispo County for a Tribune story in August. A Cal Poly English grad, Joe's work ranges from hard news to artful coverage of homes.



**David Middlecamp**, ("Gatherings," page 50) got his hands dirty with newsprint delivering papers in the early '70s. He graduated from Cal Poly's journalism program, preferring the photo to the printed word. When he joined The Tribune 21 years ago, essential job skills included developing and hand-printing black and white photos. Today David spends much of his time on the computer, creating visual slide shows for The Tribune's Web site, [www.sanluisobispo.com](http://www.sanluisobispo.com).

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## table settings with holiday flair



**LIBBY LANGDON**, a commentator on HGTV's "Small Space, Big Style," offers chic, quick and easy decorating ideas for holiday table settings. At right, Langston snipped cuttings from rosemary and sage, then tied them around silverware with a red ribbon to create what she calls her "30 second place card." Above, Langdon gathered pine cones and leaves, and then spray-painted a select few with gold to decorate place settings. Best to think at least a day ahead to allow paint to dry when creating this one.



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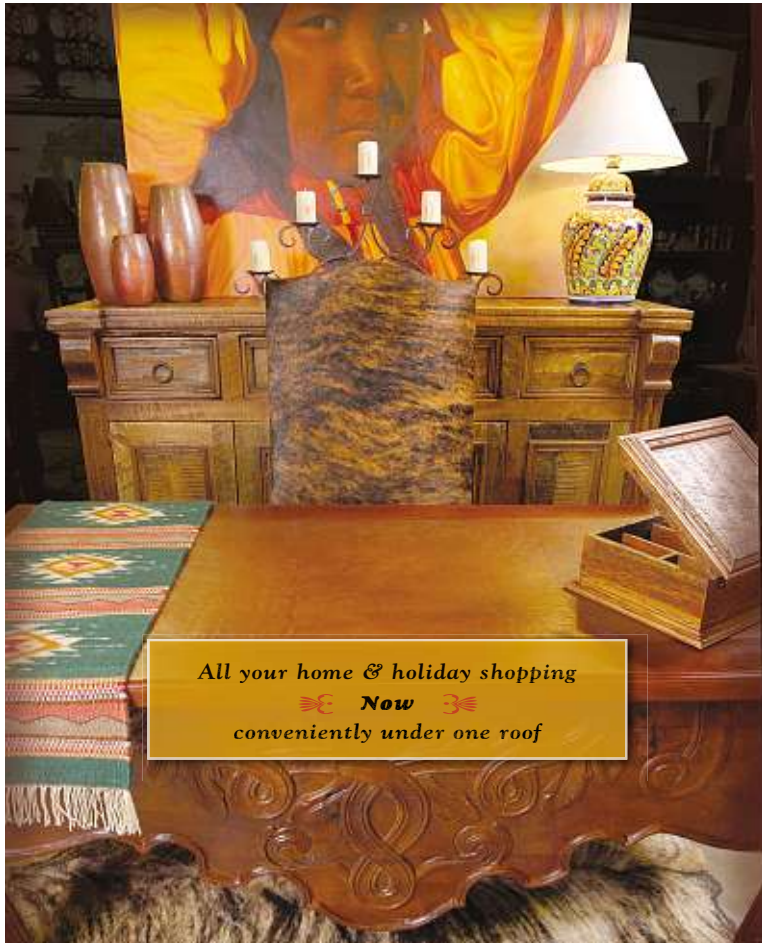


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# simply elegant

WRITTEN BY DAWN WHITE  
PHOTOGRAPHED BY LANCE KINNEY



**CRISP AND UNCLUTTERED** design defines the Garcia residence in San Luis Obispo. Above, the entry and yard are formal and manicured yet soft enough to create a warm welcome for guests. Inside, vignettes in a bedroom and on a mantel are simple yet elegant.





Having two designers in one family would likely be covered by homeowners desiring stylish yet comfortable homes. But for George and April Garcia, it provided a challenge.

George is drawn to contemporary design elements often found in urban areas while April wanted the softer hues and traditional fixtures found in many suburban homes.

To build their San Luis Obispo residence, the pair quickly learned to compromise.

The result is an inviting and decidedly chic house on the outskirts of downtown San Luis Obispo that has a modern edge to its conventional style.

The house is tall and narrow, reminiscent of the tall row houses in San Francisco. Its footprint on the property is a mere 1,100 square feet, although the two-story house is much larger and includes three bedrooms and three baths.

Carefully manicured shrubs and trees line the entry walkway. The front door is dramatic and noticeable – black with a substantial white frame, similar to the facades of many Bay Area homes. Once indoors, the floorplan is an eclectic twist on the modern home: there is no office or great room, but there is a formal sitting area and a music room for George and their two children next to the foyer.

“We wanted private and public spaces,” said April. “The back is more laid back, a place where the kids hang out.”

The front sitting room is the most formal, elegant and sophisticated area of the house. Plush chairs face each other to promote conversation and all electronic devices are hidden. A fireplace and crystal chandelier warm up the simple yet elegant space, often used for welcoming guests.

Nearby, the dining room boasts a dramatic

**SOFTLY COLORED WALLS** are accentuated with crisp white moldings throughout the house. From top, the dining room, living room and master bedroom.

painting by Mark Beck, an artist the couple has long appreciated. The painting depicts two homes on one lot, like the property they live on now. (Their garage is housed in a separate back unit). Built-in cabinetry with darker toned interiors adds a bit of depth to the space and maintains the clean look of the room.

The music room has a curved wall around the windows similar to the curvature of a piano. The natural color of the maple wood and black leather seating make it a charming yet masculine room that is ideal for lounging.

Contrasting colors are found throughout most of the home. Chocolate-colored wood floors were stained with alcohol to create the darkest brown hue possible. Light and neutral shades on the walls provide dramatic contrast.

The kitchen is one of the family's favorite rooms, and not only because the Garcias like to entertain. Bigger than most spaces, the kitchen is filled with commercial-grade stainless steel appliances and cleverly incorporates black, white and red tones. Smooth marble countertops and a natural-colored wood table paired with black chairs continue the contemporary yet homey theme.

