

A pair of builders study age-old techniques, importing materials from Tuscany and Provence to create a captivating home in California's Sonoma Valley.

Vintage BLEND

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A carved-wood door, which dates to Napoleon's days in Paris, was handpicked by builder Jon Reiter to lend the facade of this new home a sense of history.



Perched on a rocky rise surrounded by undulating vineyards, Montevigna—as this California home was dubbed upon

completion—captures stunning views of the countryside. The sun rises and sets over the house, bathing it in golden splendor throughout the day while providing sustenance for centuries-old oaks, Manzanillo olive trees, stately Italian cypress, and, recently, the owner's raised vegetable gardens. "Standing at the big farm sink in her kitchen, my aunt can see the vegetables that she cooks with," says interior designer Lindsay Brier, who helped her aunt and uncle furnish their wine-country getaway.

It's an unexpected bounty considering the house was a detour. "My aunt and uncle had purchased land elsewhere," Brier says. "But then they went to meet with builders Jon and Susan Reiter. As they drove up the drive to their home, they fell in love with the property and abandoned their plans, making an offer on the builders' home instead."

Jon Reiter understands the spell the house casts. He and his wife, Susan, devoted two years to building it on a challenging site because the views are so spectacular. "It was a quarry mined for San Francisco street cobblestones," he says. "When we found it, it was thickly overgrown. Big old oak trees were growing out of the rocky hillside. But Susan and I walked the property and knew it could be tamed."

Saving as many of the trees as possible, the Reiters leveled some of the land to make room for a three-bedroom house. There was just enough space to squeeze in a pool, and then they moved to different levels of the hillside to add a garage, a guesthouse, and eventually a bocce court. Their thoughtful, methodical approach—honed during the 20 years they've been constructing homes in a European style—continued as they erected each structure. They made several trips to towns around Florence and tiny Saint-Andiol, France, to gather building materials, such as doors and windows, as well as to learn techniques from local artisans. "Every time I see a building being remodeled in some small town, I walk through it and ask questions," Jon Reiter says. "Susan's pretty good with French and Italian. I use hand gestures." That's how he learned the method for the double-arching brick ceiling in the study. It's a style that dates to the ancient Romans. "It was more complex to re-create than I thought it would be," he says.

An exacting level of authenticity, which extends to the landscape designed by David Fazio, is what makes the house unique—and it's what captivated her aunt and uncle, Brier says. "We tried to keep the interior furnishings quiet, to keep the focus on the architecture," she says. For instance, Brier chose supple leather for the banquette cushion in the breakfast area, using its smooth texture to contrast and highlight the rustic stone wall behind it. Elsewhere, furnishings are equally clean-lined and upholstered in neutral-color linens, with a few cut-velvet pillows to enhance the house's innate coziness. "The house is great for big gatherings, but it also feels intimate," Brier says.

OPPOSITE: Just as they do in Italian homes, interior wood shutters in the study close to help regulate room temperature. Interior designer Lindsay Brier added seating under one window by topping a refinished late-19th-century Continental chest with a plush cushion.

ABOVE: Despite its age-old appearance, the home is sheathed in a recycled-polystyrene exterior and capped with solar panels. The panels are hidden on the rear plane of the roof, which is made from French terra-cotta tiles crafted the ancient way. "They're the real thing," Jon Reiter says. "Each one was formed as it was bent over someone's thigh."

"We are drawn to the simplicity of the architecture in Italy—it's functional, beautiful, and enduring."

—BUILDER JON REITER



LEFT: In the style of an old European farm kitchen, a French terra-cotta tile alcove houses the range. Poured concrete countertops stained a dark gray highlight the tile's earthy tones.

ABOVE: Beams throughout the house, including in the great-room, came from a lodge in Canada that was being torn down. Reiter buys doors, shutters, and windows from a company in Certaldo, Italy, where they have been fashioned out of local chestnut for generations. "Wood used to be easier to come by than glass, so they don't put glass in the bottom of the door where it's likely to be kicked and broken," he says.

OPPOSITE: After seeing a similar fixture in an Italian villa, Brier had a California artisan craft a grapevinelike chandelier from wrought iron. In a nod to today's preference for open-concept living, the dining area is part of a great-room. French doors leading to a terrace are often left flung wide to welcome light and breezes.



ABOVE: Attended by a gilded antique French stool, a vintage cast-iron tub in the master bath enjoys enchanting garden views through a casement window. **OPPOSITE:** Brier played upon the quiet tones of a painting by Texas-born Norman Foster in the master suite by calling on layers of linen to soften an ebonized mahogany four-poster.





TOP LEFT: Indoor-outdoor chairs set a casual tone in the breakfast nook just off the kitchen. **TOP MIDDLE:** An antique fountain from Roussillon, France, graces a garden walk. "You can hear and appreciate the fountain from everywhere on the property—it makes everything feel connected," Brier says. **TOP RIGHT:** The roof is supported by columns of carved stone that feel like they've always been there thanks to nearby gnarled olive trees that were carefully preserved during the building process. **ABOVE LEFT:** A portion of the hillside was leveled to carve out space for a bocce court. "The light on the bocce court is always spectacular," Brier says. Landscape designer David Fazzio used stones from the property to form the steps and walls. **ABOVE RIGHT:** The antique sink was a remarkable find in France: "It was cut from one solid piece of marble," builder Susan Reiter says. **OPPOSITE:** Fazzio chose plants with Mediterranean roots, such as lavender and rosemary, to lend a European feel to the property. For the loggia, he trained creeping fig to climb the columns. "Climbing plants make the house feel more anchored to the ground," he says. "They provide a rustic country feel. Even though the house is new, it feels homey and comfortable."