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at home



A Historic Estate in Montecito Carries Out George Washington Smith's Vision with a View to Contemporary Life

by JOAN TAPPER photographs by LISA ROMEREIN styled by KYLE IRWIN



PHOTOGRAPHS: FROM GEORGE WASHINGTON SMITH: AN ARCHITECT'S SCRAPBOOK BY MARC APPLETON.

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enovation and restoration are like two kids on a teeter-totter. It's so easy to bounce too hard toward exacting, difficult-to-live-in historic recreation or toward radical changes that sweep away all vestiges of the past. Finding the perfect balance can be an elusive game, but when it's achieved, the results are so graceful, so delicate, they can seem utterly effortless.

So it's a delight to step up to the front door of this historic home, where the limbs of a majestic fig tree veil part of a stepped-back wall. You know at once you're about to walk into a George Washington Smith house. The elegantly unpretentious rectangular entryway is crowned by a wrought-iron balcony and set into a signature white plaster, red-roof façade that immediately evokes images of a country house in Andalusia. Inside, the original architectural details have been complemented by imaginative Moorish-inspired furnishings and decor, but even more amazing are the additions that seamlessly and luxuriously marry old and new.

Like many Montecito estates, this one carries with it an almost century-long story. In 1920, painter DeWitt Parshall was living in a late 19th-century house on the property, when he asked Smith, his friend and neighbor, to transform it into the kind of Spanish-style residence for which the architect was becoming famous. The grounds were extensive—much larger than the property's four-plus acres today—and Smith oriented the residence on four axes so that views stretched south to the ocean, with gardens to the east and west and an oval driveway to the north. That plan accounted for the home's original name, Cuatros Vistos, or "four views."

The present owners, who already possessed homes in Europe, were eager to have a place in Santa Barbara when they bought the estate a little more than a decade ago. "It was a classic G.W. Smith," the lady of the house remembers, and "we wanted a historic home. We were happy to bring it back to its splendor." Though the bones of the dwelling had remained unchanged, the interior had taken on a "south of France look, very Provençal, with bleached floors. I wanted to return it to the Spanish-Moorish feel. New houses don't have a soul," she adds. "I love the old architecture—the old carved doors and the old glass."

A quick renovation got rid of certain extraneous touches. But for the long-term, the owners had something more substantial in mind—the addition of a family room, space for guests, and an improved traffic flow that eliminated a cramped back stairway and the need to pass through certain rooms to reach others. "Smith's floor plans create interesting rooms," says Don Nulty, a Santa Barbara architect who has overseen many historic restorations, "but sometimes they aren't smooth

Historic photos reveal the early incarnation of today's architectural nuances—from the wrought iron balcony over the front door (top) to a beamed ceiling and arched entry (bottom). OPPOSITE: A grand Orientalist painting adds drama to the living room, where an Adam and Eve chandelier provides a light touch. PREVIOUS PAGES, LEFT TO RIGHT: The reflecting pool, a focal point of the original estate, leads to the central hall of the residence; the understated entrance exhibits George Washington Smith's affection for Andalusian style.





A striking antique console and mirror by Carlo Bugatti shows off the Italian designer's penchant for exotica. OPPOSITE: Camel-seat chairs find a firm footing in the living room, whose color scheme is livened by a tribal rug.



flowing. They can seem chopped up." The owners hired Nulty to adapt the home for 21st-century living, which meant upgrading electrical and other systems, enlarging the baths, updating the kitchen, and creating a portico that united the wings. "We added about one third to the house," says Nulty, "but we were careful not to disrupt the original intimate scale of Smith's work." The owners also asked interior designer Joan Behnke to assist with carrying out their vision for decor, and they brought on landscape architect Dennis Hickok to enhance the existing garden.

Two principles guided the team every step of the way, notes Behnke: First of all, the owners wanted to make it seem as if nothing had been renovated or changed—to convey the feeling that the house had always looked this way. Second, they wanted to embrace the Andalusian flavor of the residence. "They had recently been in Morocco and were inspired by the sexy, mysterious exoticness of the country," she adds.

