THE 2013 ULTIMATE HOME

—*Special Issue*—

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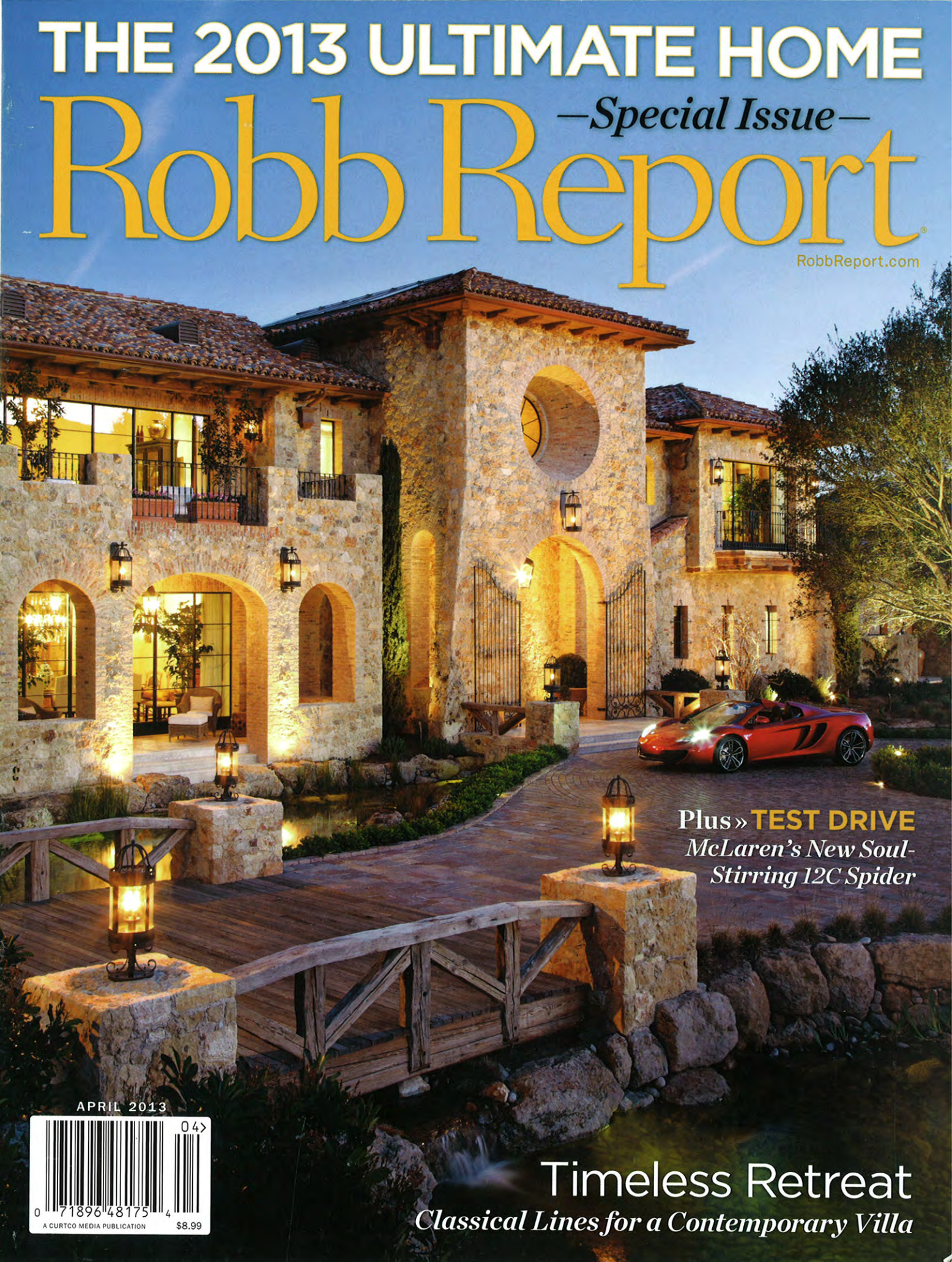