Beyond the kitchen, the family room is a relaxed, airy space with tall windows providing ample views of the greenery in the backyard. Cozy couches, plush chairs and tan plaid carpeting make it a favorite gathering place for the couple's children and their friends. The fireplace, one of four in the residence, is double-sided so it can be used indoors and out.

Upstairs, the kids' spaces are all their own. Their daughter's pink and brown Parisian-themed room seems to be the personal space of a future designer. For a birthday present, she picked out its fixtures and created her own love-

(continued on next page)

**LIVING SPACES** such as the kitchen and family room are warm and inviting. A daughter's pink and brown Parisian-themed bedroom sports a creative blend of fabrics and framed prints of the Eiffel Tower.





**IN THE BACKYARD**, above, a lawn area is bordered with formal hedges.

**THE MASTER BATHROOM**, at left, includes matching vessel sinks and vintage-style fixtures plus three light sconces.

**A BASEBALL THEME** defines the bedroom of the Garcias' son, top right.

**THE SIMPLE TOUCH** of a vintage picnic box displayed in a bookcase, at right, sets off a bright red leather arm chair and ottoman.



(from previous page)

ly, feminine but very contemporary space.

Their boy's room is adorned in baseball-themed paraphernalia, a favorite pastime for both father and son.

The couple's bedroom was a compromise for the duo. Soft gold tones make it a cheerful and soothing space. Despite George's reluctance, they installed white crown molding.

"I reminded him that it's our home – not a project," April joked.

Subtle touches such as a contemporary-style cherrywood ceiling fan fulfilled some of George's vision for the room.

The bedroom is not the grand space of many modern master bedrooms, but the couple wanted it intimate. It includes a private balcony, a relaxing place to enjoy views of Cerro San Luis.

The master bath is cheerful, contemporary and sleek. A cherrywood table serves as the base for the sink area and clean white tiles offset light tan walls. Marble is again used on the countertops – unlike today's popular granite – because of its timeless appeal.

"We kept the palette simple and repeated certain elements throughout, keeping a clean and simple look," explained April.

Without a doubt, the Garcias' careful design is a valuable lesson for all homeowners.



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**THE STATELY VICTORIAN CASS HOUSE**, built in 1875 by Cayucos founder Capt. James Cass, has been sensitively renovated and turned into an English-style inn by Gary and Nancy Bagnall. Landscape design was by Firma of San Luis Obispo.

WRITTEN BY REBECCA JURETIC • PHOTOGRAPHED BY JOE JOHNSTON



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**THE INN'S DINING ROOM** is decorated with paintings from Gary Bagnall's art collection including a 100-year-old reproduction of "Psyche" by Paul Thurman. The painting was made famous in advertisements by the White Rock beverage company.

## A restoration that took 14 years to complete

Gary Bagnall's ardor for historic homes was forged on long car trips with his father. "When we were kids, he would drive us around historic neighborhoods. He'd point out different architectural styles, and we'd admire the details like doors and moldings," he said.

Gary's father was an architect who flipped historic buildings all around California, including several of the family's homes. "He'd buy the worst house in the best neighborhood," recalled Gary. "By the time he sold it, it would be the most gorgeous."

So perhaps it was the spirit of his father who provoked Gary to take on the monumental task of restoring Cayucos' historic Cass House.

When he first laid eyes on the structure, the 1875 Eastlake Victorian across from the Cayucos pier had been abandoned for 25 years. "It was eight months from collapsing in on itself," he said. "But it was such a charming old house. It just needed someone to take care of it."

Gary had visions of turning the old house into an English-style inn and restaurant—appropriate since the home's original resident, Capt. James

Cass who was the founder of Cayucos, had emigrated from England. Gary hoped to return the dilapidated structure to its original status as hub of the small seaside town.

What he did not anticipate was that the remodel would take 14 years and more time and money than he had imagined. Part of the challenge was the sheer amount of work involved in making the building structurally sound, which included replacing its foundation. "It was sitting on dirt and pier pilings," he said. "It took a year just to jack it up and pour the foundation."

The sluggish pace was also set by Gary's insistence on using historically accurate materials—and that even included lumber. When replacing redwood siding which had been sandblasted by ocean winds, he searched far and wide for old wood. He finally found a 100-year-old redwood water tower in the Carrizo plains whose boards were reclaimed and re-milled for the house.

Shunning reproduction hardware and faux-anything, he traveled to architectural salvage yards as far away as New York and Atlanta, on the lookout for everything from antique door-

knobs to electrical plates and window sashes.

So exacting were his standards and so intricate the work that three general contractors came and went before Gary hired his nephew, Shane Bagnall, who is an engineer. One contractor left hastily after Gary discovered he neglected to install the exact historically accurate unglazed 1-inch nonbeveled hexagon tile on a bathroom floor.

