

# SAN DIEGO HOME/GARDEN LIFESTYLES®

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Craftsman Home in La Jolla  
Smith Brothers Construction  
As Featured in San Diego Home/Garden  
Lifestyles Magazine, June 2010

**CRAFTSMAN HOME  
IN LA JOLLA  
MEDIEVAL GARDEN  
IN CARLSBAD**



# SUPER PLAN

FOR THE HOUSE WITH EVERYTHING, A TOUCH OF WRIGHT

BY CARL H. LARSEN | PHOTOGRAPHY BY LARNY J. MACK

IT'S A BIG LEAGUE HOUSE WITH ITS OWN LITTLE LEAGUE-SIZED BASEBALL FIELD JUST OUTSIDE, WHERE A SWEEPING VIEW OF DOWNTOWN SAN DIEGO, THE COAST AND THE HILLS OF TIJUANA MIGHT EASILY DISTRACT A SLUGGER RACING TOWARD SECOND BASE.





A Japanese-style bridge takes guests to mahogany-and-glass entry doors of this new residence in La Jolla. Doors open to a two-story reception space.





At an expansive 13,750 square feet, the La Jolla mansion, which was completed last August, displays a strong design influence from Frank Lloyd Wright. Asian-themed architectural and interior décor elements hark back to the ideas that shaped Wright's thinking during his forays to Japan. The Wright touch is apparent from shoji-style doors, clerestory-topped rooms and details scrolled on exterior fences and posts, admits longtime La Jolla architect F.H. "Trip" Bennett, III, who brought the project from conception to completion over five years.

"This was a big project for us," says Bennett. "We've been living it together for so long."

Making the Wright-Japan connection even stronger is the landscaping designed by Dennis Gillespie. It features a roaring stream coursing across the front garden and an arced Japanese-style bridge on the wide walkway leading from the driveway to the massive mahogany-and-glass front doors.

"But there's not too much Wright," cautions Bennett's associate designer, Bill Sheldon. "Just enough to set the style." If you're looking for a style to pin on the home, it best would be called a Contemporary Craftsman.

Indeed, Wright's work is only one design influence embraced by the home's owners, a young couple with three children. Just as important were a desire to make the home a modern family preserve as well as a showplace for cocktail parties that easily might draw 150 or more.

And don't forget, the design team was told, to adopt the latest in "green" design and landscaping, while embracing total-home automation. But most important was to incorporate features that reflected the family's active lifestyle. That brought into the project a 1,000-square-foot space, called the "dojo room,"

**Above:** The property's landscape, designed by Dennis Gillespie, runs from California native brushland to formal Japanese style, and includes this boulder-strewn stream.

**Opposite top:** Mizubachi fountain from Stone Forest. Walls in the home's grand entrance are adorned with Valley Center artist Gail Roberts' paintings.

**Opposite bottom:** In the spacious family room are custom *Palladio* chandeliers in iron rust finish from Hamilton Lighting, Flexform's *Groundpiece* sectional sofa, Baker Knapp & Tubbs rattan dining chairs and Kyoto custom rug from Tufenkian. Consoles are custom designed in mahogany with hammered-brass Asian decorative grills.













Opposite top: Hand-torn Verastone wall covering in dining room from Stark Fabric. Custom Berman Rosetti Ocampo African oak dining table by Mimi London. Peter Alexander Profile dining armchairs in walnut with Japanese ebony finish. Axi suspension lights.

Opposite bottom: Bar/poker room's Shanghai lanterns in polished nickel are from Sonneman Lighting. Bar-front wall covering is Beadazzled Red by Maya Romanoff through Donghia.

Above: A computer station and casual dining were placed between kitchen and family room.

for martial-arts workouts; a more traditional exercise room; an outdoor pool with spa; and a separate 75-foot-long lap pool near the concrete party deck with a deluxe barbecue and Brown Jordan furnishings.

For indoor entertainment, there's a radical departure from the first-noticed Asian Zen style — a black-and-white Art Deco-themed bar/poker room accented in red. Access is gained off the entrance reception room through a massive sliding red "Shoji" door with glass inserts, sort of like entering Al Capone's fictional vaults.

