

# CALIFORNIA HOMIES

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historic  
*Serenity* in  
Montecito



Natural Elements And Neutral Tones Provide  
The Inspiration For Sue Firestone And Her Associates  
To Re-Create A Traditional Estate With A Modern Twist

TEXT BY LESLIE A. WESTBROOK | INTERIOR PHOTOGRAPHY BY FRED LICHT  
EXTERIOR PHOTOGRAPHY BY THOMAS PLOCH

In the living room the custom designed Bali block coffee table from All Wood Treasures is flanked by A. Rudin linen covered sofas. Natural accents include petrified wood on the coffee table from DAO (Design Around Objects) horn and lacquer column table lamps from Micucci.

Acacia wood side table in the family room from DAO makes a bold statement paired with "Loft Lamp" from Celadon House. The custom ottoman table from Vaughan Benz has an upholstered top and removable tray. A. Rudin sectional sofa is covered in "New Brussels" linen/cotton fabric. OPPOSITE lounge chair is covered in "Bouclé Ribbon" tweed, both fabrics from J. Robert Scott.





Santa Barbara based designer Sue Firestone and her team are no strangers to large projects. Recently completed endeavors by her firm, SFA design, include the Four Seasons Los Angeles at Beverly Hills, Waldorf-Astoria Orlando, and Fairmont Heritage Place Ghirardelli Square in San Francisco. Among high profile projects she is working on in the Middle East are The Ritz-Carlton Abu Dhabi, Grand Canal in the United Arab Emirates and Four Seasons Jebel Sifah, Oman.

For SFA, creating interiors for a 7500 square foot, five bedroom, seven bathroom, remodeled and expanded historic Montecito estate, on four acres filled with California oak trees, might have been just another day at the office. But the team came up with an original scheme that detoured from the typical Mediterranean theme often seen in this neighborhood. The owners wanted a sanctuary that evoked serenity and reflected their love of Balinese and Southeast Asian design, so the designers looked toward natural elements, used in unexpected ways, resulting in tranquil spaces with a contemporary flair.



Water feature in the boxed hedges is part of the original garden design created by 1920s landscape architect Lockwood de Forest, Jr.



“The challenge was to create a new, modern home that preserved the views and historic aspects of the property,”

—Don Nulty, AIA



The interior is a mélange of Afro/Asian/Modernist themes—a safari of design and textures, in refreshing contrast to the home’s original intent. Architect Don Nulty, AIA, who has been practicing in Santa Barbara for thirty years with an emphasis on historic restorations and renovations, was responsible for the additions. “The challenge was to create a new, modern home that preserved the views and historic aspects of the property,” he says. The architect tastefully and sensitively added 6,000 square feet to the existing, 2,200 square foot architectural footprint, which incorporates a three story tower designed by renowned American architect Bertram Goodhue (1869-1924), known for his Neo-gothic and Spanish Colonial Revival buildings, as well as the design of the Los Angeles Public Library. The estate gardens, by noted landscape designer Lockwood de Forest, Jr., first took root in the early part of the last century. De Forrest was responsible for some of Montecito’s finest and largest estate gardens installed during the 1920s for the wealthy that fled colder climes to live in this idyllic seaside community.

Combining the dictate of the both the noteworthy and natural landscape design (a mix of formal and natural garden settings including a folly) with their clients’ wishes for a natural, Zen-like interior was another challenge. Rosie Feinberg (Sue Firestone’s associate of thirty years) and her team brought the outdoors in by incorporating bold pieces such as a chunky wooden Mimi London side table in the master bedroom and found accessories, including a large scale, sculptural piece of driftwood.

Tying in both existing and new textures with the new color palette—an off-white upholstered coffee table to nubby, natural linens and chenille, a wrought iron balustrade with a bronze finish and Mediterranean tile flooring with subtle color variances—also contributes to the success of the design.

Part of bringing the estate back to its original glory included transforming the exterior walls with a subtle, artistic finish. Steven Lehner & Associates antique glazed the exterior surfaces, using a triple application of color to achieve the desired effect.

Other rustic and organic elements were placed throughout the house. As a case in point: a Holly Hunt collector's edition chair of rope construction sits astride a table-sized river rock in the entry.

"We were striving for a design that really pushed the envelope, proving that nature can be sleek, contemporary and edited to achieve true elegance," says Firestone. "We wanted to avoid the sparseness and the narrow lines of modern Minimalism."

To achieve a more neutral, relaxed look, an artistic parchment paint finish was used throughout the interior, creating a feeling that one is walking into an envelope of suede. Additional green and eco-conscious materials include a ceiling treatment of natural hemp fibers applied in the entry and between the coffered ceiling panels in the living room, as well as bleached hemp window treatments. Despite the massive scale of the house, rooms feel cozy and intimate, especially in the living room and the dining room, where a chandelier, in a nod to Santa Barbara's Spanish Colonial Revival roots, softly illuminates the round walnut table that seats eight.

A wine cellar, private screening room, and blue-tiled pool all add to the luxury of this very private family home. Thanks to the use of dark exotic hardwoods and a gentle shibui hand in the design, the newly renovated, elegant estate seems right at home in the heart of its woody, historic Montecito setting. <sup>[11]</sup>



UPPER RIGHT A fanciful bronze candlestick dances atop a Mimi London chunky walnut cigarette table in the master bedroom. "Alba Stripe" window covering made of ababa and raffia from Thomas Lavin; loveseat covered with Donghia slipcover. RIGHT A workspace desk created in a bedroom has Alan Knight wood ribbed mahogany desk lamp with round water hyacinth shade. Bookcase accessories include a footed Somali serving bowl and primitive African basket and antique wood wheel (all from Inner Gardens) and carved wood objects from Janus et Cie.

An aura of calm prevails in the master bath with treetop views. Kriess Collection Sonata custom console made of travertine with an iron base holds rock crystals and stone Buddha head, both from Accessory Preview.