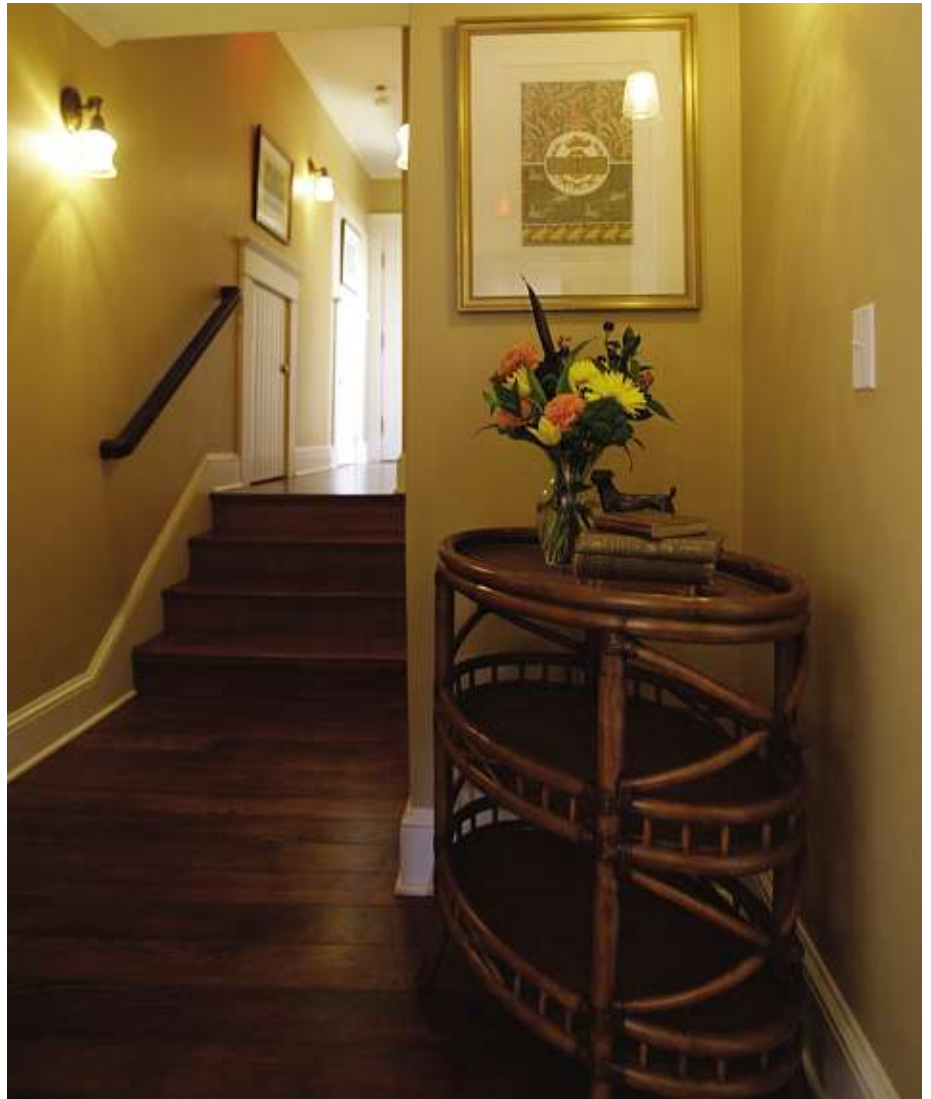
As if the project alone wasn't enough, Gary has a demanding job as president of San Luis Obispo's Zoo Med Laboratories, which manufactures exotic pet products. About halfway through the restoration, the time and financial demands of the restoration began putting a strain on his marriage to wife Nancy Bagnall.

So Gary and Nancy put the house on the market. But after six months, no reasonable offers had surfaced.

"I made up with my wife and we kept going," he said.

Work progressed at the same deliberate pace.

(continued on next page)



**MOHAIR VELVET CHAIRS** and an antique Eastlake fireplace found in Cincinnati grace the parlor, above left. An Asian-inspired cane table sits in a hallway, above right. Hanging above it is a framed plate from a William Morris wallpaper pattern. The dining room features an Arts & Crafts-style table and chairs. The shutters are original to the house.





**INTERIOR DESIGNER ANNE FORTINI** gave the master suite a subtle, contemporary twist with a wrought-iron four-poster bed.

(from previous page)

Special knives were created to replace missing moldings. Three different woodworkers were called in before shutters were refinished to Gary's satisfaction. Installing the commercial kitchen, necessary for the inn's restaurant, provided its own set of headaches.

But soon, as renovations began drawing to a close, Gary realized it was time to start thinking about interior design.

"I got stuck," he admits. "I'm just not a designer."

So Gary enlisted the help of Anne Fortini of Fortini Home in San Luis Obispo to decorate the five bedroom suites, parlor and dining room. Unlike the restoration, interior design would be geared toward the comfort of the inn's guests.

"I wanted it to be really elegant but not so Victorian that it would be a turnoff to people who stayed there," he said.

Thankfully, this too was consistent with the history of the Cass House. Unlike more ornate Victorian homes, Eastlake or "stick" style homes, which are common in San Francisco, feature cleaner lines and less clutter, sharing some principles with the Arts & Crafts movement.

Fortini began with classic Eastlake design methods. Instead of fussy Victorian wallpapers, an Eastlake house had painted walls. So Gary

researched and selected a historically accurate palette of colors – mostly golds, taupes and blues. Then paint was applied with a washing technique, typical of the time, which renders visible brush strokes.

Eastlake fabrics were rich and sumptuous, so Fortini selected an array of velvet, wool, mohair and linen for upholstery and draperies. Some fabrics feature designs by Victorian-era textile artist William Morris, who was a founder of the arts and crafts movement.

Gary has been an antiques collector since his youth, and the lengthy remodel gave him time to acquire furniture and art for the inn. He found just the right Eastlake fireplace in an antique store in Cincinnati. While browsing Arroyo Grande antique store The Green Vase, he stumbled across a hand-painted Eastlake bed. "I walked in and it hit me like a ton of bricks," he said. "It's incredible to find an Eastlake bed with original paint."

Most of the furniture, however, had to be custom made. This was a practical consideration in many cases, as pieces had to perform specific functions – concealing televisions, storing clothes (there are no closets in the rooms), and providing a roomier bed than the average Victorian antique.

Gary insisted on American-made reproductions, most of which are simple in style, evoking the

straight lines and geometry of Arts & Crafts design. Bamboo-style pieces add interest to the mix. "There was a lot of trade with Japan at the time, so that's typical of the era," explained Fortini.

Fortini also took some license in incorporating modern versions of classic designs. For instance, the Victorian four-poster bed is given a contemporary twist when reinvented in wrought iron. Ebony woods give classically-lined furniture an updated, sophisticated feel. Sisal rugs bring in coastal warmth. Bathrooms are sleek and modern.

"I wanted to take things up a notch and make it luxurious and elegant," she said. "It's what you would see in upscale hotels."

