Inspiration!

HOW TO MAKE YOUR HOME A PARADISE
Against the cinematic backdrop of the Santa Ynez Mountains, a terraced rose garden rises up from the Velozes’ pool to their Mediterranean-style house. “This,” says Marlene, “is my favorite view on our property.”

OPRAH’S NEIGHBORS BOB AND MARLENE VELOZ HAVE LIVED ALL OVER THE WORLD. DAN SHAW DISCOVERS WHY THIS IS THE PLACE THEY CALL HOME.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY MICHEL ARNAUD · STYLING BY TODD MOORE

AS IT GETS AS GOOD
"Santa Barbara is a paradise," the French cultural critic Jean Baptiste Clarin wrote when he went in search of American utopias. Bob and Marlene Veloz most definitely agree.

"We pinch ourselves every day for our good fortune," says Bob, 70, a retired aerospace executive who was born in the Bronx and moved to Burbank, California, when he was 12. He and his wife have owned houses in the Santa Barbara village of Montecito since 1981, and moved into their current residence two years ago.

"We take nothing for granted," adds Marlene, 63, who grew up in Montreal, as she gazes out her bedroom window to the rose garden, swimming pool, and Pacific Ocean beyond. "We both come from humble backgrounds. None of this is lost on us."

Like their dear friend Oryrah, who bought their former house a mile away, the Velozes are enthralled by the rugged drama of the Santa Ynez Mountains and the heavenly weather that allows rose bushes to bloom ten months a year. "This house gives us everything we want—gardens, privacy, views," says Marlene, who's moved 19 times during her 41 years of marriage. "There's a magic to it. We might not leave our property for an entire weekend. In the summer, we swim until 9 P.M. We wonder, Where else would we want to be?"

Having lived in England, Paris, and Saudi Arabia, as well as in Malibu and Newport Beach, California, the Velozes cherish their adopted hometown not only for its climate but also for its character. "Montecito and Santa Barbara have a great sense of community," Marlene says of the region, 50 miles north of Los Angeles. "The people are so civic-minded. It's expected that you give something back."

When it comes to charity, the Velozes are known for doing the unexpected. After developing an appreciation for the benefits of organic produce by working with Thomas Cole, who created their fruit and vegetable plots, the Velozes decided to provide seed money for a gardening curriculum at the nearby Laguna Blanca School. "Because of the Velozes," says Cole, "I've been working there part-time for four years, and every class has its own garden."

The Velozes have demonstrated their devotion to Santa Barbara by financing museum shows that focus on regional art. Fifteen years ago, as they were beginning to collect California plein air paintings (landscapes that celebrate and mythologize the state's natural beauty), they heard that the Santa Barbara Museum of Art was organizing a show called "A Painter's Paradise: Artists and the California Landscape." Working with the curators, they bought some new paintings specifically to lend to the exhibition, and they also helped finance the conservation of artwork belonging to the museum and to other donors. Without the Velozes' assistance, the University Art Museum at the University of California, Santa Barbara, couldn't have mounted its 2002 show devoted to Fernando Laposani (1857-1932), a seminal California landscape painter whose best works had been poorly stored and were deteriorating.

One of Laposani's most dramatic works, Desert Gorge: Wall Street Canyon, hangs in the Velozes' living room, a tranquil space that..."
Marlene sets the 14-foot-long dining table with her new Ahtaminda china from Bernardaud and 19th-century Moser crystal goblets. Her favorite florist, Jerry Podolook of Montecito-based S.P. Hogue & Co. created the arrangements with succulents and roses that play off the colors in the painting Eucalyptus by Christian Von Schneidau.

‘THIS HOUSE GIVES US EVERYTHING WE WANT—GARDENS, PRIVACY, VIEWS.’

Marlene’s stylish purple and gold dress by Versace, on the second-floor balcony, where the Welshes have hung part of their collection of 19th-century portraits— including, from left, In the Boudoir by adalbl Leibiz, Landscape near Monte Carlo by Carolus-Duran, and Stewart’s Sonlight.
'THERE'S A MAGIC HERE. WHERE ELSE WOULD WE WANT TO BE?'

interior designer Joan Behnke planned as a showcase for their paintings. "We wanted the artwork to be the most important visual element," says Behnke. In planning the decor, the Velozes made it clear that they'd be entertaining often and that their guests' comfort was paramount. Behnke's hospitable touches include pillows for the chairs in the dining room and his-and-her powder rooms in the foyer.

Since the Velozes believe that charity begins at home, they like to hold one or two big fund-raisers at their house each year. In 2005, Marlene agreed to host a luncheon for Girls Inc., an after-school, weekend, and summer program for girls 6 to 18— an event that would test the Velozes' capacity for crowd control. When word spread that Oprah was going to be the guest speaker, ticket sales soared. "We had

520 people here for lunch," Marlene recalls. That event was good preparation for the 50th-birthday gala they gave Oprah last January. They erected two tents (one on the lawn, the other over the pool) to accommodate 200 guests. "Oprah spends her life giving to other people, and we wanted to do something for her," Marlene says. "The fun is really in the giving. I'm sure we had far more fun than she did."

As much as they excel at entertaining, the Velozes spend many romantic evenings home alone. "Most nights we take the ducks for a walk around the garden," says Bob, explaining how a flock took up residence in the pond outside their living room last winter. "We bring our glasses of wine and we enjoy all the beauty we have right here," Marlene says. "We take the time to smell the roses."