

Life is CELEBRATION

"You only live once,
but if you do it right, once is enough."
Mae West

Even an untrained eye would know the difference in a home fashioned by **OZ Architects** - simply because it "feels good". **OZ** fashion often infuses a bit of whimsy and folly into both their structure and interiors.

The subtle differences in their extraordinary detailing can be seen in everything from the unique ironwork, stone elements to even the smallest edge detail. To this point, lead interior designer, **Inga Rehmann** beautifully enhanced the architectural work of architect **Don Ziebell** while extraordinary elements - many of which were selected from **OZ I Shop** and **Antiquities Imports**, takes this home over the top in terms of aesthetics, function and comfort.

Not just for show, this garage is actually one of the most well-worn rooms in the home. With flooring constructed solely of rail car planks, this room with its 16 ft. soaring ceilings can handle anything from a full-on country western ho-down to a sit-down dinner for 34, as was served for Thanksgiving 2017.

Written by Michele Perillo
Photographed by Lisa Romerein

(Materials supplied by Antiquities Imports. Installation Premiere Wood Floors.)





All stone materials and surrounds supplied by **Antiquities Imports**. Custom fireplace grates throughout are from **feu fire**. www.feufire.net

After reviewing multiple photographs, my recent tour of this property which was scheduled for 1.5 hours - and ended up (an enjoyable) six, gave rise to the thought that maybe in fact a picture is ***not*** always worth a thousand words.

Compliments to builder **Jerry Meek** of **Desert Star Construction** and his team, headed up by Superintendent, **Kieran Davern** and their ability to execute some of the most complicated architectural details with precision and flawless craftsmanship. No surprise, **Team DSC®** is the proud builder of the famed dining-destination, **El Chorro Lodge**. As a place where family, friends and locals have gathered for decades, it's no wonder that his clients often refer to **Jerry Meek** as "our friend, who also happens to be our builder".



The entrance hall (*shown above*) has a casualness about it - suggestive of a "breezeway" connecting one side of the home to the other with views of the pool, courtyard and guesthouse on one side, and the cityscape below on the other.



An antique limestone fountain, turned on side, makes for a sofa, while old iron, wood and stone relics have been creatively repurposed throughout the entire property into furnishings and fixtures.

FUN FACT: (*Top right*) Just beyond the entrance and steps below the arrival terrace resides a Pétanque court. - the French version of Bocce, or lawn bowling. According to a document in the Musée Ciotaden in La Ciotat signed by Ernest Pitiot, pétanque in its present form was first played in 1910 in the town of La Ciotat near Marseilles. It was invented by Ernest Pitiot, a local café owner, to accommodate a French jeu provençal player named Jules Lenoir, whose rheumatism prevented him from running. In the new game, the length of the pitch or field was reduced by roughly half, and a player no longer engaged in a run-up while throwing a ball—he stood, stationary, in a circle.

Although I had already seen the stunning photographs prior to my visit that day, the story that unfolded after my arrival was far different than the pictures had shown. As I headed en route up **The Summit** in the community of **Silverleaf**, I initially overshot the driveway. In strong contrast to this gi-normous (gigantic/enormous), massive and pronounced structure with umpteen "vignetted" rooms that I had anticipated seeing, I instead came upon an inconspicuous and unassuming home that was not gated or walled, not flaunting or ostentatious, but rather calm and casual. It almost seemed organically fused with its surroundings. Laden in earthy foliage and rock formations that blended well, it was perfectly and beautifully "just there".

It was a chilly mid-December morning as interior designer **Inga Rehmann** of **OZ Architects - OZ Design**, stood waving us in from the road. With her hair blown from the wind, and holding her jacket tightly, she yelled with a smile "Good Morning" - despite my 30 minute tardiness. "Good morning" I replied with apologies of lateness and having my dog in tow. "Boy the weather has changed quickly", I added. She nodded and said "we've got the fires going - all 8 of them". The air smelled so wonderful up there. It smelled of fresh "nothingness", which may sound funny but when you live in the city, the smell of nothing is actually quite recognizable and nice. As the homeowner, a very sophisticated woman with a fabulous personality that was larger than life greeted us, my visit to a home whose story, I believe can only be properly told with the narration of a lucky spectator - *Moi* - someone's firsthand experience - began.

It is only a short span from the road to the front entrance of this home. A variety of ground cover and small plantings such as white roses, sage, lavender, and variegated porcelain berry vines garnish an otherwise natural desert setting. The sturdy antique iron gates, often left open, flank a pair of craggy stone pillars reminiscent of those found along the old country roads in Provence. Sections of crushed granite and limestone treads pave a welcoming path up to the first landing. There an intimate terrace setting (*shown above*) resides. Just steps below it is a regulation Pétanque court - France's version of Italy's Bocce ball and not to dissimilar to America's game of Horse shoe. The casualness of life and leisure here coupled by the rustic and relaxed aesthetics set the tone for the incredible experience that came thereafter.