"It's a bit of '30s-style Chicago gangster chic," says the man of the house in his private lair, standing by the poker table and across from the Rat Pack bar. Over the bar are three suspended *Shanghai* lanterns in polished nickel from Sonneman Lighting. On the far wall, which is covered with a faux black leather, are three wide-screen TVs. Next door, behind thick, acoustic walls, is a theater room seating nine that was installed by Modern Home Systems of San Diego.

Not to forget the Field of Dreams. That's the Little League-scaled baseball diamond beyond the pool that includes crushed-brick base paths and the kind of turf used by the Major Leagues. On the home site's lower level is a regulation-sized tennis court with changing cabana.

What's going on here? This clearly isn't a residence for a family to camp out in for a few years, and then see how their creation may fare on an improved real estate market. No, "this is our forever house," say the owners.

The path to "forever" took five years to complete, using a design team that rocked and rolled through three different home designs as the family grew, and as additional land became available to expand the project on a coveted hilltop overlook.

Now, the designers are suffering a bit of postpartum depression, having com-



A Little League-sized baseball field overlooks a tennis court.

pleted a project that all say was a textbook example of collaboration. All had lived with their “baby” for years.

The key players, besides Bennett and Sheldon, were interior designers Barbara Enberg and Janette Seltser; kitchen designer Alison Dorvillier; landscape architect Gillespie of Gillespie, Moody, Patterson; and home builder Jeff Smith, president of Smith Brothers Construction of Solana Beach.

They pored over custom designs for cabinetry and two large outdoor sconces for the front entrance, shopped in Paris, Los Angeles and San Diego for furnishings, fabric and wall coverings and were frustrated by a long delay in obtaining the Australian sandstone that critically frames the front entrance.

One day, Bennett had himself hoisted 30 feet on a scissors lift to find just the right point to place a 90-degree joining of two large glass windows in the master bedroom suite so that the couple could enjoy the best view toward downtown.

“This is a very complicated house,” says Smith, who operates in the highest end of the custom-home market, both in California and Hawaii. “But it turned out extremely successful in terms of finishing on time, and on budget. It wasn’t any one person who made that happen. It was the collaboration, working with the owners, that was so critical in making this work.”

For many months, this group would meet almost weekly, shaping the design, color and decor, each bringing their special knowledge. Behind the scenes were the owners, who had made their wishes known in early debriefing meetings that shook out their individual tastes to achieve a harmony in how the home would look and function.

Architect Bennett prepped himself for the project early on by making a pilgrimage to Oak Park, Ill., a mecca for Wright devotees wanting to explore his architecture. The research, he says, was a bit like going back to his college days at Texas Tech.

Gillespie had to bone up again on baseball fields, downsizing a bit from his experience building them as part of overall landscape designs for master-planned communities. In a landscape palette that goes from California native brush lands to a formal Japanese-themed garden is a defining point: a bonsai-shaped pine placed along a key sight line that forms the spine of the home.

What became apparent, says Bennett, was the couple’s interest in organic



design and their insistence that their children be able to use the heart of the home — the first-floor kitchen and adjoining family room — with Mom and Dad.