The Cass House opened for its first guests in July and Gary expects that the restaurant, which seats 40, will open by the end of the year. Despite the hard work and heartache of the past 14 years, he has few regrets. In fact, he and Nancy have recently undertaken the restoration of their own Arroyo Grande Victorian home.

Is he a glutton for punishment? Gary admits it may be so.

But seeing the Cass House rise from the ashes has been tremendously satisfying for a number of reasons.

"It really was a tribute to my father, sort of a tip of my hat," said Gary. "I think he would have been pleased."



**CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT:** The Captain's Room has a bamboo Asian-style bed. An cabinet was custom made to hide a television set.

Rose's Room, named after Capt. Cass' daughter, holds an authentic Eastlake bed made up with high-end Anichini linens.

Bathrooms have unglazed, nonbeveled hexagon tile, antique-style plumbing fixtures and Maxfield Parrish prints.

The Ocean Terrace Suite's sitting area holds an upholstered cane back chair and ottoman in a dark stain.



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**JULIA ALEXIS**, a Shell Beach artist, painted her front door, left, an appealing shade of coral. She found the tile artwork hanging next to it at Village Pottery in Shell Beach. She created the color on her living room walls, above, with artist's acrylic paint, then hung a work by Lompoc artist Eric Morlan. She purchased her sofa from Davidson's in San Luis Obispo.



**A GUEST ROOM** in the Alexis home, far left, displays a quilt made by Julia's daughter, Allison Lockwood, a Shell Beach textile artist. The Mexican mask above the door is from Luna Rustica in San Luis Obispo. In her kitchen, Alexis mixes vintage Saarinen tulip chairs with red acrylic seats from Marshalls in Arroyo Grande. A window above the sink, right, displays a plate found at a retail closeout store and candle holders from Marshalls.

# artists in residence

WRITTEN BY REBECCA JURETIC • PHOTOGRAPHED BY LANCE KINNEY

*Creative people don't live in designer-decorated spaces. Instead, their desire to create is so powerful that it flows out of their studios and into their homes. Two artists take us inside.*

## Julia Alexis

Shell Beach artist Julia Alexis often finds herself, paintbrush in hand, caught in the throes of inspiration.

Her subject? Not a landscape or still life but a newly-conceived wall treatment.

Such is the life of an artist, where the desire to create is so powerful that it inevitably flows out of the studio doors and into the home.

Alexis takes the same approach to decorating her mid-century modern home as she does to painting a portrait: pushing boundaries, defying conventions and enjoying the process along the way.

Her creative approach takes two directions. Sometimes she is methodical, as when it took her a week to find just the perfect comfortable couch. Most of the time, though, she relies on a mix of intuition and trial-and-error.

A good example is her ongoing experimentation with wall treatments. When she purchased her house in 1997, she hoped to move away from the riot of color she lived with in the past. "I resolved to

have an all-white house, pure and stark, but I couldn't stick it out," she said. "The house itself called to me to catch it on fire with color."

She started with one eggplant-colored accent wall in the living room which, after a trip to Cuba, she repainted a Latin-inspired green. Still not satisfied, she rubbed on a coat of yellow-green and, later, metallic gold.

"Now I like it, at least for the time being," she said, citing a low threshold for boredom.

Thus was born her enthusiasm for faux painting, which she does in fits and starts. Tired of her "paper bag" colored living room wall one day, she rubbed artist's acrylic raw umber paint over it. The resulting effect resembles aged leather.

Some ideas eventually wore out their welcome, such as the "Pepto Bismol pink" of the front hall. Others took some warming up to, as with the orange, purple and brown treatment in her master bathroom.

(continued on next page)



**THE LIVING ROOM** of artist Julia Alexis is a mix of styles and colors, a testament to the artistic talent of its owner.

(from previous page)

“At first I thought it looked like garbage, but after a good night's sleep, I was dazzled with it,” she recalled.

Alexis tackles all of her decorating with this same fearlessness and passion for the bold.

She loves both modern art and ethnic artifacts for their strong colors and graphic appeal. For example, against the white backdrop of her guest room, these elements make a statement on their own: a needlework textile from the San Blas islands, a Chinese embroidered banner, a mask from Mexico, ethnic print throws on the bed, and a quilt made by her daughter Allison Lockwood, a textile artist.

Art and color extend even to her outdoor spaces. In the front of the house, a mobile sculpture provides a pop of color “to divert the passer-by,” she said. In her backyard, she created a special niche for a Virgin of Guadalupe statue that she bought in white, then painted.

Alexis finds her inspiration everywhere, whether she is browsing a garage sale or a high-end boutique.

Area rugs are a particular passion, and she has

sourced them everywhere. Among her collection is a vintage art deco Chinese rug from Old Edna Antiques, pieces purchased while traveling in Turkey and Morocco, an Afghan rug emblazoned with weaponry from a warehouse sale, and three from the Caucasus bought at Marshalls in Arroyo Grande.

She is equally daring when mixing furniture of different styles and pedigrees. For seating in her modern dining area, she combined two vintage Saarinen tulip chairs, red acrylic chairs from Marshalls, and an office table purchased at Staples. In her bedroom, she has hand-carved Mexican furniture from Luna Rustica as well as an Asian-style screen purchased from, in her words, “a sleazy weekend warehouse sale.”

Her key to achieving the right mix isn't found in color swatches or on magazine pages. Her artist's instinct, innate and finely tuned, sounds like an alarm when the look is spot on. She gave the example of finding the right piece of art to go over her living room sofa: “I saw it in an art gallery and when my heart started beating fast and I felt faint, I knew it belonged to me.”



**CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT:** A whimsical Mexican sculpture, repainted. A mobile sculpture by Jim Jacobsen sits on the front patio. Artist Julia Alexis in a favorite hat. Her studio with a painting in progress. The master bedroom with a bench and mirror from Luna Rustica in San Luis Obispo.





**ARTIST CHET AMYX** and his wife, Guyla, built their home in three stages. Clockwise from left: the living room with a wood and canvas sculpture by Chet; the home's atrium; Chet's studio with a sculpture made from plywood and foam; the residence exterior; the kitchen with its vintage formica table, a yard sale find. Guyla created the kitchen's tall ceramic sculpture of a woman.