One of many sculptural highlights in this rustic retreat, the steel-framed spiral staircase was constructed of reclaimed french oak wide planks which had to be soaked and slowly bent over many months to achieve its circular shape. The treads and risers were left in their original condition, minus a light sanding and a thin coat of buffed-in-place wax. Ascending to the "birds nest" private retreat above, the natural patina of the wood combined with the dull sheen of the hand-forged iron rails cast a warm glow with shades of amber and burnished coal under the sun's streaming natural light.



(Above) Twin **Verellen** lounge chairs paired with a matching loveseat complete this informal setting within the guest house. A **Sam Pratt** painting adds an ethereal element.

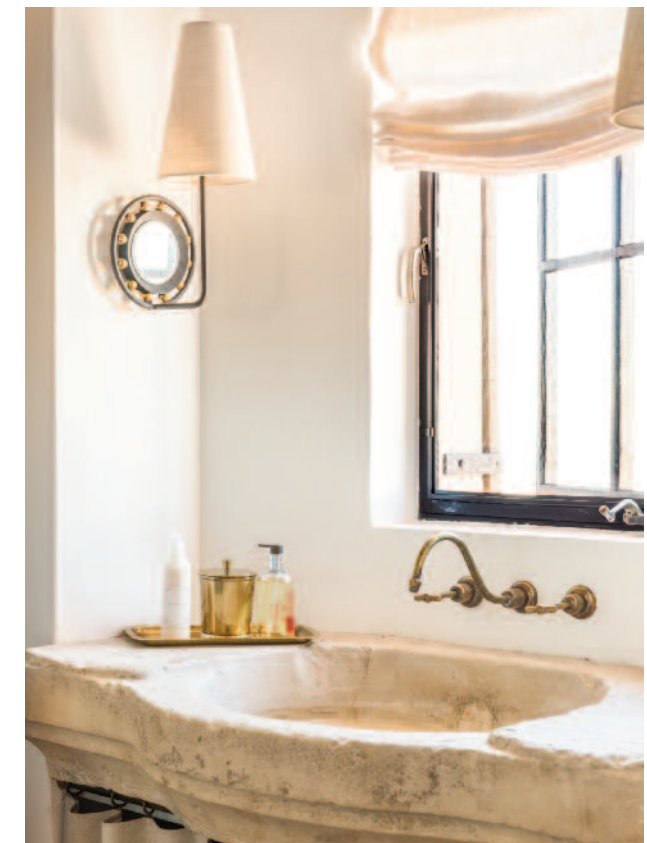


The three story stairway, clad in white oak from France which had to be X-rayed to remove all the nails, was then assembled by hand in three separate sections - a testament to the relentless and unwaivering efforts of the crew lead by Superintendent, **Kieran Davern** of **Desert Star Construction**.

literally nestled within a hillside lot with its own set of difficulties and variables to be dealt with, the home - regardless of style - has an architectural framework that is a work of art.

Unlike the compartmentalized rooms which are often disjointed and disconnected seen largely in many reproduction french farmhouse-style homes, the special relationships in this house were anything but that. In terms of volume and scale, the change from room to room is all but imperceptible until you stop to marvel at the feat. Remarkably, a celestial ceiling height of nearly 12' feet suddenly drops to 9' without the expanse of the former ever diminishing the special intimacy of the latter.

Similarly the floor plan, which in essence might be considered a classic horseshoe, has been enhanced by the introduction of multiple levels. Due to hillside constraints, even the levels themselves have height differentials within them. Yet there are no interruptions in the seamless and comfortable flow of the home. This flawless skill has deservedly become an **OZ Architects** trademark.





One of the greatest masters of special effects, **Frank Lloyd Wright** was known for using variations in ceiling heights and hallway widths to alternately compress and expand the sense of space as a person moved through his buildings.



Taking that concept to a higher level and applying it to a multi-level hillside structure takes incredible finesse. Known for his skills therein, **Don Ziebell** is quick to give praise to fellow architect, **Zahir Poonawala** for his remarkable ability to facilitate a smooth transition of all.

Walking into the entrance hall for the first time was sublime. The light streams in by way of four separate quadrants. The two exterior walls are floor to ceiling steel grids filled with glass. The adjacent interior halls lead to auxiliary spaces, one a reading room and the other a kitchen/family room combination. The light is so impartial and perfectly balanced in this space that it truly resonates against itself creating an unmistakable sense of solitude - sanctuary without ceremony. That is what I felt when I entered this home.