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An *Italian Affair*

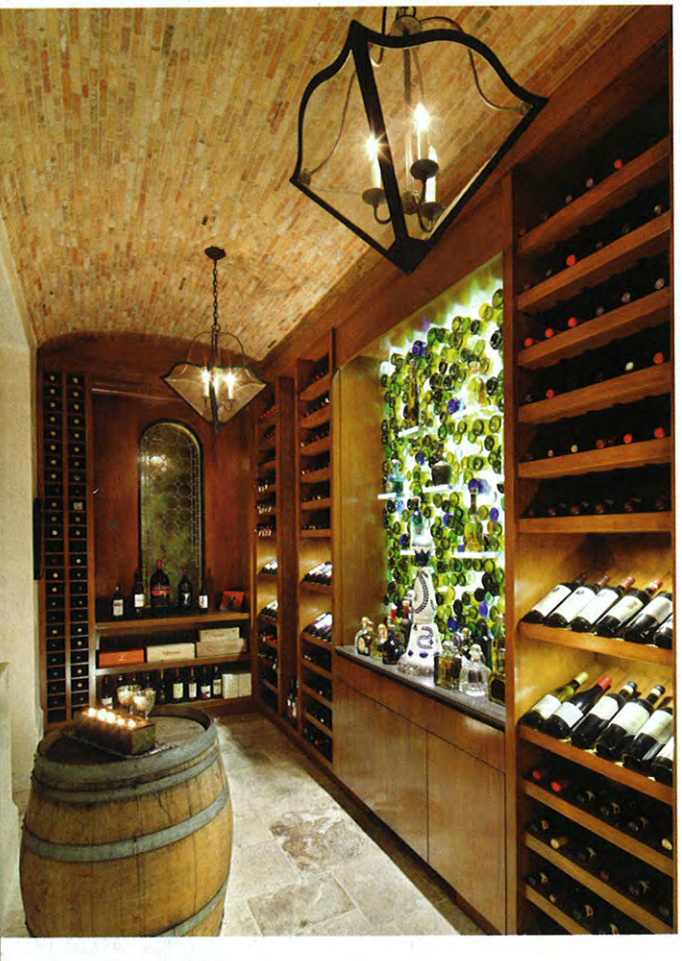
INFLUENCED BY TUSCANY'S RUSTIC FARMHOUSES and crafted from the finest European-sourced stone and timber, this contemporary Italian-inspired estate in Southern California radiates splendor while still reflecting, with warmth and elegance, a couple's love of traveling and hosting family and friends. The residence's perfect marriage of grandness and intimacy persuaded our editors to pronounce the property *Robb Report*'s ULTIMATE HOME 2013.

BY Erika Heet

PHOTOGRAPHY BY Erhard Pfeiffer

Rock Solid | After discovering the work of Richard Landry—the Los Angeles architect behind *Robb Report*'s Ultimate Home four years running—Bob and Audrey Byers approached him with a clear directive for their dream house, to be built on 4 acres overlooking Lake Sherwood in Thousand Oaks, Calif. "We love Italy—it's one of our favorite places," says Bob. "So we wanted to bring Italy to us." Landry visualized a six-bedroom, 10-bath, 23,000-square-foot Italian-influenced estate dominated by a rustic stone facade (previous pages), portions of which were excavated from the site. Complementing the stone villa, which was built by the Calabasas, Calif.–based Tyler Development Corp., is a roof composed of 21,000 Coppi tiles, made more than a century ago by Italian artisans who shaped the clay by hand over their legs. To continue the Italian feel, the landscaping firm G. Grisamore Design, of South Pasadena, Calif., surrounded the house with Italian cypress and olive trees and brought in meandering ponds and waterfalls by the San Clemente, Calif.–based Mystic Gardens. "The planks for the bridges came from Coney Island," notes Bob, who sold his medical equipment supply company in 2008 and turned his attention to realizing the couple's plans for the house, which was finished in October.

"The goal was to build a good-size house that was still warm and inviting," says Bob. To that end, they called on the Los Angeles designer Joan Behnke—another past Ultimate Home honoree—to create an interior scheme that would be conducive to entertaining and would provide plenty of space for the Byerses' four grown children and three grandchildren, who visit often. For the home's 28-foot-high entrance hall (above and opposite), Behnke offset the continuation of the stone with a hand-forged chandelier by Gregorius Pineo and several sconces, some of which were fashioned from objects found at a flea market during a buying trip to Paris. "When Bob and Audrey walk into their home," says Behnke, "it triggers all the memories they have of traveling."