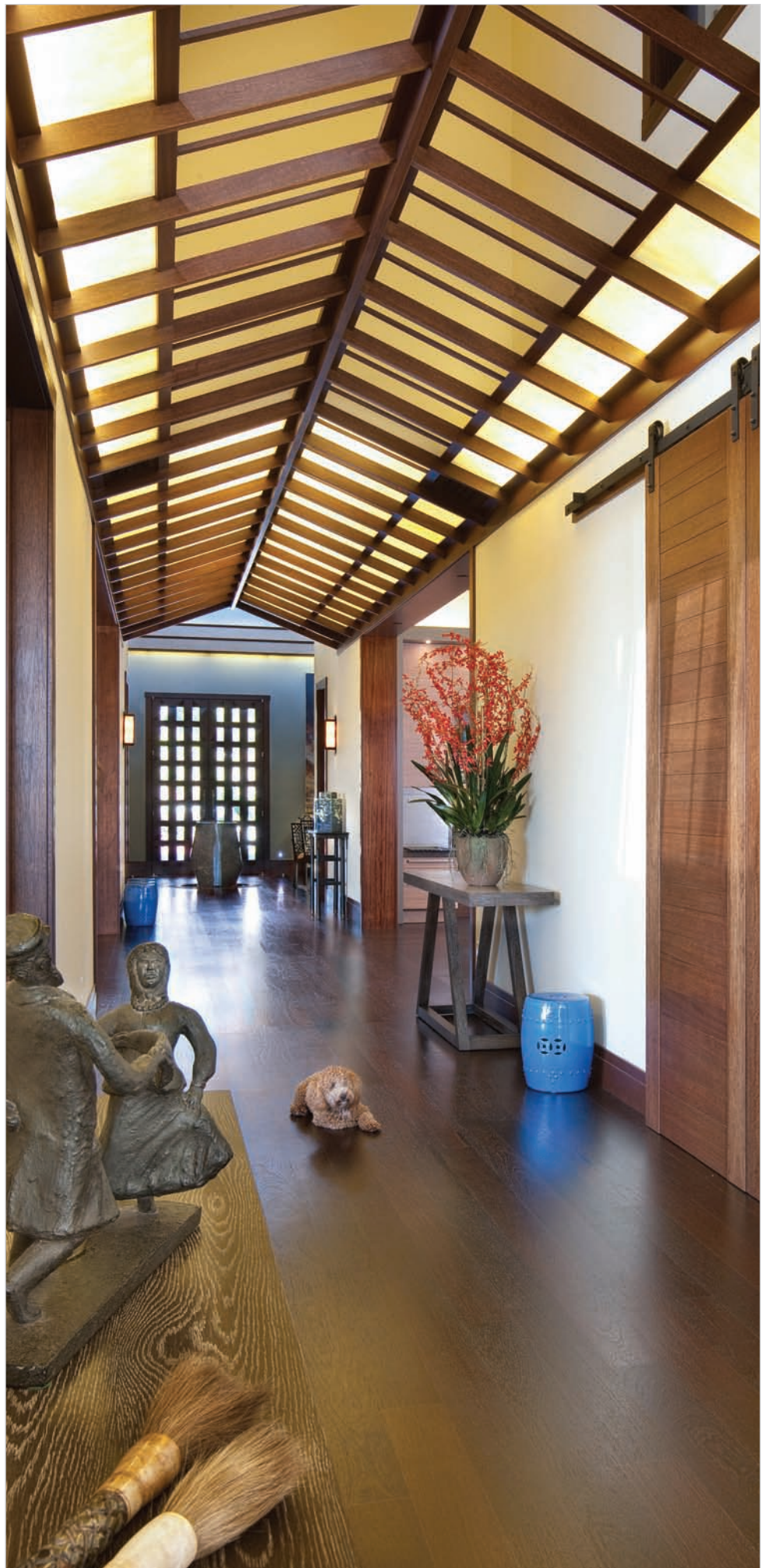
“This is where we spend 80 percent of our time,” says the father, surveying the kitchen, adjoining family room and pointing to the children’s craft and game room.

In laying out the kitchen, designer Alison Dorvillier placed the SieMatic Elm (horizontal) cabinetry, an earth-friendly laminate made in Germany. Countertops are CaesarStone. A large island is used for the sink, and as a breakfast bar with its own two-drawer refrigerator. Appliances are Wolf and Sub-Zero and Bosch, with a stainless full-size refrigerator and freezer. Additional appliances are off the kitchen in a large butler’s pantry serving the dining room.

The kitchen also functions as the family’s “mission control,” says Dorvillier. She set up a work alcove in the cabinetry for a computer base from which the home’s automation controls, such as heating and cooling and music, can be run through a Crestron system.

Just off the kitchen, in range of inquisitive parents, is the children’s activity center, similar to what you might see at a well-equipped preschool. It comes complete with a stage and curtains. Designer Enberg used her child-rearing days to help guide this room, which she pointed out has to evolve as the children get older. So today’s puppet theater stage may be tomorrow’s deluxe garage-band headquarters.

One of biggest challenges faced by Bennett was to make such a large home, with five bedrooms and a guest suite, not appear to be a Brobdingnag-sized presence along the street. To do this, he placed the foundation eight feet below street level, still allowing for views from the home but downplaying its scale.





