



“With the thought early implanted in my mind that true beauty lies in simplicity rather than ornateness, I found real joy at Rancho Santa Fe. Every environment there calls for simplicity and beauty—the gorgeous natural landscapes, the gently broken topography, the nearby mountains. No one with a sense of fitness, it seems to me, could violate these natural factors by creating anything that lacked simplicity in line and form and color.”

—Lillian Rice, 1928

SHOWCASE

Row Home Revival

A young TV producer reinterprets a 1926 Lillian Rice original

BY THOMAS SHESS

PHOTOGRAPHS BY GARY PAYNE

Above: Sonoran gold flagstone courtyard and overall project concept and supervision, including rear addition, by homeowner Mark Benjamin of Archipelago Development.

Right: *Roses* on living room wall by David Settino Scott, from Susan Street Fine Art, Cedros District; sofa from Butera Living, Rancho Santa Fe.

ark Benjamin sold his TV production company last year and left Los Angeles in his rear-view mirror. With the cash from the deal he purchased a vintage, albeit run-down, row home on Rancho Santa Fe’s main drag as an investment.

“If this home wasn’t located in the Covenant, on Paseo Delicias, and didn’t have the late, great Lillian Rice as its architect, it would have been trashed long ago,” says Benjamin, who, at thirty-something, is reinterpreting his career as well as his 3,000-square-foot Spanish Colonial mini-hacienda.

He found his 1926 home—at the east end of a four-home project—was riddled with termites, mold and water damage. “It all had to be fixed,”

he says, "and believe it or not, several neighbors pitched in to bring a gas main down our alley so we could cook with gas."

Architect Rice, one of the first women to graduate from the School of Architecture at the University of California at Berkeley, created her row homes as all-electric units. At the time, she was employed by architect Richard Requa, who championed the Mediterranean/Spanish design motifs in Southern California, especially San Diego. Requa and Rice are credited with the design of Rancho Santa Fe, which began in 1922.

There have been many changes in Rice's original 1,000-square-foot residence, built



Above: Mark Benjamin replaced non-original brick and cement in front of his historic home with new landscaping and a new sidewalk. Other row homes pictured along Paseo Delicias also were designed by Lillian Rice.

Left: Kitchen countertop of Calcutta marble cut and installed by homeowner; Franke sink and faucet from Standards of Excellence.



with one bath (shower only), two 12-by-12-foot bedrooms and a stoveless kitchen. (The original owner cooked on a hot plate.) Benjamin reinvented the kitchen by installing modern appliances, including a Wolf gas gourmet range, a Sub-Zero refrigerator and a Bosch dishwasher.

He also moved the sidewalk toward the street to conform to the other three row homes in the project, a move that gave him room to add period landscaping in front.

"I get knocks on my door all the time from people thanking me for the new landscaping," Benjamin says. "Nothing visible from the

street was changed. I just repaired it or painted it to its original look."

Benjamin convinced the Rancho Santa Fe art jury to accept his plan to extend his home to the shared wall of the adjoining Rice row home. "Zero-lot line is something our city and county planners need to embrace, especially if the whole idea is to create affordable and urban infill housing," he says.

By expanding from the original house to the neighbor's wall, Benjamin was able to circle the lot by adding a new wing and a two-story addition adjacent to the alley. The new, 3,000-square-foot space includes three



Top: Living room lamps from Butera Living, Rancho Santa Fe; coffee table by Baker, Knapp & Tubbs, Los Angeles; Belgian linen chairs from La Grande Maison, Cedros District; hammered-tin framed mirror and wool Pakistani rug from homeowner; hand-stained, distressed white-oak flooring by Zauss/Godwin Hardwood Flooring, Miramar and Cedros District.

Above: Ultra spa tub from European Bath Kitchen Tile Stone, Cedros District; Jerusalem gold countertop over a Mark Benjamin-designed alder wood cabinet; tumbled Old Santa Fe brick by Robinson from Modern Builders Supply.

Opposite page: Homeowner, interior designer and project developer Mark Benjamin enjoys a glass of wine in the added family room. Black leather chairs by Hickory Chair; table designed by homeowner; mirror from Baker, Knapp & Tubbs; salvaged Douglas fir ceiling beams by Vintage Timber Works of Rainbow, California. In the background: Wolf range, Subzero refrigerator and Bosch dishwasher from Pacific Sales; kitchen cabinets from Expo Design Center; oven hood fabricated from workbench of initial owners Ida Mae and Glenn Moore, who was the original landscape architect of Rancho Santa Fe.

bedrooms, three and a half baths, a master-bedroom retreat and a guest unit in back. The front courtyard now includes a new tile fountain and Sonora gold flagstone. The central courtyard was upgraded by adding the same flagstone throughout.

Benjamin didn't cut corners. "This is my first major restoration project," he says. "I didn't want to skimp on anything that would detract from the historic context of the exterior. Plus I live here."

What's next for Benjamin?

"This project has been the most rewarding undertaking I've ever done," he says. "I've decided to try tackling more single-home redevelopment and see where it takes me."

The quality craftsmanship he's used to restore Lillian Rice's early work indicates he'll do just fine. ▸

Special thanks to Zauss/Godwin Hardwood Flooring for introducing HDQ to this fine home.



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