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Spanish Mediterranean Meets Western Europe

by Julian Lopez | photos by Jeff Farsai

It's almost difficult to miss the 3,100 square-foot Spanish Mediterranean style home when heading down Broadway and Prospect Avenue. It stands a tall muted butterscotch-yellow prestige and enclosed with a matching stucco wall that is reminiscent, just as the overall layout, of a private palace or sumptuous hacienda.

Immediately, upon looking at the two-story home above the eight-foot wall, where a vigor bougainvillea spills and entangles alongside the occasional wrought iron window gate, one can catch a glimpse of a couple balconies and other exotic tall greens. Palm trees that align the sidewalk seem to intermingle with the variations of other palmettos, cypress trees and Mediterranean plants that surround the home.

Centered within the front garden, just along the main entrance, is a double-tiered water fountain with a large rounded basin. It is the view from the main arched living room window of the home, and it serves as the centerpiece of the front garden.

The address in Belmont Heights, just slightly north of the Ocean Boulevard and Second Street juncture, is home to both Sal Saenz and his partner Neal Vincent.

"I'm very fortunate. I sometimes look around and feel like I have to pinch myself to convince me that this is our home," says Saenz, a Long Beach realtor at Remax College Park.

But before Sal and Neal first moved to the corner street home, built in 1927, the two were then living in what they believed was already their ideal home only several blocks away.

"We weren't even looking for a place," explains Saenz. "We loved Belmont Shores and were actually helping some friends look for a house in this part of town when we came across this place. They were reluctant, but we fell in love with it instantly."

Although the residence lacked warmth, since it had remained unoccupied for several years, Sal and Neal could envision how gorgeous it could become with a little hard work. "It was far from just cosmetic work, but we could definitely see the potential this place had," says Saenz.

With certain ailing structures demanding repair, or appearing unfit for what they envisioned, the two of them began revamping conditions. Part of the work would involve redesigning the kitchen, plastering walls, including a large living room ceiling hole, and designing a landscape with an all-inclusive backyard swimming pool and Jacuzzi. In addition, privacy would surface with a wraparound stucco wall that has an eight-foot variance, a height approved by the city due to the slight elevation of the street and pool safety regulations. Neal, who is an architect with HKS, contributed

a lot of his expertise in the redesigning of the home.

Although many repairs and embellishments soon began revitalizing and enhancing the place, many of the features considered involved maintaining the integrity of the home's Spanish style and original interior. Everything about the final product's inside, with its hardwood floors and curved stairs, including much of the original moldings, captures the essence of the home's classic character.

Its main curved entrance is a double door of wood and windowpanes that lead to a small foyer and living room. Inside the living room, a grand piano and Mediterranean and European furniture all encircle the room above a large Persian rug. Its stunning look immediately begins to coincide with the overall layout of the



house. In addition, many art pieces embellish the various walls of the house that were collected locally and internationally.

The formal dining room, immediately following the living room, presents a stunning 1880s antique Italian dining set with diptych lions and a chandelier similar to others throughout the house. Additional furniture beyond the home is also European and Mediterranean, creating the international ambience that the two men envisioned. Together, the assortment of European furniture and art pieces compliment the original interior, such as the wooden stairs and Spanish restroom tile on both the first and second floors.

"Part of our goal was to maintain the original look of the home, and bring it out as much as



possible, while enhancing it with new electrical and appliances, such as the kitchen, or in the restroom of the second floor where we added a new Jacuzzi tub and twin sinks," says Saenz.

Sconces along the living room and dining room were resuscitated and now light up and accent both rooms, as originally intended, after Neal discovered concealed wiring behind certain walls.

The kitchen, which features a new six-burner Viking, and other state of the art appliances, was redesigned as a Spanish style kitchen, while adding new conveniences, such as the island counter.

While various rooms of the first level, such as a second living room, a restroom with original trimmings, and a bedroom, also of Mediterranean pieces, were all designed to coincide with the tradition of a European style home, much of what has been obtained is a combination of the 14 years that Sal and Neal have been together.

"We compliment each other," says Saenz. "And we have very similar taste, which made it easy for us to agree on a lot of the furniture and ideas of the home."

The couple, who met through mutual friends,

took approximately four to five years to complete all home projects, creating a beautiful utopia of their own personal taste and years together. The international look of the home is also reflected throughout the second floor, where a second bedroom, an office and the master bedroom are located.

Upon observing the décor of the second floor, the same feeling of Europe and the various international antiques that have been collected becomes quickly evident. The collection of motifs and art emanate a feeling of being in a foreign country where all the West of Europe is conjoined without limits.

"One of the things we enjoy about our home," says Saenz, "is that being here also promotes the feeling of being somewhere international and on vacation."

Views of Long Beach are visible on both balconies of the second floor, including the ocean view from the balcony of their master bedroom.

While many collections throughout their home reflect an international flavor, a part of Long Beach and other local areas also lives within the opulent embellishments of the home. Fur-



niture from Surya Gallery located on Broadway and Arte de Mexico are also intermixed in the décor, while the main exterior wrought iron gate came from Beyond Tiffany, also in Long Beach.

One of the latest editions to the home is a fireplace hub along the exterior of the home that serves as a secluded haven for both men. Two beautifully sculpted figures face forward, along the sides of the fireplace.

Sal and Neal are also contributors to their local community by serving as Board members of the Musical Theatre West Broadway Shows, at the Carpenter Center and on the Board of Governments at Long Beach City College. The two men also share their home with their two chocolate labs, Parker and Trooper. CLOUT