## Chet Amyx

Morro Bay artist Chet Amyx works in a variety of media as a sculptor and painter. But some of his most original work involves objects that many would consider past their prime.

"As an artist, I have an inherent and trained eye for interesting shapes, color and textures that are all around us, so things that are old and weathered have a very aesthetic appeal for me," he said.

Bothered by the disappearance of California's old wooden barns, he incorporated pieces of weathered wood, rusty hinges and door handles in modern hanging sculptures (what he calls "sculpted-paintings") as part of a series called "Vanishing California."

So it was only fitting that when Chet created an addition for his Morro Bay home, he used old materials reclaimed from a 19th century schoolhouse in Toro Creek.

Today, he shares his house with wife and fellow artist, Guyla. But in 1975, he had been living alone in the house for a year when he contemplated adding on to what he called his "lonely little 900-square-foot, 1950s-style stucco bungalow, without any special character."

When Chet learned the one-room schoolhouse was about to be bulldozed into the creek, he and a friend offered the school board a hundred dollars to tear down and re-use the materials. And so they did... board by board.

"The lumber was all prime ancient redwood, except for the floors, which were a fir, and the roof covering which was cedar shingles. Many of the nails were forged or cast square nails," he said.

(continued on next page)

(from previous page)

The next summer, he and a former art student with some construction experience added a studio, loft and bathroom to his house. The addition was earthy and warm, a look that Chet said is reminiscent of 1960s California wood-clad structures.

When Chet married Guyla in 1990, they converted the studio into a master bedroom. In 1997, a decision to build an attached apartment for Chet's aging mother ballooned into a second major remodel, this time with the help of Doug Allred Construction.

Along with the apartment, the couple planned a backyard studio, a full remodel of the original structure, and a new garage. Realizing they needed more studio and guest room space, they added a second floor addition to their plans. Then, in an effort to preserve views obstructed by new development, the couple decided on one final addition: a third story "tower room." Their plans would add about 1,000 square feet to the house along with an 800-square-foot studio.

With plenty of lumber left over from the first remodel, Chet and Guyla hoped to carry over the earthy feel into their next project. But they also wanted to incorporate modern qualities that would enhance the display of art, such as bold geometry, plentiful windows and skylights, and large expanses of white walls.

The structure's interplay of angles and curves as well as the couple's measured approach toward remodeling cause Chet to liken the home to sculpture. As with their art, he and Guyla relied heavily on instinct, puncturing openings in walls and ceilings when they sensed more openness and light were required, and adding stairs when they needed to aid the home's flow.

The couple furnishes their space instinctively as well, freely mixing modern pieces with heirlooms and vintage items that offer a sense of history.

Of course, there is also an abundance of art created by the couple and their friends. Many of their pieces are large-scale and have a dramatic presence in the space. "We both have so much work, we just have to find a place that fits, and sometimes it's a strange place," said Chet.

And so art is not relegated to walls and tabletops in the Amyx home. A life-size sculpture of a woman stands in a corner of the kitchen. Another seemingly suns itself by an upstairs window. Other pieces share space with potted plants on the patio.

Art is integrated into every aspect of Chet and Guyla's life and, for them, this is the definition of home. "Our place can't be just where we live," said Chet. "There's a full integration – our history, our art, our spaces are all a part of us. That's what makes us so much more complete."



**ANOTHER OF GUYLA'S** ceramic sculptures sits on the deck, above. Below left, a life-size sculpture suns itself by an upstairs window. Middle, a bronze sculpture by Randall Johnson of San Luis Obispo. At near left, Chet Amyx by his front door.



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**THE OWNER WANTED** 'a sea of color' to beautify the front of her Pismo Beach residence. Untouched hills behind the home provide a neutral backdrop for the sumptuous plantings.

a garden of



**A RIOT OF BRIGHT** bougainvillea line the driveway to the home.

WRITTEN BY DAWN WHITE

PHOTOGRAPHED BY LANCE KINNEY

**A** vacant hillside lot with extensive views of the Pacific Ocean turned out to be the perfect “property with potential” for a Pismo Beach woman.

Standing in the middle of the property, she was overwhelmed by its natural beauty, she says. That feeling of serenity prompted her to buy the hillside parcel immediately and begin building her dream home with lavish gardens to match.

“I wanted an explosion of color and texture,” she recalls.

She employed the help of Martin Lopez, a local landscape designer who has designed the exteriors of other prestigious properties around the Central Coast.

The untouched hills behind the home – spotted with native plants and brush – are a neutral backdrop for the vibrant yet tranquil backyard and gardens.