Great Heights | The entrance hall leads to the soaring great room (previous pages and opposite), which affords striking views of the lake. Behnke helped temper the space's size by placing a series of seating areas, including a zinc bar designed especially for the room, beneath a custom iron chandelier by Paul Ferrante. Above the antique fire surround, which is from Exquisite Surfaces, is a painting by Ned Evans; to its right is a piece by Richard Bruland. Behnke infused a sense of playfulness into the room with suzani drapery fabric by Donghia and a custom Martin Patrick Evan rug. "The minute you walk in the front door, you are struck by the view of the lake," says the designer. "There is something about water that pulls you in. The tall windows and doors are just frames for the view."

The mood in the dining room (above) is more intimate. The barrel-vaulted ceiling consists of bricks that were recovered from historic buildings on Chicago's South Side. The wood columns were handmade by Southern California artisans. At one end of the dining space is the wine room and tequila bar (left), which is anchored by a backlit acrylic display peppered with colorful bottle fragments. "Bob and Audrey are a very youthful couple, and although the home's design is somewhat traditional, we proposed some fun elements," notes Behnke. "We aspired to be a little unexpected with the design, and the Byerses were completely willing to try new things."

Amate

Out to Lunch

Among Audrey's few requirements for the home was a generous loggia (foreground of previous pages). "This is the area of the house we use the most—we're out here all the time," she says. The room's centuries-old beams and ceiling planks were sourced from Europe by the New York–based Silvia Florian of TSR Design Corp., as was the 17th-century Dalle de Bourgogne stone flooring. ("When Audrey's 94-year-old mother saw the antique finishes, she asked us, 'Can't you afford new stuff?' " quips Bob.) Accordion doors from Steelworks allow the family room to join the loggia, creating one continuous space that is open to the elements. "We didn't just blur the lines between indoors and out, we eliminated them," says Landry. "We entertain a lot," adds Bob, "and we didn't want to end up with people isolated in different rooms. Opening these rooms up brings everybody together."

The family room merges with the kitchen (above), for which Audrey requested a La Cornue range. "Although I don't cook very often, I really wanted one," she says. "Everyone wants to come here and try it out." What strikes Audrey the most about the room, she says, is "the detailing, and the things you don't notice right away. From the surface of the drawers to the edges on every counter, it is all finished so beautifully." Just off the kitchen is the light-filled breakfast room (right), with an antique chandelier from Dagmar Design and draperies made from Schumacher fabric.

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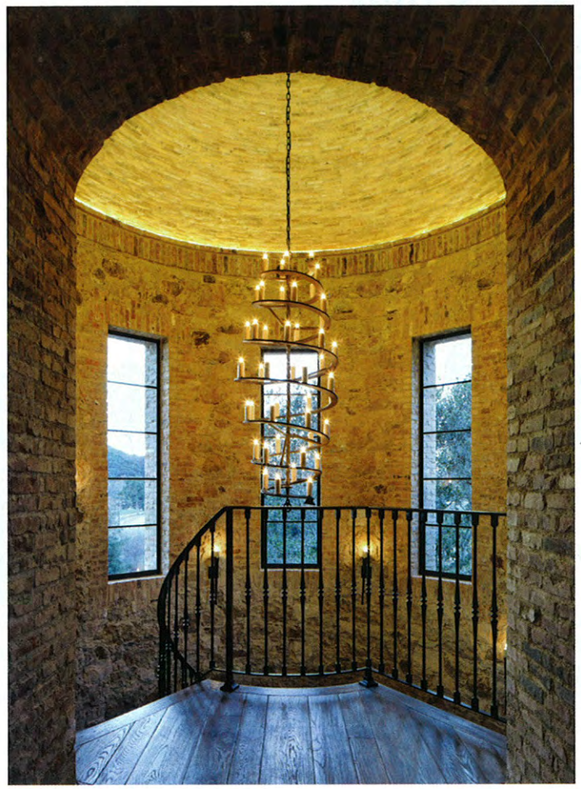
View Master

