

# Holiday Homes Tour Features Lavish Décor and Sustainable Vision

By Sophie Braccini



Owner Chris Avant and Veronika Rather inside the renovated "Barn" Photo Sophie Braccini

Great contrast this year in the choice of venues offered to the public's eye by the Moraga Women's Society 22nd Homes Tour. From the spectacular Collins home to the sustainably restored Moraga Barn, this tour had a lot to offer and ponder upon.

The Tour started at the home of Brad and Kelly Irving on Corte Yolanda. A general atmosphere of friendliness and warmth came from visiting this traditional family house. The "head crafter" here obviously has a passion for precious details and proudly displayed a collection of 3 different sets of "Villages" sprinkled with snow and bustling with miniature life. For visitors, the Tour is about enjoying the decorations and also checking out the remodeling that most of those houses have undergone.

Winnie Jasper and Jerry Chamberlain's home went through a serious remodeling as well. The standard ranch house has seen its ceiling significantly raised and skylights added access to natural light. 1200 sqf were added including a charming master bathroom. The home was "Christmassy" in every nook and cranny. Colors, plants and collectibles had all been set for the season.

Sue Olsen's home in the Country Club has undergone a serious remodeling as well. Here too, the rule is high ceilings and plenty of natural light. In a more modern style, every object and addition has been the result of research in the unique. For example, a checkerboard butcher block crafted with maple wood and African Wenge covers the kitchen center isle.

The next stop was quite unexpected in a home tour: the Moraga Barn is a historical building that was purchased by Canyon Construction and will become the headquarters of that company. When stepping inside, the reason for the Barn's inclusion in the tour became clearer. It was not for the homey festive feeling that the building was included, but to showcase the beautiful restoration

work and the amazing range of innovative approaches that were applied to this site.

Canyon Construction researched the original look of the Barn, the oldest building still standing in Moraga. The original arches that define the façade look could be found and restored under the plaster that subsequent owners had added, and original balconies that had disappeared got redesigned. Looking at the original pictures that the Moraga Historical Society was displaying during the Tour, the Barn looks more like its original design now than it did during the past decades. This building is not only a piece of history, it is a showcase for Canyon Construction which specializes in sustainable building.

From the solar tiles that provide the electricity needed by the building, to the buried geothermal system that provides heating and cooling, to the use of either renewable or recycled material, all in this building talks about the future in sustainable construction. The company is seeking the Platinum LEED certification, the highest level in green building, which only a handful of constructions have attained in California.

Here, too, attention is paid to detail. For example, at the ground level, the floor is covered in tiles that were previously set in Union Square in San Francisco; all of the redwood lumber has been reclaimed; the stair railings have been crafted by local artist Chuck Splady out of steel that's 90% recycled (the standard is 60%); the upper floors are covered with High-Volume Fly-Ash concrete, a technology that improves the durability of concrete, its esthetics and eliminates the polluting effects of the standard production. Chris Avant the President/Owner of the company invites the whole community to an Open House on January 11th from 10am to 7pm.

The last visit stood in complete contrast to that of the Barn. Jim and Lynne Collins' home sits in an unincorporated area across from Rancho Laguna Park, overlooking the hills and trails of EBMUD land. The 7800 sq. ft. home can see and be seen for miles around. Every room in the house has been designed to match the spectacular view they face. The ceilings are high, the windows are immense and the glorious outdoors is present in every room. All the materials, furniture, fabrics, apparel and accessories chosen for this house talk of quality and luxury. This outstanding home attracted a very large crowd during the tour and Moraga Women's Society volunteers took turns shuttling visitors from the Rancho Laguna Parking area.

All through the day, other volunteers stood in every room of every home, directing visitors and giving out useful information. This event is one of the main fundraisers of the Moraga Women's Society.