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ITALIAN ACCENT

AFTER A TRANSFORMING RENOVATION, A COUPLE'S SANTA MONICA HOUSE EMERGES WITH A FEELING OF AGE, PROPORTION AND EUROPEAN ELEGANCE.

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INTERIOR DESIGN Christine Markatos Lowe, Christine Markatos Design
ARCHITECTURE Lewin Wertheimer, Lewin Wertheimer Architect
HOME BUILDER Shawn Nelson and John Maurer, Nelson Daniels Construction
LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE Nancy Goslee Power, Nancy Goslee Power & Associates
BEDROOMS 7 | BATHROOMS 9 | SQUARE FEET 15,000



It didn't have any sense of age," says interior designer Christine Markatos Lowe of a late-1980s Mediterranean-style structure overlooking The Riviera Country Club golf course in Santa Monica. "The front of the house was very busy," elaborates architect Lewin Wertheimer. "And there were many aspects to it that felt dated." That fact wasn't lost on the homeowners, who nonetheless recognized its possibilities and purchased the house in 2002. It had a comfortably meandering layout, generously proportioned rooms and ravishing views of the distant Santa Monica Mountains.

To make the most of the house's potential, the homeowners' dictum to the team—which also included builder Shawn Nelson, his project manager John Maurer and landscape designer Nancy Goslee Power—was simple: Instill some Italy. "They wanted it to have the elegance of an Italian estate," explains Lowe. For Wertheimer, instilling some Italy meant "playing off the volumes the house had but making them simpler and old-world in their effect." The front door was pushed out 4 feet, widening the foyer so that

Designer Christine Markatos Lowe had C. Mariani Antiques in San Francisco fabricate a bench using Fortuny's Sevrès fabric for the foyer, where a marble-topped table made by New York-based DMS Studios Ltd. stands. *Top left:* The entry courtyard's fountain was fabricated in Italy based on an antique. *Bottom left:* Hélène Aumont's Negresco chandelier, from Jean de Merry, hangs in the foyer.

"My vision for the interior stemmed from using a mix of classical elements in a modern juxtaposition."



A 17th-century Venetian mirror hangs above a 16th-century mantel in the living room. The antique armchair is upholstered with a stripe from Claremont Furnishing Fabrics Company, and an ottoman from John Rosselli & Associates in New York is covered with an embroidered Indian textile.



Above: A 19th-century Italian cassone stands behind a custom sofa upholstered with a Rose Tarlow Melrose House damask in the living room. Left: A James Welling photograph, purchased from Regen Projects, hangs above a 19th-century commode.



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the balcony at the top of the entry stairs no longer "loomed over you." That balcony also got a new railing and the visual support of massive reclaimed beams. Wertheimer replaced several small windows along the circular stair tower with one large one, and in front of the tower, he flanked a tall rectangular volume with side wings for proportion.

Maurer and Nelson removed the bland exterior sand coat and, with Wertheimer, performed a total facelift with a mottled ochre plaster that, says the architect, brought the structure "closer to the ground." Then the plaster was matched with Santa Barbara sandstone and gravel on the drive that shared a similar palette. "All the materials look like they might have come from the same quarry," adds Wertheimer.



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On top of the structure, Maurer and Nelson strategically placed 78 solar panels flush with the tile roof. "You would never see them as you walk around unless someone pointed them out," says Maurer.

Lowe had worked on previous homes with the couple, so their passion for all things Italian was not news. But a period Tuscan or Roman interior was out of the question. "My vision for the interior stemmed from using a mix of classical elements in a modern juxtaposition, while remaining appropriate to the architecture and the needs of the clients," says Lowe.

To achieve that goal, she filled the house with 18th- and 19th-century Italian antiques, some reproduction pieces that she scaled up in size and upholstered seating. The mix makes the rooms feel comfortable, despite their sizable dimensions. "These rooms are enormous, but they feel warm," says the wife. "Christine did an amazing job."

A traditional white kitchen with Calacatta marble countertops gets a colorful twist with blue-gray Metro tiles from Urban Archaeology in New York. The island sink's matte-nickel Easton faucet from Waterworks adds a classic silhouette.



Lowe blends periods in the dining room with an 18th-century German cabinet, found at a Christie's auction, and a 1940s Murano chandelier. Custom dining chairs, covered in leather from Ashbury Hides, surround an LxRossi walnut table. The hand-blocked wallpaper is from San Patignano in Italy.



An early 19th-century French daybed offers a relaxing perch in the master suite, which is adorned with hand-blocked wallpaper from San Patrignano. Draperies designed with fabric from Nancy Corzine frame Roman shades made with a George Spencer Designs textile from Claremont Furnishing Fabrics Company.



Above: An antique armchair, covered with a silk-velvet from Nancy Corzine, faces a custom chest and a four-poster that Lowe designed and crowned with a Chelsea Editions linen stripe. Left: A John Dugdale photograph hangs above an inlaid Indian chest in a guest bedroom.



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Power—who attended a girls' school housed in the villa in Florence where Henry James wrote *The Portrait of a Lady*—is “a fervent convert to the country,” she says. “I embrace the way Italians use the land.” So she flanked the entry court with old-growth olive trees and California sycamores and lined the drive with Italian cypresses.

So, with the transformation complete, how are the homeowners settling in? “I’m always planning more,” says the wife. “It’s such a fabulous creative process. When you grow with your home, there’s always something to do.” **L**