

MOVING

Light THROUGH Space

ARCHITECT BRION JEANNETTE CREATES
A LUMINOUS HOME BY THE SEA
TEXT BY KATHY BRYANT | PHOTOGRAPHY BY MARK LOHMAN





ABOVE Lighting fixtures are selectively placed to provide full daylight on a cloudy day or in the evening. The stone on the wall and fireplace are hand-hewn limestone and were specifically selected to enhance the beauty and comfort of this entertainment lounge.

OPPOSITE The ceiling is veneered cedar grape stakes, just as was the ceiling in the original house Jeannette designed forty years ago. It gives a nod to the mission-style ceilings.

IN THE 1970S WHEN ARCHITECT Brion Jeannette returned to Southern California from Tucson, Arizona, where he graduated from the University of Arizona School of Architecture, he had a clear vision of what his architectural designs would be. In Tucson, he had been involved in the design of many hacienda-style homes and that, combined with his interest in energy efficient design, led to a dynamic synergy that continues today. Architect Clifford May was another influence through his creation of the California ranch-style homes and modernized versions of the Spanish Colonial hacienda.

“I spent decades learning how to enhance life in the sun by harnessing its positive force, while simultaneously shielding life from the sun’s harsher side,” Jeannette says. In fact, he’s seen the

pendulum swing in his favor since now architects are touting energy conservation, something Jeannette pioneered. In fact, the California State Energy Commission asked for his help in drafting the first Title 24 energy codes. “Some people laughed at energy conservation,” he says. “That is until gas prices went up.” And until climate change became an important topic for the world.

His clear architectural vision came in handy when the current owners of a Corona del Mar property he’d designed 40 years ago, dubbed Casa Bahia Serena, contacted him. Long-time residents of that beachside city, they had enjoyed living in his creation but were now ready for a new, larger home incorporating the adjacent property they had acquired. They had a large family, enjoyed entertaining and used their home often for philanthropic events.





The kitchen walls and counters are book-matched Taj Mahal Quartzite which is simple and easy to live with while giving a sophisticated aura. The floor is limestone, while the appliances and range hood are stainless steel.



After much design deliberation, it was decided to tear down the original property and start anew, while still retaining some of the features they loved in the 40-year-old house. “They wanted the new home to be a 21st century statement on hacienda living, epitomized by seamless interfaces between inside and outside living done in elegant, casual architectural style,” Jeannette says. “These clients are creative people and their input enhanced the property.”

When you enter the house, you pass through inviting entry gardens that beckon you further inside. Upon entering, you see a clever contradiction of Old and New World materials. But it’s the expansive views that are a bit breathtaking with the

natural light and the blues of the sea and sky making you immediately part of the environment.

And yet, perhaps surprisingly, the house is energy efficient as well as beautiful. Overhangs shield the rooms from too much sun, high-performance glass protects from the sun’s glare and a large skylight spans the entire central core of the home. This operable skylight has panels programmed to open automatically on warm, sunny days and to both release hot air and enhance gentle breezes. There is a Savant control system for practical matters like heating, cooling and irrigation.

“I like to use American products as much as possible,” says Jeannette. As examples, Oceanside’s Design Synthesis doors

create expansive openings to the Newport Bay and the sanded limestone is from Kentucky. Solar panels provide nearly all of the home’s energy requirements. “Usually my designs exceed those requirements by 60 to 70 percent. One way to do this is to make sure the design fits the site. For example, the kitchen should face east to get the morning sun.”

Another design principle Jeannette uses is Feng shui which subtly creates harmony and balance within the home. “We work with Taiwanese masters on this,” he says. “It should never be obvious. The principles of Feng shui simply make people feel good.”

The creation of this home was a happy confluence of Jeannette and his support staff which includes his

wife and partner Bonnie Jeannette, architect Amy Creager, and other architects who have been with him for years on over 1000 projects. For this home, the owners were also involved and the house was facilitated by Corona del Mar’s Tony Valentine Construction and interior designer Rachel Horn. This 14,640-square-house that took a year and a half to build is a jewel in the crown for Jeannette whose creations are found throughout the world. His architectural motifs include his beloved hacienda but also feature a broad diversity depending on the client’s needs and tastes. As Jeannette says, “Architecture should enhance the quality of life for the client and the environment.” CH

BELOW The master bathroom has a frameless glass shower. The walls are made of large hand-chiseled and sanded limestone with a smooth honed finish. The large window is the backdrop for the solid carved stone freestanding tub.

OPPOSITE Every room in the house has a view, even the interior rooms. The house is linear allowing the entire length to be focused on the Newport Bay views by the bay as well as views of the jetty and the ocean beyond.