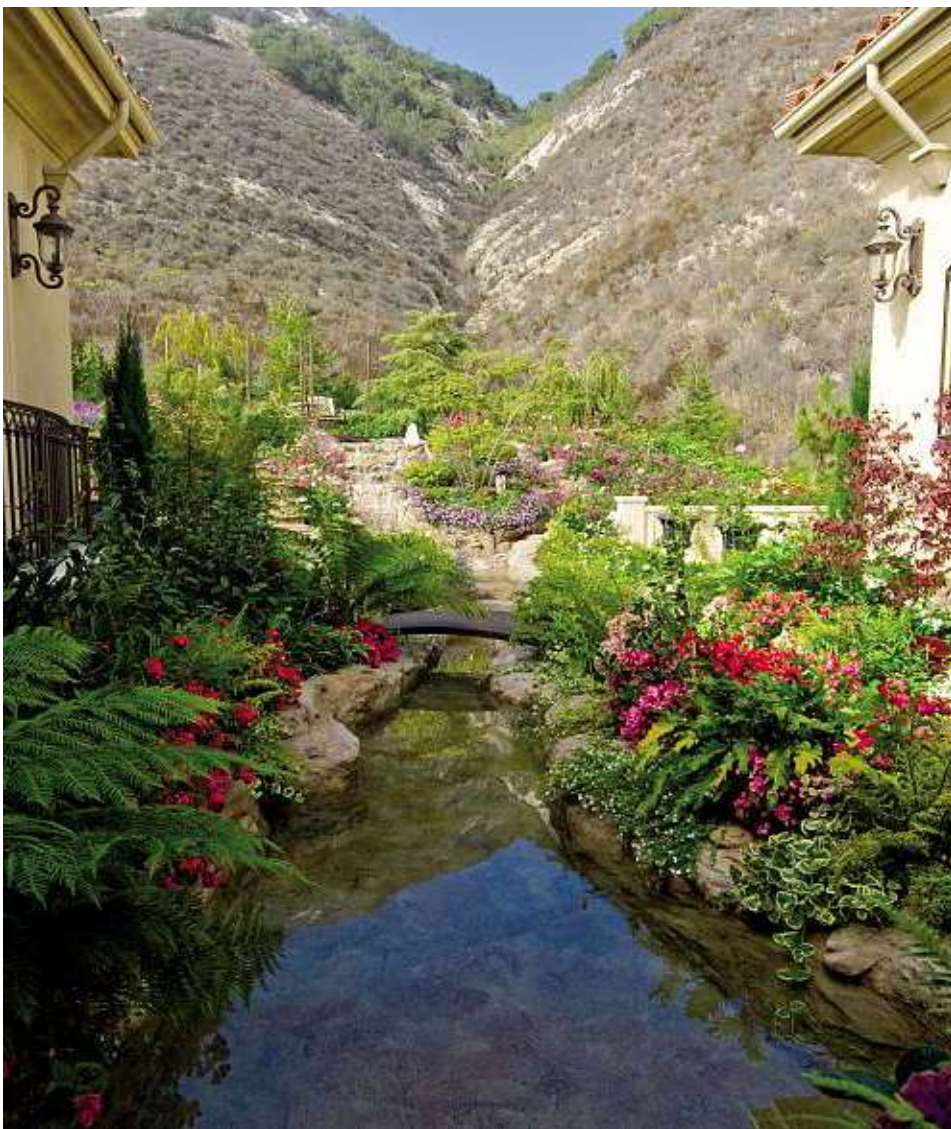
“It began with capturing the views of nature,” the owner explained.

A natural crevice from rain drainage was the focal point for designing and building the faux waterfall and creek she wanted in the yard. Some areas are steep and make the soothing sounds of a brook while other areas are quieter, as a creek would be in nature.

From inside the house foyer, one of the best views of the yard and the hills can be seen through floor-to-ceiling windows. This area, the owner said,

(continued on next page)

# beauty and splendor



**A CREEKBED**, newly installed and surrounded by lush plantings of ferns and flowers, looks as though it occurred naturally, above. At top, seating areas are sheltered from coastal wind.



**TALL CYPRESS TREES**, white roses and vivid bougainvillea, above, create a sense of opulence and splendor at this hillside residence. Templeton landscaper Martin Lopez helped the owner develop her vision of extensive gardens.

(from previous page)

allows the backyard to be enjoyed indoors as well.

The appearance of the lower yard is softer with the plantings similar to those near a natural creek. Six varieties of ferns and numerous camellias thrive closest to the home in the mostly shaded areas of the yard.

“Having shaded and sunny areas of a yard provide a larger palette to work with,” said Lopez.

Plants in the area grow close and “lay over each other,” as they do in the wild, Lopez said. Bacopa ground cover creeps around decorative stones used for pathways to

enhance the natural appearance.

Along the flagstone path, bursts of color can be enjoyed throughout the year. Ever-blooming and seasonally blooming flowers provide color at all times of the year.

Fragrances and textures were also carefully considered. Honeysuckles and gardenias emit floral aromas; nearby lavender plants provide soothing, refreshing scent.

Various seating areas were added so the owner could savor multiple views and varied foliage. One favorite area is a cement bench canopied by white alder trees and engulfed by dwarf lavender plants.

“It’s the perfect place to relax with a book,” the owner said.

During landscaping, finished in the past year, Lopez and the owner chose mature trees in order to enjoy their canopies and grandeur immediately. Favorites are the cedar deodars, two bold but graceful weeping evergreen trees.

The property grows 140 varieties of plants, making it popular with hummingbirds and butterflies, said Lopez.

The backyard would not be complete without a rose garden, an area that possibly provides the most dramatic color. Both shrub roses and hybrids with hues of dramatic reds, cool whites, pinks and golden yellows fill

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**DWARF LAVENDER PLANTS**, top, provide aroma and color in a backyard sitting area. Above, landscaping was a combined effort of the Pismo Beach homeowner and Templeton landscape designer Martin Lopez, above.



**A FLAGSTONE PATHWAY** outside the home's library leads to an arbor-covered bench with expansive views of the Pacific Ocean in the distance. The area is secluded yet sunny and sheltered from ocean breezes.

(from previous page)

that area.

A favorite rose is the Red Ribbon, a velvety crimson rose that doesn't lose its color during its bloom.

Much of the garden is filled with lantanas, a wispy plant that thrives in the coastal climate. A perennial, it's aromatic and produces gold and pink flowers.

To keep the landscape looking natural, Lopez doesn't prune the plants as in many traditional gardens.

"We don't shape – we keep it natural by hand-clipping," he said.

While the owner did not want a back fence to block her views of the hillsides, she eventually installed one that is covered in trumpet vines. Too many critters and deer would make lavish meals of her plants if she had no fence, she joked.

The front of the property is also an exuberance of color, textures and fragrance.

In June, the garden was awarded the Pismo Beach beautification award for its front landscaping, which is rich in red, purples and fuchsia flowers.

Even so, the owner says the landscape is a work in progress with plans for additional seating areas, a gazebo and many more flowers.

# renovating the ranch





WRITTEN BY  
REBECCA JURETIC

PHOTOGRAPHED BY  
LANCE KINNEY

Living within a stone's throw of work may not be everyone's dream, but for Clint and Connie Pearce – whose home, work and family lives are intricately intertwined – nothing could be more natural.