The architect situated the master bedroom (above), which opens to the rear terrace, so that it would offer the Byerses prime lake vistas. "The house has a natural flow of public to private spaces, and every room takes advantage of the views," Landry says. The couple and Behnke acquired the chandelier in Paris. The lamps flanking the bed are from Dagmar Design, the drapery fabric is from Bergamo, and the hand-embroidered bedding (here and throughout the bedrooms) is from Vis-à-Vis. Subtle touches include a flat-panel TV that pops up from the custom leather cabinet with nail-head trim, and floor sensors on either side of the bed that, given the slightest pressure, trigger low lights leading to the adjacent bath (left). The team created a special recess for the Devon & Devon bathtub, which boasts Compas fixtures. The chandeliers and sconces are from Paul Ferrante, the hand-painted mirrors are custom designs by House of Brienza, and the cabinetry is a Behnke design.

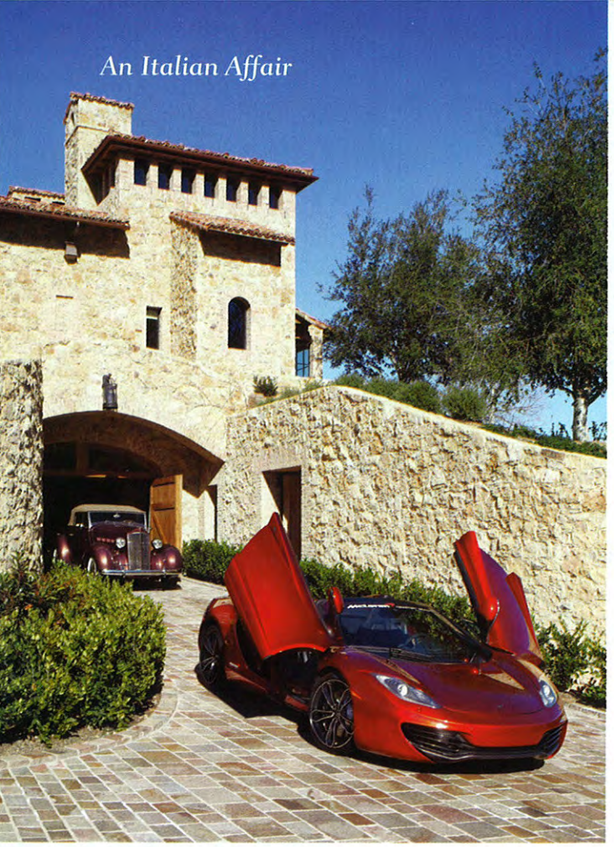
Taking Shape | Beneath a vaulted-beam ceiling is one of four guest bedrooms in the main house that look out to the surrounding mountains or the lake. (The 2,000-square-foot guesthouse accommodates even more visitors.) "When our family visits, the rule for choosing bedrooms is first come, first served," says Audrey. Behnke designed the bench at the foot of the bed; the desk is another Paris flea-market find. The drapery fabric is from Vervain, and, as in the master bedroom, the floor is covered in a light-hued selection from Decorative Carpets.

For the nearby stairway (right and opposite), Landry conceived a domed ceiling and added warmth with cove lighting. A Paul Ferrante spiral chandelier echoes the shape of the stone-walled stairwell—handcrafted by Villa Pacific—while Gregorius Pineo sconces line the walls. A mélange of antique European railing patterns informed Landry's design for the hammered-wrought-iron banister. "This is a style that has survived centuries," he says of the home's rootedness in Italian design. "While we are influenced by architectural precedents, such as rural villas on the hillsides of Tuscany, we can infuse this with the way we live today."



Center Stage | Unlike many home theaters that are tucked away in the basement, the Byerses' theater (above) sits on the main floor, near the master suite. "Bob and Audrey wanted to be able to use the theater all the time, and they asked for it to be very central to the home," says Landry, who gave shape to the backlit onyx-and-walnut ceiling for a sense of movement. The couple credits their son-in-law with developing the idea for the glass floor (left), which enables theatergoers to admire Bob's car collection in the garage below. The Los Angeles–based Robert's Home Audio and Video—the installer and maintainer of the home's Crestron audio, video, lighting, climate-control, and security systems—acoustically tuned the theater with surround sound and hidden reinforcement subwoofers.

