





ROMAN

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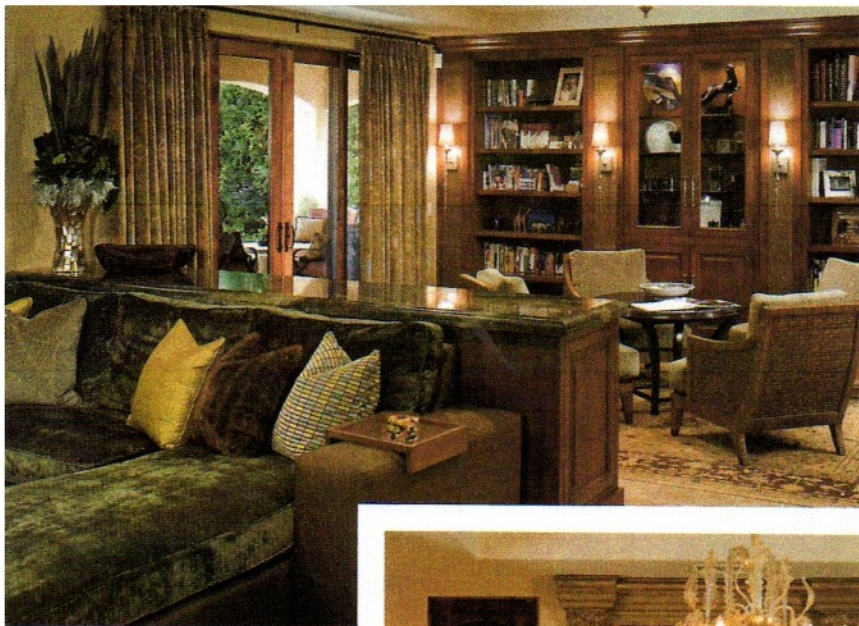
A La Jolla couple decorates their coastal residence with Italian spirit and treasures collected from near and far

AFTER YEARS OF LIVING in a modern mansion, Paula Symonds and her husband, Monte, sought a more casual cadence as they embarked on retirement. In their early 50s, the adventure travelers had become bored with the clean lines, stark colors and minimalist furnishings of their La Jolla Corona dwelling and wanted to explore other home décor styles. They began touring residences throughout the county, in search of ideas to refresh their existing home. But instead of redecorating, they decided to buy an Italian-style villa overlooking the coastline in the nearby Inspiration neighborhood, a move that gave them the perfect opportunity to put a new spin on their relaxed yet refined lifestyle.

“We aren’t formal and wanted a very accessible house that was great for entertaining,” says Paula, pointing out the open and airy living areas with massive windows and charming patios. “We instantly fell in love with it, especially the spacious configuration that allows us both to have home offices—on opposite ends of the house!”

The three-story, 6,900-square-foot home with sweeping southern views of Pacific Beach, Point Loma and Baja had been completely remodeled in 2005 by the previous owners. While it did not need any architectural changes, the inside wasn’t a good fit

BY JILL ESTERBROOKS / PHOTOGRAPHS BY JIM BRADY



Opening page: Fabrics, such as Palais Velvet and Bergamo drapes, make the statement in this house. This page, from top: The downstairs media room is equipped to handle movie night and Monte's work. Gentile designed the built-in china cabinet in the dining room. In the entry, an Italian buffet complements one of many paintings throughout the house.



for most of the pair's modern art and contemporary furniture pieces, so they looked for an interior designer to help fill in the blank canvas.

"Other than a few favorite art pieces, the two gorgeous glass chandeliers and the dining room set we purchased with the house, we needed it all," says Paula, a former marketing executive.

Now the only issue was which interior designer could turn the empty house into a home with classic character and timeworn appeal. Encinitas interior designer Lori Gentile, ASID, was the one who caught their attention.

"We got this warm fuzzy feeling when we met her and saw her eye for elegant yet eclectic design," Paula says. "We just told Lori to work her magic."

The environment they desired needed to be more than just cozy and whimsical, however. In addition to spaces that would accommodate laid-back evenings as well as blowout bashes, the pair wanted customized offices to pursue their hobbies and interests, as well as niche spaces to show off their art and photo collections, which include works acquired during their travels to exotic places. The couple's globe-trotting habits presented a pressing deadline for the veteran designer, who had only a few weeks to design the interiors, price it all and get final approval before her globetrotting clients departed on a month-long African safari.

To accomplish this seemingly impossible mission, Gentile first created a color palette, which she usually designs to complement her female clients' coloring—"so they glow in their home," she says. Then she turned to her extensive library of more than a thousand catalogs filled with what she describes as "the most beautiful fabrics, wall coverings and furnishings from around the world."

Her design schemes, which veered away from what she calls "fussy" Italian and leaned more toward a neo-classical look, were eagerly approved by the couple. Their frequent sojourns around the world left them longing to impart a touch of old-European flavor to their modern American lives.

As Gentile promised, upon their return from Africa, the decorating project was well under way, with custom-designed cabinets, special-order furniture and handcrafted window coverings in various stages of production and installation. The four-month endeavor resulted in a stunning residence that boasts an artful blend of elegance and ease, making all who gather here feel right at home.

A GRAND FRONT ENTRY with an Italian buffet and glass chandelier notifies guests they've arrived at a fetching destination. The formal living spaces beyond—outfitted with soaring ceilings and massive windows displaying ocean views—set a

brehtaking stage for an array of refined furnishings and richly colored finishes.

