

Spanish architecture lends itself to romance

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I love the romance and character of Spanish Colonial architecture. It's a style known for tile roofs, stucco walls, arched doorways, fountains, and iron fixtures.

The style can be seen throughout California in cities such as Los Angeles, Sacramento, and Santa Barbara. It is well-chronicled and inspiring to see how top-notch interior designers like John Saladino and Michael Smith have furnished and refurbished them. George Washington Smith, Reginald Johnson, and Wallace Neff designed some of the most noted examples.

I had been driving past this one Spanish style home in downtown Sonora since I was a teenager. It had a charming arched front door and, in the summer months, the owners put a heavy canvas curtain across the door to keep the sun out. About 12 years ago, the owner's daughter decided to sell it, and my late husband, Jim, and I made an offer before it went on the market.

The house was built in 1931 by Melba and Lewis Price. Melba was a distant Segerstrom relative (by way of the Burdens) and attended Jim's and my wedding in 1982. The builder, John Simpson, was known for building Spanish-style homes with craftsmen features. Our neighborhood is named Simpson Terrace for him. Some fine examples of his work are on our two blocks.

Old homes found intact like this are very unusual, and that's to the Price's credit. The challenge was making the home "our own" while honoring its age and architectural style. No structural changes were needed, but we did a lot of aesthetic things like custom curtains, new stainless appliances, tore out some unfortunate linoleum floors in the kitchen and re-



Courtesy photo

Spanish design mixes well with classic decorative touches and modern fabrics.

finished the original Douglas Fir floor beneath, did a custom butcher block top on the kitchen island, replaced a few mid-century light fixtures with cool iron vintage ones, and painted.

Among the features original to the house are a tile and plaster fireplace; plaster walls; hardwood floors; an iron staircase banister and fireplace implements; iron light fixtures and door knobs; bathroom and kitchen tile; and built-in hutches. In the living room there is a vaulted barrel ceiling (a sigh inducer) and one whole wall of wood paned, casement windows (casements open out like doors) that open to one of

the little side gardens. There are pull-down copper screens that, when in use, allow the sounds of the fountain to float in doors. Other rooms have either coved ceilings (curved) or picture rail moldings, which are similar to crown molding.

There are arched doorways and a heavy dark wood pocket door dividing the entry from the dining room, presumably built to keep the kids and dogs out of trouble prior to meal time. In the diminutive master bathroom (5 by 7) there is a Tunisian inspired hopper window with a very heavy, decorative iron grate. I have to reach through it to water the geraniums outside the window.

Most of our furniture was antique except for the upholstered pieces. Truthfully, I wasn't initially happy with the way it all worked in the house. It was very masculine and had a decidedly "arts and crafts" look. The Arts and Crafts era was an incredible time for home and furniture design, but it's not exactly "me." I found that by adding feminine fabrics and accessories it created this beautiful contrast. I designed the slipcovers, draperies, pillows and upholstered pieces in soft shades of taupe and green. I chose a Benison linen floral for the wood framed sofa, a soft taupe and green linen toile with deep claret brushed fringe for the feather throw pillows, a vintage inspired awning stripe for dining room curtains, and a soft green chenille for the wing-back chair slipcovers. I did contrasting ties and welts on the slipcovers in one of the floral fabrics. The green toile repeats itself on the dining room chairs. Dining rooms are often cold with all the wood surfaces. Curtains and upholstered or slipcovered chairs provide much needed warmth.

The overall effect is kind of rustic-romantic: a mixture of masculine and feminine, a blending of eras. The color scheme started out with warm white walls, claret red, olive green, and

dark brown, but recently I added rustic turquoise handmade pottery and a turquoise and brown area rug in the entry. Since the architecture is strong and rustic, scale and texture became a recurring theme throughout the public rooms. I happen to like baskets and greenery and those provided the texture. But scale isn't as easy. With such high ceilings, the living room needed an oversized piece to fill some of the ample wall space. This was accomplished with an old hardwood book case-cum media center. The upper half holds the books while the lower half houses cd's, a stereo system and a small television.

The kitchen and baths were all about the tile. In the kitchen we pulled up the linoleum to find lovely Doug Fir wood floors beneath. We did a cherry stain on them. We replaced the Harvest Gold refrigerator and dishwasher with stainless. Installed some antique black iron light fixtures and matching pulls. Tore out the island's Formica countertop and replaced it with a custom butcher block. We painted the walls a soft golden tan, painted the maple cabinets white (maple doesn't really go with a Spanish style house), and did some fun arched window treatments in a Ralph Lauren red floral print with black ties and welts. I love that the window treatments are arched, mimicking the arches elsewhere in the house.

I love seeing the house evolve with the changes my busy life has imposed on it. The pets have full run of the place. My adult son comes home from the city invariably bringing a friend. My mom visits many weekends a year and we love going to the Diamondback for at least two meals while she's here. We're in walking distance to the Farmer's Market and concerts in the park. Life in a small town means clean, mostly safe living. Wherever my work takes me, it's always a pleasure to come home at night to my little tile-roofed nest.