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A Trio of Spanish Revival Jewels

By Sophie Braccini



After a long search, the Atkinsons found this unique Spanish style home nestled in the Orinda hills. Photo Doug Kohen

An Orinda Treasure

One of the oldest homes that Turner found during his search was built in Orinda in 1927.

"It took us two years to find this home," says present owner Julie Atkinson. The home is indeed unique. A single story structure with very thick stucco walls and a low-pitched roof covered in tiles, it presents an asymmetrical facade. "You can see the original floor tile in the house with its unique design and the tile baseboards," says Atkinson. The blue baseboard tiles create a beautiful contrast with the brown-sheen floor tile.

The bedroom wing of the building was once linked to the common rooms by an open hallway; a previous owner, who had young children, closed the hallway with windows, but, "it retains that feel of transition to one part of the house to the next that's a characteristic of this type of architecture," notes Turner.

Dorothy Lamb, founder of the Orinda Garden Club in 1937, also once owned the home; she lived there until 1997. Some of the unique features she added in the spirit of the Spanish style are still present - such as a back patio with a fountain set into the hilly greenery.

The cozy rooms and long, clear walkway overlooking the front patio create an unconventional and charming ensemble seldom found today.

A Home for Her Tiles

A much more recent Lafayette home has captured some of this same charm, thanks to its new owners Thomas and Linda Delaplane, who added to the home's unique qualities. "When we bought the house the kitchen had shiny black granite counters and center isle," remembers Delaplane, "the olive trees in front had been removed and replaced with a lawn." They built a gate, creating a front patio and courtyard with a fountain. With a natural feel for Southwestern American style, the Delaplans restored the house to its original character. They added mature olive trees in front, changed the metal garage doors to wood, and created an open kitchen with natural-colored tile.

The home includes a covered walkway overlooking the front patio that leads to the bedroom wing; a perfect location to display Linda's extensive collection of tiles. "I had collected hundreds of decorative tiles, from all over the country, and have been able to use many of them in this home." In keeping with the original Spanish revival style, the couple embedded some of the tiles in the stucco walls of their home, to decorate the front and back fountains, the side of the pool and many more inside and outside walls. Some are ancient, some are from contemporary craftsmen, and they seem to have found a permanent home in Lafayette.

Casa del Sol

This love of unique detail is also a characteristic of the most modern of these three homes, "Casa del Sol," on Manzanita Drive in Orinda. "I noticed the uniqueness of this home as I was driving by," said Turner. Its present owner, local home designer Roger Deakins, designed the home. He lived in it for a year with his family before putting it on the market. "The strength of the home can be seen in the broad roof lines and overhanging eaves, in the 6" X 8" redwood beams that outline the walkway around the house, and in the army of red clay tile roof shingles," says Turner.

It may not be obvious to today's readers, but the enormous popular success of the 1884 novel "Ramona," by Helen Hunt Jackson, is credited for the emergence of the Mission and Spanish colonial revival style in American architecture. Most of those homes were built in southern California, but some authentic Spanish revival style homes from the 1920's can be found in Lamorinda, as well some recent additions that share the same inspiration.

Tran Turner, who was an Art Museum Curator of 19th & 20th Century Architecture & Design and is now a real estate agent for Coldwell Banker Residential Brokerage in Orinda, went on a hunt for such homes. "Made popular by the Spanish Colonial buildings built for the 1915 San Diego Exposition, many early California architects like George Washington Smith and James Osborn Craig subsequently brought national prominence to this architectural style in Santa Barbara," says Turner.

The Spanish revival homes have a lighter palette of colors that immediately differentiate them from the Mediterranean style. Other original features include inner courtyards, long, arched corridors, exterior walls coated with plaster, smaller windows, low-pitched clay tile roofs and wide, protecting eaves.

"For inspiration I looked to the Spanish Colonial Revival architecture designed and built in Santa Barbara, and the early California Missions" says Deakins, "all the windows are trimmed with redwood; the green painting will match the copper of the gutters as it ages. I've chosen a lighter color palette throughout and used hand made material in the construction, such as the Hispano-American terra-cotta tiles covering the front steps or the hand-cut Southwest flagstone fireplace." The 4,000 square foot home perched on a hillside, with a partial second floor, is a modern interpretation of the Spanish style; with a more compact floor plan. The materials, such as the inside wall treatment made of naturally pigmented and textured plaster, bring out the Spanish revival accent.



The courtyards in the Delaplane home are enhanced by beautiful tiles.



The Delaplans' front courtyard



The Deakins' kitchen features soft colors and natural materials.



Redwood and handmade tiles make the Deakins' home warm and inviting. Photos Doug Kohen



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