"Our grandkids are always in there," says Audrey. Adds Behnke, "The theater often becomes a big TV room." The designer upholstered the walls in Larsen fabric and had the draperies made from a Clarence House textile. The sconces are from Porta Romana, and the cashmere throws are from Micucci.



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—ARCHITECT RICHARD LANDRY

Auto Bond | "I knew I wanted a subterranean garage," says Bob, who worked with Landry on the James Bond–like concept for the 7,500-square-foot space. The homeowner also knew that he wanted plenty of individual bays to highlight his various cars. "Our last house had a four-car garage, and I had to keep putting the cars up on lifts to see them," says Bob, who periodically changes how he displays his extensive collection. That assemblage includes a 2005 Maserati Quattroporte; a 2002 Porsche 911 Carrera; a 2009 Bentley Continental GTC; a 2010 Lamborghini Murciélago; a 2001 Ferrari Modena; a 2009 Audi R8-RS; a 2012 Tesla Model S Signature; and a 2013 Porsche 911 Turbo S Cabriolet. "It's been Bob's dream since he was a kid to have a custom garage," says Landry, "so it was an important part of the architectural program."

To provide the necessary light in the underground space, Behnke brought in a row of Paul Ferrante chandeliers and sconces. More bricks from historic buildings were set by hand in the ceiling and columns; there are 5,000 bricks per bay. An on-site well provides the home with water that has been filtered of all impurities, which is suitable not only for drinking but also for washing the pristine cars. The floor tile, from Ann Sacks, is hardy, car-friendly concrete that has been stained to resemble terra-cotta.

At one end of the garage is Bob's man cave (bottom left), which he says "is designed for poker parties and watching many games at once on TV." Flanking the Lamborghini that faces the space are two more of Bob's classic cars: a 1981 Delorean and a 1937 Packard 115 C Convertible with a rumble seat.

The garage opens through a pair of barn-style doors onto the driveway (top left), where the Packard is parked not far from a visiting 2013 McLaren 12C Spider. "Audrey calls this the House of Bob," says Bob with a laugh.

Calm, Cool, and Connected

The rear terrace and pool follow a semicircular curve, which is echoed in the ocular window (from Steelworks) in the stone tower; both the window and the tower are design elements borrowed from structures in traditional Tuscan villages. "The word *timeless* has been used and overused," says Landry, "but we hope that some might look at this home in the future and appreciate it for its architecture. This house promises to age well."

Landry ensured further architectural continuity with a series of Italian-style arches that extend from the wall of glass in the great room (left) to the loggia (center) and the guesthouse (right), which contains a gym on the first floor. Within this old-world design scheme, Robert's Home Audio and Video seamlessly implemented the latest technology, such as a Crestron system that allows the couple to control the pool (which is by Summit Pools & Spas), spa, water features, security system, lights, and music from anywhere in the world via their smartphones. "We even had them install sensors in the mailbox that indicate when we have mail," says Bob. He notes that he will soon install hillside solar panels that eventually will help provide the home with renewable energy.

The Byerses spend most of their time outside, so G. Grisamore Design added a modest-size lawn (foreground) to the landscaping plan, which was executed by Native Designs of Valley Village, Calif. "Maybe it's my upbringing—I grew up on a farm and could never be in a high-rise," says Audrey. "I need grass and dirt." Though they have been in the house less than a year, the couple has utilized the outdoor space—which includes furniture from Janus et Cie, with Perennials fabrics—for everything from small family gatherings to a wedding ceremony.

Glowing Reviews

Despite the scale of the house—which in the evening appears to rise from the lake below—smaller living areas, such as the one created around the fire pit before the guesthouse (left), abound. "This house has a lot of purposeful contrasts," says Landry. "We paired the grand and the intimate and the robust—all the stone, for example—with sensual curves for a perfect balance. And the house truly reflects this couple: They are fun, and they enjoy life. The openness of the house reflects how welcoming they are."

While they continue to visit their condominium in Mammoth Lakes, Calif., and their fractional residence in Cabo San Lucas, Mexico, the couple is finding themselves staying home more often. "We don't travel as much as we used to, and being here is like being on vacation all the time," says Bob, who has named the house Villa del Lago. Adds Audrey, "We stayed in a château on Lake Como, which we loved, and this house reminds me of that place. This house is our story." R

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