Connie is the daughter of Phyllis Madonna and the late Alex Madonna, and is general manager of the Madonna Inn. Clint is the real estate manager of Madonna Enterprises.

The remodeled 1912 home they share with their two children, Audrey and Dalton, sits at the base of Cerro San Luis, just across a field from the renowned hotel.

When the Madonnas purchased the structure as part of the 150-acre Bianchi Ranch in the early 1970s, they had plans to use it as overflow guest quarters for the inn. With this in mind, they added a second-story room and divided the downstairs area into six bedrooms and five bathrooms.

Those plans never came to fruition, and the structure ended up as employee housing until 2005, when it became vacant.

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**THE 1912 RANCH HOME** recently remodeled by Clint and Connie Pearce. Holland Construction headed up the renovation.



**THE FRONT PORCH** was extended into a rotunda-shaped space which includes a sitting area and fireplace. The dining area is part of the Western-themed great room. The dining table was purchased at Habitat in San Luis Obispo and chairs were custom-made by Theodore Alexander, a North Carolina company that crafted several Madonna Inn pieces.

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Having lived for years in a much smaller house on the family's Foothill Boulevard ranch, Clint and Connie saw possibilities in the 5,000-square-foot Craftsman-style ranch home.

"We always loved the setting. It's in the city but at the same time in the country," said Clint.

The couple took their ideas to architect Bryce Engstrom. Work on the house commenced, but they soon received an unwelcome surprise.

"We thought the structure was sound, but as we got into the house we found termites, dry rot, things out of plumb," said Clint. "We virtually had to rebuild."

Workers re-poured portions of the foundation and replaced wiring, plumbing, walls, windows and moldings. In fact, one of the few original things from the old house that remains is the ceiling of the upstairs loft that was part of the 1970s addition. Because its turquoise stain resembles that in the Austrian Suite of the Madonna Inn, the Percer kept it as a tribute to Connie's family.

The couple was conscientious about keeping new materials consistent with those in the original home. With renewed interest in historic preservation nationwide, they found it relatively easy to find historically authentic materials. They were able to duplicate the

home's cedar roof shakes, find the right double-hung wood windows and even match the color scheme with historic paint colors offered by Sherwin Williams.

When they couldn't find a good reproduction, they started from scratch. Carpenters with Holland Construction crafted much of the home's woodwork on-site to match its original Craftsman style. They even created the walnut front door entirely from scratch and hand-cut each rafter tail to replicate the contours of the original pieces.

The only place the couple stepped outside the home's original footprint was in the rotunda-shaped porch, a feature suggested by

**THE DEN WITH FAMILY PHOTOS.** Furniture was custom made by Old Hickory Tannery, which also made Western antique reproduction pieces for the Madonna Inn.





**THE FAMILY'S FARMHOUSE KITCHEN** with tile from Artisan Tile in San Luis Obispo. A Black Forest clock and brass deer sculpture were gifts from Connie Pearce's parents, Alex and Phyllis Madonna.

Engstrom to mirror their century-old Canary Island date palm. They also added embellishments not found on the original structure such as El Dorado stone where rotting wood skirting had once been, and hand-forged iron rails to add character to the front steps.

When designing their interior, the couple stood by one overriding philosophy.

"We wanted it to look and feel as if it's 100 years old," said Clint.

From there, they took creative license and gave each room its own theme.

"Connie is a Madonna," explained Clint. "We couldn't have everything the same."

Western style infuses the great room area,

from the antiqued limestone bar in the kitchen to the Cherokee stone fireplace in the family room.

Furniture and accessories are a mix of new and old. Some of their pieces are family heirlooms, such as a Black Forest clock and brass deer sculpture that were gifts to the couple from Alex and Phyllis Madonna. Here and throughout the house are paintings by Clint's aunt, Western artist Suzanne Baker.

A few items were chosen by the couple earlier in their marriage, such as a rustic dining room table that they purchased from Habitat in San Luis Obispo.

The couple is also skilled at finding high-quality reproductions, something they do fre-

quently when outfitting rooms at the Madonna Inn. One of their favorite companies, Old Hickory Tannery, which often creates pieces for the inn, custom built numerous pieces of Western-style furniture for the house including leather chairs and ottomans for the family room and barstools for the kitchen.

The room of 11-year-old Dalton was designed to evoke favorite family trips to Jackson Hole, Wyo., with its cabin-like vaulted pine ceiling and hand-tooled leather headboard. But the real character of the room comes out in clever details that are more evidence of the couple's talent for creative staging such as the use of

(continued on next page)

**THE MASTER BEDROOM** and bathroom were inspired by vacations to Tuscany and Napa. The mirror above the bathroom sink was made to look like an antique three-panel mirror. In reality, three separate mirrors made by Frame Works in San Luis Obispo are hinged together.





**WINE CELLAR RACKS** were crafted to look like century-old redwood. Masonry walls, seen above, were built by Cumbria Construction in Cambria.



**AN ANTIQUE ART NOUVEAU** lamp was a gift to the Pearce family.

**THIS ICE CREAM CHAIR** was formerly in the Madonna Inn's coffee shop. When the chairs were replaced, the family saved this one for their daughter's room.

**LIGHTING** was selected for its Western flair, as with this cowhide and bow-and-arrow lamp.



**BOOKSHELVES IN THE DEN** were made by Lorts Furniture. Dalton's room, top, was decorated with a cabin theme. The painting above the bed is of Bishop's Peak, done by Suzanne Baker, Clint's aunt. Audrey's room is in a sophisticated Italian style.

(from previous page)

an antique buckboard seat as a bench and an antique barrel for a corner table.

Their daughter Audrey, 14, required a space significantly more ladylike. Clint calls her room "elegant Italian" with its petal pink walls and 19th-century antique reproduction furniture. Her bathroom continues the theme with its aqua Venetian glass tiles and Carrera marble floor.