In the main living room, Gentile covered two finely tailored Dessin Fournir club chairs with Dragon Empress fabric and nestled them next to an antique mirror-topped cocktail table flanked by a zebra-skin ottoman. Sitting opposite is a custom-made sofa with Palais Velvet fabric from Richard Bernard. Two gold pillows with decorative buckles made from antique shoe clips shimmer in the glow of Bergamo drapes that Gentile calls “liquid gold.”

The adjoining dining room showcases the warm wood and gold-accented Italian table and chairs the couple purchased with the house. To finish the grand entertainment room, Gentile reupholstered the seats and commissioned a built-in china cabinet. She also embellished the ceiling with exquisite Borghese wallpaper by Robert Crowder.

In the ground-floor master bedroom, layers of fabrics and patterns lend a cozy, inviting ambience. Gentile covered the windows in full-length curtains “turned wrong side out” so their loose silk strings are exposed, then dressed the bed in a regal Jack Lenor Larsen fabric. She chose soft Castel Tavish suede for a bench from Colibri Furniture. There are some jazzy details—such as the antique mirrored headboard wall and Venetian lamps she purchased at Studio Veneto in La Jolla—but the overall feel is luxurious, she says.

Downstairs, Gentile turned a room that originally had nothing more than the fireplace mantel into a handsome family room that serves double duty as Monte’s home office.

“I spend lots of time down here,” he says, demonstrating how his computer and printer neatly disappear into the custom-designed wall cabinet when friends or business acquaintances drop by. Also nifty, he says, is the clever granite-top lowered bar that separates the lounging zone from a library and conference area opening onto one of several ocean-view patios that bedeck the villa.

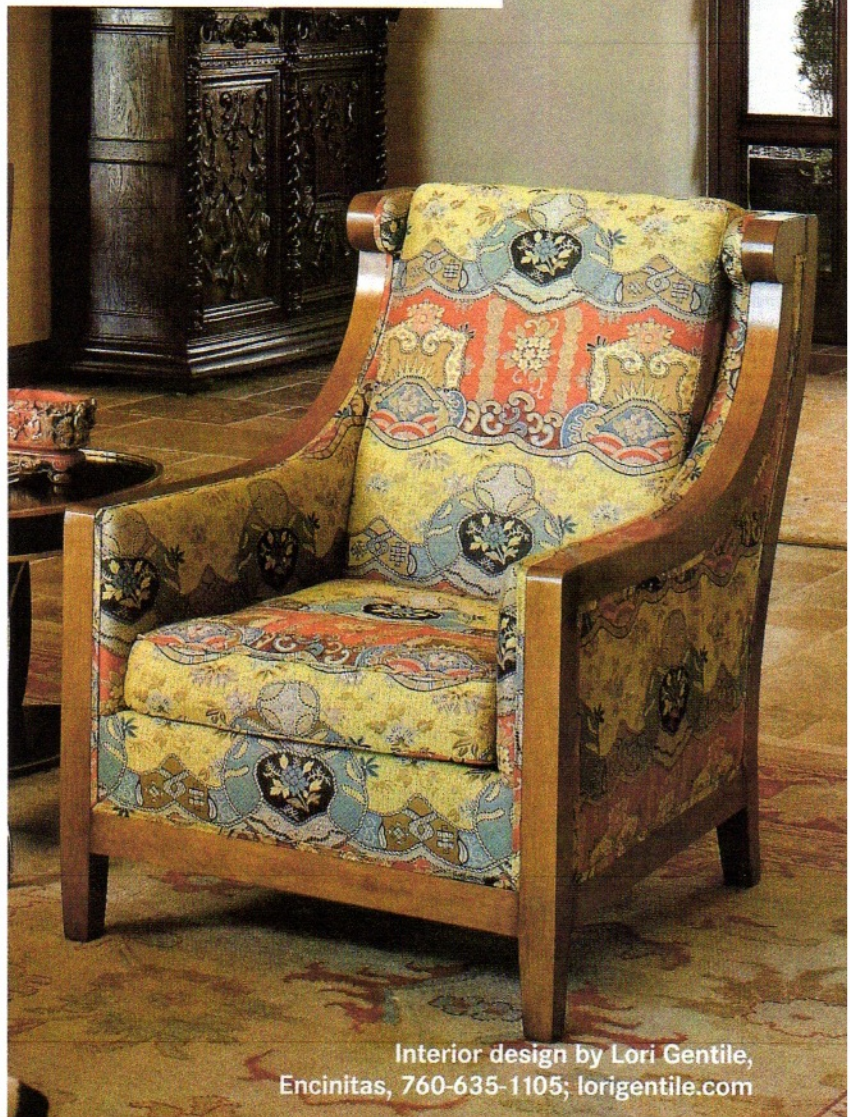
The overstuffed furniture and tasteful accents on the veranda mimic those used throughout the home’s interior.

“In Italy, like here in San Diego, people live their lives outdoors as much as they do indoors. It felt natural for us to have outdoor spaces that are really functional as well as attractive,” says Paula, perched on an upstairs balcony just off her home office. The room is equipped with custom granite-topped counters and built-in cabinets to facilitate her passion for scrapbooking.

Staring blissfully at the setting sun—or perhaps dreaming about the next exotic vacation—she says they’ve found their own Shangri-La right at home. ■



In the living room, Dessin Fournir club chairs were upholstered in Dragon Empress fabric. Inset: “Wrong side out” curtains and Jack Lenor Larsen fabric bring drama to the master bedroom.



Interior design by Lori Gentile, Encinitas, 760-635-1105; lorigentile.com