California Woman to Build Home From Old Jet

Monica, Ms. Rehwald, whose passions include yoga, organic gardening, meditation, folk art and the Cuban cocktails called mojitos, loved the adventurousness of the design, the feminine shapes and especially the environmental aspect.

"It's 100% post-consumer waste," she says. "Isn't that the coolest?"

Unusual homes are nothing new. Please Turn to Page 46, Column 1.

First, Mr. Hertz had to find a plane. New 747s start at more than $200 million. He called Mark Thompson of Aviation Warehouse, who runs an airplane junkyard in the California desert that resembles the futuristic wasteland of "Mad Max." Mr. Thompson told him that $70,000 to $100,000 would buy Ms. Rehwald a decommissioned Boeing 747-200 that still carries the faded logo of defunct Tower Air.

Half the value was in the airframes, the movable parts of the wing. Mr. Hertz figured he could use them to control the awning on the patio by Ms. Rehwald's swimming pool.

Mr. Thompson met with county engineering officials to persuade them that the jet parts could withstand the strong winds that sometimes buffet Ms. Rehwald's property. It's difficult to get a city engineer who is used to working with 2-by-4s and plaster to realize that an airplane that flies miles per hour can stand up to 40-mile winds.

Nancy Francis, supervisor of the Ventura County Planning Division, said she's excited such an unusual dwelling is going up in her jurisdiction. "Everyone in the county wants to go on the site visit when it's done," she says.

A winding one-lane road leads to the sunny hillside in the Santa Monica Mountains where Ms. Rehwald intends to create her architectural oddity. The 55-acre plot with views of the Pacific, now covered in aloe, agave cactus and white oleander flowers, is one hour north of L.A. It once housed dozens of buildings erected by Hollywood designer Tony Duquette, who built with found objects and industrial garbage such as old tires and radiators. A fire in 1993 destroyed most of his strange handiwork.

Ms. Rehwald bought the land last year.

Mr. Hertz and his assistants have been spending time in the desert with the decommissioned jet, measuring it with long pieces of string and contemplating its shape. The airplane is at present going to a salvage yard in Texas. Mr. Thompson will cut it into pieces and truck it to a valley near his client's property. He figures it will take a helicopter 10 hours—at $5,000 an hour—to ferry the metal chunks up the hillside.

There he intends to assemble a compound of buildings connected by narrow dirt paths. The jet's wings will rest on thick concrete walls, forming the roof of a multilevel main house. The nose will point to the sky, becoming a meditation chamber, with the cockpit window a sky-light. The first-class cabin will be an art studio. The signature bulge on the top of the 747 will become a loft. A barn will house rare domestic animals such as the poitou donkey. A yoga studio, guest house and caretaker's cottage will round out the compound.

"We are trying to use every piece of this aircraft, much like an Indian would use a buffalo," says Mr. Hertz.