That theme was driven by the husband's collection of Orientalist art, largely 19th-century French paintings that depict colorful scenes in North Africa and the Middle East. "They were the inspiration for the colors of the decor," his wife says. "There are lots of jewel tones, which lend a Moorish feel and gave me



In the formal dining room, a Middle Eastern scene tops the fireplace, one of seven in the house. OPPOSITE: An inlaid Syrian chair, half of a pair, flanks a Moorish-inspired Italian table with equally intricate workmanship.



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: A Moorish lamp; a welcoming settee in the front hall; an antique Syrian carved chair in the new family room. OPPOSITE: Moroccan-style mashrabiya shutters help illuminate the intimate bar just off the living room.

the palette" for the furnishings. The artworks show souks, warriors, rug merchants, and domestic scenes and are full of exquisite detail. In them "you see the Berber carpets, and tiles, and *mashrabiya*," as latticework Moroccan shutters are known. Those elements ultimately found a place in this house, too, blending both with its existing appointments and one-of-a-kind accents.

The vivid paintings set the mood from the moment one walks into the front hall, where a persimmon-hue settee anchors a corner. A striking antique console and mirror—made of wood inlaid with copper, bone, and ivory—dominates the opposite wall. It's the work of Carlo Bugatti (father of the famed automotive engineer), an innovative, turn-of-the-century furniture designer who mixed ethnic, art deco, and Italian influences in his creations. Underfoot, the original terra-cotta floor tiles have been restored and duplicated so exactly for other rooms that it's impossible to tell which are which. An adjoining powder room carries out the Moroccan theme with





An antique suzani creates a partial canopy in the master bedroom (top), which leads to the sitting room (bottom) with an outdoor staircase, a signature Smith detail. OPPOSITE: The second-floor gallery with a garden view gracefully unites the two wings of the house.

handmade geometric mosaic *zillij* tiles on the walls and custom-made mashrabiya on the windows.

Beyond the hall, a glass door reveals a breathtaking green lawn extending to the sides and unrolling back to two giant Canary Island date palms that flank the beginning of one of two serenely long reflecting pools. It's a tantalizing enticement to step outside, but first the rest of the house beckons.

A few steps lead down to the living room, whose dark beams are decorated with a stenciled Moorish pattern. The imposing fireplace—one of seven in the house—has been there since the beginning, along with the intricately carved wooden doors of its built-in wood box. Antique Syrian tiles are on display, while authentic camel seats invite conversation. In the center of the room, a superb wrought iron, candle-lit chandelier with an Adam and Eve theme hangs from a beam—"the work of a formidable French ironmonger," notes Behnke.

Adam and Eve resurface in the dining room and are portrayed in inlay on a tabletop, and there are other playful references to alluring women in art, including the odalisque painting that is a highlight of the intimate library.

From there, a butler's pantry leads into the light, airy kitchen, whose simple cabinets were copied from the few that Smith had built in. "All I wanted to do was repeat, repeat, repeat" what was part of the house, the owner's wife notes, whether that meant cabinets, fireplace grates, tiles, or wrought iron sconces. Or the family room, which echoes the living room not only in size and shape but also with its fireplace and beamed ceiling. And the staircase that leads up to the guest rooms on the second floor, where a graceful gallery offers a garden view, was the solution to Smith's odd traffic pattern.

Meanwhile, the master suite occupies the original wing's second floor, with a commanding view of the grounds and mountains. If the bedroom itself is restrained and elegant, the all-ivory master bath is both sumptuous and sensual, with luminescent taupe and cream *zillij* tiles in an arched niche behind the tub. In contrast, the gentleman's dressing room is paneled in rich dark wood, taking its cue from an elaborate antique inlaid Syrian mirror.

Finally, where a porch once stood open toward Montecito Peak, there is now a sitting room, closed in decades ago. From here, George Washington Smith's exterior staircase angles down to a side garden, allowing a discreet descent to the swimming pool.

The estate's original lush landscaping was the work of a Dutch horticulturalist named Peter Riedel, who planted exotic and specimen trees, added an off-center octagonal *Continued on page 185*





A green gateway to the rose garden. OPPOSITE:
Nature's forms and man-made ones add visual
excitement to the gardens. Bronze cranes
internally revel in one of the reflecting pools.





The link between old and new, an arched portico at the center of the house is a setting where the family can dine outdoors—a contemporary touch for a Southern California classic.