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# home: A NEVER-ENDING VACATION RESORT

by Julian Lopez | photos courtesy of Rick D'Amato and Dan Diaz







Dan Diaz (left) and Rick D'Amato (right) enjoy a relaxing afternoon at their College Park Estates home.



**W**HEN RICK D'AMATO and his partner of 20 years, Dan Diaz, open the door to their 1950s federal style home in College Park Estates — a suburb neighborhood near Pacific Coast Highway and Clark Avenue, east of the Traffic Circle — visitors not only are able to share the couple's dream home, they also get a sense of the two men's unique personalities.

D'Amato and Diaz purchased their home more than four years ago with the intent of transforming the uninhabited house into a place where they could imagine being on a never-ending vacation. The men were able to see beyond the small windows that had been sealed shut with paint and everything else that called for more than cosmetic work. "The moment we drove up to the vacant property, we looked at each other and knew it was perfect for what we wanted to create," said D'Amato, a principal architect with

the leading environmental design firm, LPA. "(Our) overall goal with this home was to connect its living spaces with its environment while maintaining the shape and form of the house so that it does not veer away from its overall neighborhood. The approach is similar to the commercial buildings I've designed at LPA."

The couple, who often share their home with guests, wanted something that would reflect their welcoming and stylish personalities. They set out to design their home with a holistic infrastructure that would respond to the local climate while optimizing energy and space.

"We ... love having guests over, so it was important to us that the place also seemed welcoming," D'Amato said.

Its spacious rooms are breathtaking. The living room, centered between the dining room and the bedrooms, features bamboo flooring that





stretches into a modern kitchen and a lounge room.

The spacious décor is positioned with precision. Every room becomes as welcoming as the owners.

Although concrete masonry units enclose a private courtyard at the home's main entrance, suggesting privacy to the outside observer, the effect brings the outside to the inside. Within this private utopia, a potted cactus and other drought-tolerant plants are visible. The home interior is framed by an array of tall windows and a glass door that help keep the house cool in the summer, maximizing sunlight and natural breezes.

"We have had no need for an air conditioner due to the way we replaced the old small windows with larger ones," Diaz said.

The living room, dining room and kitchen show

off the backyard via parallel tall windows and a wide custom-made ceiling-to-wall glass door that pivots from its center to uniquely swing open from both ends. The vista evokes an all-inclusive resort with its luscious landscape, raised deck, red oval fountain, cushioned benches, gas fire pit and saline pool.

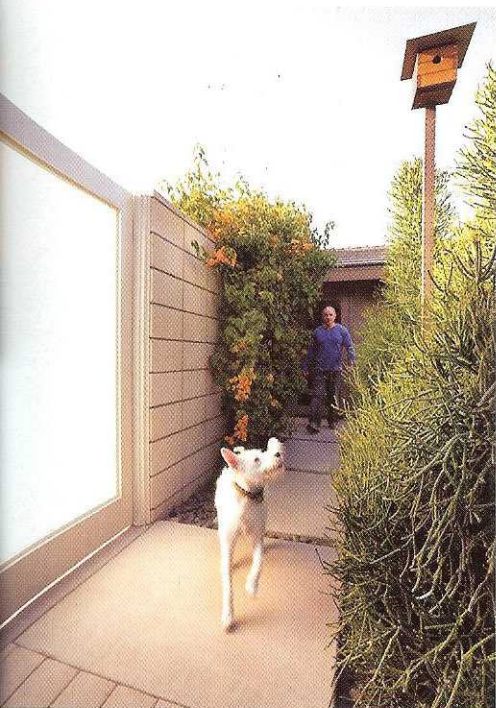
"Our backyard is our personal oasis, but also a very welcoming place for our guests," Diaz said. "We like the idea of hotel comfort and hospitality."

The interior décor and landscape throughout the 1,650-square-foot home are skillfully presented with accent lighting or skylights that further augment the soothing atmosphere.

D'Amato admits that part of their inspiration for crafting a contemporary residence has been their admiration for interior designer Jonathan Adler.







Much of the home's décor was purchased from local businesses such as Surya Gallery, Prep Kitchen Essentials, David Galindo Home and others.

Achieving a contemporary, yet welcoming touch to their home involved removing interior walls whenever possible to add an airy experience.

"We like the feel of an open space because it's more welcoming," D'Amato said. "And one of the first things we did when moving in was to tear walls apart."

Their master bedroom is stunning. Slight hints of masonry units complement the setting, helping to insulate the bedroom. Through a glass pocket door, the couple often enjoys the view of their resort-style backyard from the comfort of their bed.

Its contemporary restrooms operate on tankless water heaters to save energy and water. Recy-

clad glass tile and natural rock floors embellish the bathrooms and laundry room.

"We wanted to maintain the same feeling of being in a resort, even with our restrooms," D'Amato said. "We felt they should be a place of tranquility."

While the chemistry between D'Amato and Diaz is quite apparent, they each bring individual qualities to their relationship that helps complement their home's look. D'Amato admits that his strength lies in drafting the structure of a home, efficiently using space and furniture layout. Diaz is better at selecting specific art pieces and details that make everything come together.

"I do commercial interiors, which was part of what we wanted our home to be like, (but) Dan brought a softer feel to the décor," D'Amato said.