



La dolce vita

Just as traditional villas in Italy and the south of France were built to last for centuries, so this house will endure for generations to come

First-time visitors to Italy and southern France are invariably enchanted by the architecture, especially the solid, shuttered stone houses that provide a refuge from the heat of the sun.

It's an architectural style that has long proved ideal for the Mediterranean climate. It is also well suited to many parts of California, including the Sonoma Valley wine district where this house is located.

The house was conceived and built by Jon Reiter of Jon Reiter Fine Homes. A frequent business traveller to Europe, Reiter is passionate about the architecture and traditional craftsmanship embodied by the centuries-old villas.

It was this passion that inspired the design and construction of Montevigna, as this house is known. Reiter says the desire for authenticity

even influenced the choice of building site.

"This wooded, 6-acre block was once a quarry and comprises lots of pits and mounds," he says. "But this was also why it was perfectly suited. Just as European homeowners would choose a site with plenty of natural building materials, so we chose this site for the stone we could use in construction. We could also

build the house on a knoll to maximize the views."

Reiter says that as well as using stone quarried from the site, he wanted to incorporate recycled and reclaimed building materials wherever possible. And this extended to the landscaping. The entry, for example, features a gateway, columns and cobblestones imported from France.

The driveway was made

Above left: This new house is modeled on traditional villas found in the south of France and Italy. It incorporates a mix of French and Italian materials as well as stone quarried from the building site.

Top and above: Outdoor living areas include a loggia with an Italian-style roof. This features wood slats made from recycled wine barrels. A separate barbecue area is positioned alongside the door to an underground wine cellar.



from clay remnants that come from a local quarry. These were mixed with resins to form a solid surface that looks like gravel. The retaining walls were built from stone on site.

The house itself has an insulated concrete form (ICF) construction, which features concrete poured into recycled styrofoam blocks.

"Styrofoam does not break down readily, so rather

than putting it into landfills, it makes sense to use it for a house that will be extremely well insulated," says Reiter.

The blocks, both outside and inside, have been finished with plaster that incorporates natural earth pigments and pine sawdust from the site.

The roof features French clay tiles in the traditional half-round shape. But all the door thresholds and windowsills

were carved from stone slabs found on the land. The front door surround, also made from stone, was found languishing in a barn in south Mexico.

"The solid oak door is one of the oldest items in the house," says Reiter. "This came from a house in Paris that was built in Napoleon's time."

Inside, the double-height entry highlights several key features, including decorative

wrought iron inserts and heavy wood beams. These were reclaimed from a 100-year-old lodge in a lumber district in Canada.

A different treatment was provided for the ceiling in the library. This room features a typical Italian vaulted brick ceiling, which Reiter says was a particularly labour intensive part of the project.

The waxed concrete floor

incorporates a finish pioneered by Reiter. To avoid the concrete cracking, the floor was cured with wet hay for weeks on end. The decomposing hay has left a distinctive textural pattern on the floor. In other rooms, the floors are oiled pine.

To ensure authenticity, the windows and shutters were imported from Italy. Reiter says he likes the wood used, and the German glass.



Above left and above: Authenticity also defines the interior, which features heavy wood beams reclaimed from an old lodge. The library has a vaulted brick ceiling.

Left: The kitchen pairs traditionally styled perimeter cabinets with an island made from reclaimed wood. Part of the countertop was carved from a stone slab on site. The other side of the countertop features salvaged copper. The sink is a 300-year-old French antique.





Preceding pages: The massive stone fireplace in the family living area was found dismantled in a barn in the south of France. The fireplace is inlaid with a tiled herringbone pattern featuring vertical strips cut from the leftover roofing tiles.

These pages: Stairs lead up to bedrooms on the second floor. The master suite incorporates a French antique claw-foot bath. The stone in the fireplace, which also features elsewhere, is from a local quarry.



“But more importantly, the Italian manufacturer makes in-swing casements just like the original villas,” he says. Despite the traditional features, the house is designed for sustainability and energy efficiency. There are solar panels on the roof for water heating and radiant in-floor heating. And the floors are 2-3in thick to provide an energy-saving thermal mass.

Architect: Victor Conforti, Victor Conforti Architecture (Sonoma, CA); Jon Reiter, Jon Reiter Fine Homes (Kenwood, CA)
Interior designer: Anyon Interior Design
Structural engineer: Todd Green Engineering
Builder: Jon Reiter Fine Homes
Siding: Stucco and stone harvested from site, over recycled insulated concrete form walls
Roofing: Antique French clay tiles from Provence Materiaux Anciens, France

Doors and windows: Swedish pine with walnut finish in Toscano and English styles by SG Serramenti Authentic Joinery & Millwork
Flooring: Old-growth white oak and old-growth eastern white pine by Carlisle Wide Plank Floors; trowel-finished concrete with natural stain
Wallcoverings: Plaster with pine sawdust and natural earth pigments
Paints and varnishes: Natural oils with earth pigments
Lighting: French antiques; Juno
Underfloor heating: Warm Floors

Corporation
HVAC: Henry Mechanical – radiant solar panel and Honeywell forced-air furnace
Wood shutters: Pine with walnut finish by SG Serramenti, Certaldo, Italy
Kitchen cabinetry: Antiques; painted cabinets by Jon Reiter Fine Homes
Countertops: Marble from Provence Materiaux Anciens; concrete by Jon Reiter Fine Homes
Backsplash: Clay tiles from Provence Materiaux Anciens
Kitchen sink: French antique marble
Faucets: Rohl from Perrin & Rowe

Dishwasher and coffee maker: Miele
Bath: Antique claw foot
Basin: Kohler
Vanity top: Carrara marble
Bathroom faucets and shower fittings: Rohl from Perrin & Rowe
Flooring: Carrara marble
Story by Colleen Hawkes
Photography by Tim Maloney

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