Clint and Connie were inspired by trips to Tuscany when they chose the elegant, Old World antique reproduction furniture in their

master bedroom. The warm wood and vaulted ceilings give the room what they call a Napa Valley twist. In their bathroom, soft colors and dreamy glass tile give the feel of a spa retreat.

The final task for the Pearce home was converting their 10-by-20-foot basement into a wine cellar. In keeping with the historic feel of the house, woodworkers distressed new fir lumber to imitate the look of 100-year-old redwood wine racks. Walls were clad in the same El Dorado stone as the exterior of the house.

The house may look a century old, but the Pearces wanted it to be today's state of the art.

The structure is wired for everything from security to the Internet to a sound system that allows any family member in any room to access an online library of 2 million songs.

This approach isn't anything new for a family accustomed to balancing tradition with innovation. "We had a strong desire to preserve the architectural integrity of the old house because we consider it a historic landmark," said Clint. "But we also wanted it to be solid, because we knew we were building the house for the next 100 years."

WRITTEN BY DAWN WHITE  
PHOTOGRAPHED BY DAVID MIDDLECAMP

# sumptuous yet simple



DAVID McWILLIAM

Some of the season's best meals are often created with the simplest ingredients. Consider gnocchi. They're merely small potato dumplings but when prepared correctly, they're sublime.

The trick is to boil the dumplings until they float to the surface, says Chef **David McWilliam** of the Gardens of Avila restaurant at Sycamore Mineral Springs. He recommends gnocchi as a holiday dinner side dish or, for those who love Italian food, as a main course.

"It's a classic dish that's both seasonal and versatile," he said.

He serves his gnocchi with butternut squash to add sweetness plus color and a creamy texture, but McWilliams says the toppings for gnocchi are endless.

Serve it with a glass of local chardonnay or Firestone Pale Ale, he advised.

For dessert, McWilliams suggests his chocolate lava cake with a molten middle. This rich cake with a warm gooey center will make a memorable end to any holiday meal.

**INGREDIENTS** for gnocchi with butternut squash.



## POTATO GNOCCHI WITH BUTTERNUT SQUASH, BROWN BUTTER AND SAGE

**SERVES FOUR**

*Ingredients:*

- 2 large potatoes scrubbed clean
- 2 egg yolks
- 1 tablespoon salt
- 2 teaspoons fresh ground black pepper
- 1 cup of all-purpose flour plus additional flour for dusting
- 1 butternut squash
- 1 bunch of fresh sage leaves chopped

Poke potatoes with a fork and place in a preheated oven at 350 degrees. Cook until tender and soft to the touch. Place the white part of the cooked potato in a medium mixing bowl and mash in salt, pepper and egg yolks. Mix well and then add flour.

Split into 3 separate piles and roll out those sections into small tubes on a well-floured surface. Cut tubes into 1-inch pieces.

When ready, gently place gnocchi into a pot of boiling, salted water and cook until they float. Pull out and set aside to serve or place into ice bath for a minute if serving later.

### **For the butternut squash:**

Peel butternut squash, remove seeds and dice into small cubes. Place into a pot of boiling water and cook until tender, about 20 minutes.

*To serve:*

Heat a sauté-pan on high and add 2 tablespoons of butter and 1 tablespoon of sage leaves. Melt until the butter browns. Cook the precooked butternut squash (about 2 to 3 cups) in the butter until it caramelizes. Gently add the gnocchi to the pan of squash and sauté until brown all over. Serve immediately.



## CHOCOLATE LAVA CAKE

**SERVES FIVE**

- 7 oz of 60 % cocoa-chocolate, coarsely chopped
- 9 tablespoons butter

(Combine in a heavy bottomed pot and melt, but keep warm until use)

- 3 large eggs
- 4 egg yolks
- ¼ cup granulated sugar plus 2 tablespoons
- 2 tablespoons all purpose flour

Preheat oven to 400 degrees. Spray 5 cupcake tins with non-stick spray and set aside.

Remove oven's lower rack so that you may place the cupcake or muffin tin directly on the oven floor. (This allows the cake to be cooked on high heat but keep a soft center.)

Combine eggs and sugar in a food mixer and whip on high until pale white and fluffy.

Gently fold in the flour and then combine half of the chocolate at a time, gently folding the chocolate into the egg mixture

Pour into a pre-sprayed muffin tin and place in pre-heated oven. Cook for 7 minutes, turning the batch at 3½ minutes. Let cool and serve garnished with vanilla ice cream and chopped pecans.

**WARM CHOCOLATE LAVA CAKE** is served with vanilla ice cream and a sprinkling of chopped pecans.

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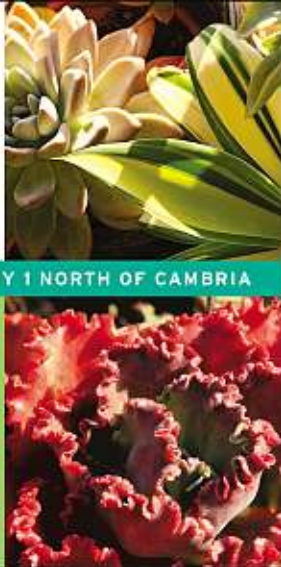


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WRITTEN BY ROCHELLE REED • PHOTOGRAPHY BY JOE JOHNSTON

# flowers for the season

Holiday floral arrangements need to be as hardy as they are beautiful. The frenetic pace of the season — shopping, parties, visits, not to mention this area's always surprising weather patterns — require a flower that can stand up to heat, cold and neglect without wilting or withering.

Originally from South Africa and Australia, proteas are increasingly showing up in holiday arrangements because of their unusual beauty and valuable longevity at this time of year. Gardeners can grow their own proteas, providing their garden is not situated in a cold, low-lying area. Best planted now until the end of February, proteas are available in one-gallon cans at local nurseries.

For most of us, however, a bouquet or cut blossoms from a local floral shop is in order. An additional payoff: unlike a poinsettia plant, a protea bouquet looks appropriate long past the New Year.

*Photographed at Orchids of Los Osos*





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