## Super Plan

That accomplished, he faced the issue of scale and traffic flow within the house. This was made more difficult by having to sharply define the home's most-formal areas, an entry reception room and its dining room, with the kitchen and family room. To do this, he devised a "spine" hallway, eight feet wide, which leads through the home. It easily can be a gallery for art or family photos. Most impressive, perhaps, of any of the interior-design elements is the inverted V-shaped raised mahogany latticework overhead, with cutouts for art glass, a reminder of Japanese rice-paper design.

With rising energy costs in mind, and La Jolla's bankable climate, Bennett decided on two large clerestories — one at the entrance, the other in the kitchen — to achieve a system of

passive air flow throughout the home. Acting as vents, windows in the two clerestories allow air to circulate, similar to chimneys. This is in addition to a separate system of ductwork indoors allowing fresh air to circulate into each room through the use of automated fans and open windows.

Another green element is Bennett's heavy use of fluorescent lighting, hidden in recesses throughout the home. Determining just how much light was needed in a given area was one of his most challenging tasks, Bennett says. The owners have an aversion to floor lamps, and for that reason there is a heavy reliance of sconces, hidden task lamps in the kitchen and the indirect fluorescent light and a few strategically placed drop-down lights.

The home's biggest green features, however, immediately deflect anyone who would think that having a ball field, with its heavy water needs, is

an unneeded extravagance in a time of drought. Bennett worked into the home's design a separate drainage system to take advantage of reusing household graywater — water from sinks, showers and laundries. Made by ReWater Systems Inc. of Chula Vista, this design collects graywater in a large underground tank. It is filtered and then fed to the ball-field grass by an under-ground drip irrigation system.

If first impressions count, the impression here for guests upon entry to the reception room is of a very formal house. It's a bit deceiving, once the rest of the home is scoped. But here, in the entry area, is a 24-foot-high wood-finished ceiling reaching to the top of the clerestory. A 39-inch-high granite fountain, Stone Forest's *Mizubachi* model, stands front and center in the room, while off to the left is a baby grand





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piano and, to the right, a seating area. Commissioned for this room were four landscape paintings by Valley Center artist Gail Roberts. This is the closest the home has to a formal living room.

To the right, through the rolling door, is the bar/poker room while a similar doorway, to the left, leads to the dining room. The design is highlighted by wenge wood floors, with a brushed finish, and heavy use of mahogany. Like the rest of the home, the dining room is spare in the amount of furniture. A 10-seat custom dining table in African oak by Berman Rosetti is the focal point, with walnut arm chairs by Peter Alexander finished in Japanese ebony. An imported Chinese credenza off to one side carries on the theme. The wall coverings are Verastone's hand-torn paper in *Antico*.

Dictating the coloring of the interior woodwork is the finish of the Italian-made, double-glazed Panto windows, Bennett says. The windows, almost rising from floor to ceiling, add a dramatic touch to the dining room, bar/poker room and family room, where they can be opened two ways — by pivoting, or tilting inward at the top to allow for fresh breezes.

If there is a surprise, it's that the man of the house has no office. "Here it is," he says, pointing to his laptop. His wife, on the other hand, enjoys fabulous views from her study-work area on the second floor, with easy access to the activities below.

The master suite, with a see-through fireplace, has no TV, which falls perfectly in line with how the couple divide their time and activities. And, what could compete with such a commanding view? Well, perhaps the riveting Scandinavian mystery novels at bedside.

Outside, a patch of land awaits an organic garden, and the concrete has just dried on a half-court basketball area. The kids, meanwhile, can play Robinson Crusoe or Swiss Family Robinson from a deluxe tree house that would fit in perfectly at the Wild Animal Park.

Looking at the home from street-side, Bennett seemed proud after everyone had told of how BIG a project this house was. He emphasized the team approach that made it all happen.

"Even though it's a big house," he said, "it's not busy."

And, the sports-minded father, firm in his conviction that this is the right place to join the formality of a Champagne dinner with a post-game barbecue, says: "Where else would I go? Look at the view." ∞







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