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Hidden treasure

From the surprise views to the secret room and the coffered ceiling from a Venetian palazzo, every element of this property is a voyage of discovery

Above: Antique terra cotta roof tiles, rubble stone walls and a tower-style chimney enhance the rustic Italian charm of this guest house. The building, and the gate at left, mark the entry to a cliff-top property designed by architect Richard Landry.

Facing page: The authenticity extends to the interior of the guest house, which echoes the style of a traditional Italian farmhouse, complete with exposed beams and stone walls.

Not every house reveals itself to the street. Sometimes you need to walk through the gate to enter another world – one where every turn on the garden path and every open door reveals a new surprise.

This new house, by architect Richard Landry, provides such an experience. Landry says the design is a response to two key influences – a very long, narrow cliff-top site that has a slight kink, and traditional rural Italian architecture.

“The shape of the site did make the design challenging, but it gave us the opportunity to create shifts in elevation and meandering,

tree-lined walkways that open up gradually to reveal spectacular views.”

This sense of discovery extends to the entry, which is through a gate beside a stand-alone guest house.

“You don’t see the front door of the main house immediately,” says the architect. “You need to discover it by walking down the steps, alongside a koi pond and around past a small courtyard and loggia. The house reveals itself gradually, partly because it is not a monolithic structure, but rather a composition of smaller masses and tower elements.”



Right: In the main house, the entry foyer also features a rubble stone wall. Other Italian influences can be seen in the arched openings and antique brick barrel ceiling.

Facing page, top and lower: The kitchen, within a structure that resembles a lean-to, has bleached walnut cabinets and marble countertops. Light pours in through a skylight on the ridgeline, and from the adjoining breakfast room, which is like a 19th-century greenhouse.









To ensure authenticity, many of the building materials were imported from Europe, including the antique terra cotta tile roofing that comes from an old convent, and reclaimed bricks, which feature on chimneys and barrel ceilings. The rest of the exterior is clad in a smooth stucco and a highly textured rubble stone, which was sourced locally. This stone reappears on a double-height wall within the entry foyer.

On the interior, the surprises continue. Each room has its own character, with the structure of the house expressed through exposed beams and rafters and traditional barrel ceilings.

"Essentially, the architecture detailing is simple, in keeping with the rural Italian farmhouse aesthetic," says Landry. "There are no ornate mouldings, for example. The visual excitement comes from the antique building materials and the furnishings, which were sourced by interior designer Craig Wright."

The library features walnut millwork and a refurbished antique coffered ceiling that once graced a Venetian palazzo. There is also a secret room, behind a hidden door on the second floor. Equally dramatic, this room has a sweeping canopy and glittering sailing ship chandelier.

Facing page: With its refurbished antique coffered ceiling, the library is one of the most dramatic living spaces. The stone fireplace surround is another item imported from Europe.

Above: The formal dining room is also defined by its decorative ceiling. Here, a series of brick-lined barrel vaults enhance the intimate ambiance. The dining room opens to the outdoors, and to a small loggia with an outdoor fireplace.





Facing page, top and lower: Several rooms are positioned at basement level, including the home theater (lower) and the pool room (top). Windows in this room look directly into the swimming pool, which casts a shimmering light. This room also has a coffered ceiling, with the coffers illuminated so they glow.

Left: The secret room, as it is known, is entered via a hidden passage on the second floor. The sailing ship chandelier is a prized antique.





Left: The larger loggia is positioned right beside the swimming pool and was designed with entertaining in mind. Special features include a quadruple groin vault ceiling, a fireplace set within an arched grotto, and informal seating. Drapes can be pulled to screen the sun when it is low in the sky.

Architect: Richard Landry, Landry Design Group (Los Angeles)
Interior designer: Craig Wright
Kitchen cabinet company: Arandia's Woodcraft
Builder: Finton Associates
Structural engineer: KNA Engineering
Siding: Sweetwater rubble stone with antique brick
Skylights: Bristolite bronze anodized
Flooring: Hand-scraped walnut; Jerusalem stone pavers
Lighting: Custom fixtures; antiques
Ceilings: Antique Venetian wood in library; antique brick in dining room, loggias and entry; teak in Wintergarden breakfast room
Kitchen cabinets: Bleached walnut
Countertops and backsplash: Marble
Refrigeration: Sub-Zero
Dishwasher: Miele

Story by Colleen Hawkes
Photography by Erhard Pfeiffer

 Gallery

 Video

Above: The swimming pool is on two levels to accommodate the sloping site. Water cascades over a stone wall that provides an infinity edge. The lower pool is a lap pool for serious swimming.

Facing page: Terraces around the pool provide plenty of opportunities for alfresco entertaining. They are positioned to maximize the spectacular views, which are gradually revealed as you move through the property.



The fireplace in the library, as with all the fireplaces, features an antique stone surround imported from Europe.

To reinforce the sense of a traditional rural Italian building, the kitchen appears to sit within a lean-to. A large skylight along the ridge line provides plenty of natural light, as does the adjacent breakfast room. With glass walls and a glass ceiling, and palm trees in planters, this room resembles a greenhouse.

Rooms on the first floor have a seamless flow to the outdoors, with several rooms opening directly onto loggias. The largest loggia, off

the living room, appears to protrude out into the pool, and affords a spectacular view of the city and ocean beyond. The antique brick ceiling in this loggia comprises four groin vaults separated by overscale wood beams.

"This project was never about designing a house to look new," says Landry. "It was all about character and rustic charm – the house needed to look as though it had been there forever. And this applies to the landscaping as well. Already, the trees and creepers have taken root and are visually softening the architecture, enhancing the authenticity."