Prior to touring the interior, **Inga Rehmann**, the homeowner and myself cozied up to the kitchen island - an antique farm table which **Ziebell** had modified by adding 8" burnished steel leg extensions to increase its height. I settled in to the most generous "twin barstool" (*not shown here - perhaps later acquired*) for what I thought might be a very quick twenty minute interview. I began by asking an obvious question. "Did you know what you wanted in terms of style when you first set out to build?" After all I thought, with such a distinctly unique interior, surely she must have had some pre-conceived ideas on what they would create. For quite some time, I pushed for answers - just wanting some insight on how such a very complicated project could ever have had simple roots. And although I posed the question at least four different ways, I always received the same answer. Without hesitation she would say: "No. All I knew is how we live, and how I wanted it to feel and function for our large family. That was the only driving force initially." An hour and a half later - after glorious stories of trips abroad which were orchestrated by seasoned traveler and "knower of the whereabouts of all things beautiful", **Don Ziebell**, it became clear that the home's design truly was an off-shoot, an outcome of their needs. Not the other way around. I was no less than fascinated by the unique evolution of this. And so we began our tour.

The reading room (*shown above left*) which is anchored with a very large, 17th century limestone fire surround is directly off the foyer. It is a very special place where the homeowners often gather in the evening to discuss the day or share a glass of wine together. **Ziebell** designed an intimate alcove off to the west of the main seating area which overlooks the city below. His hand-sketched drawing of this room, penciled well before construction began is beautifully framed and hangs on a wall as a vivid reminder of the vision that brought this to life. Moving south to a very spacious, sun-drenched landing with stairs which lead to a cluster of private sleeping quarters on the second level, I am again reminded of the extraordinary talents of both **Don Ziebell** and fellow architect, **Zahir Poonawala** and their proficiency in a technique which has almost become its own art form within their practice of architecture.

A glorified three bedroom home, with well-planned convertible accommodations to comfortably sleep 12(+), was the perfect solution for these empty nesters.

In this home it is difficult to assess where architecture ends and interior design begins. They are seemingly one in the same. When asked how she made the transition to residential from commercial interiors at **OZ Architects**, designer **Inga Rehmann** speaks of her first visit to a completed **OZ** project where no furnishings had yet been installed. Poignantly she states; "I walked into a structure which **Don (Ziebell)** had designed and even in its emptiness, I felt as if you were in a 'home'. Right then, I knew where I belonged."



Filled with every convenience imaginable, **Inga Rehmann's** guest quarters in their well-appointed completeness say "Welcome. We hope you enjoy your stay".



As we entered the guest accommodations, the homeowners' recital of their wants and needs - comfort, casual and elegant - became apparent. Although the master suite is quite spacious and all inclusive - sitting area, spa-like bath, private gym, generous his and her closets (*hers shown left*) - the guest rooms themselves were indicative of some of the finest resort-style villas one might find in the south of France. Not only are all accommodations en suite - a French term meaning "of a bathroom", (*immediately adjoining part of the same set of rooms*), but as well each of them has auxiliary rooms such as a kitchenette, or wet bar. Many have their own private seating/reading rooms, and all have their own fireplaces.

If "comfort" was the guiding light, then its beacon shown awfully bright within the minds of those who created these interiors both decoratively and architecturally.

Much credit deservedly goes to lead designer **Inga Rehmann**. Her background as an interior hospitality-specialist for many years prior to her current position of ten years at **OZ Architects** led to the development of a separate interiors division within the firm known as **OZ Design**. With this expansion, **OZ** is able to offer its clients, both full-time residents and those with secondary homes, a very special service.

As seen here, **Inga's** highly-evolved and comprehensive skills have resulted in creating much more than a "pretty interior". In these days of high-travel and extended stays within private residences, that talent is enormous when it goes above and beyond, as hers does to another degree offering guests a memorable experience on both a sentimental and practical level. Complete with all of the finery, her rooms say "Welcome. We hope you enjoy your stay".

CREDITS: Builder: Jerry Meek, Desert Star Construction; Superintendent: Kieran Davern; Project Manager: Jeremy Meek; Architecture: Don Ziebell, OZ Architects; Project Architect: Zahir Poonawala; Interior Design: Inga Rehmann, OZ Design; Cabinetry: Ryso Peters and RBI Cabinetry; All flooring, doors, roof tiles window surrounds, and stone fountains: Antiquities Imports; Plumbing fixtures and hardware: Clyde Hardware; Circular Stairway: Accent Design & Manufacturing. Audio/Video: Cyber Technology Group; Wood Floor Installation: Premiere Wood Floors, Paul Newman; Tile and counter installation: Picasso's Tile & Design. Steel window/doors: Sienna Custom Window & Doors, Greg Lucas. Ironwork, range hood: Peter Sevin, Art Ironworks.



Saturday morning quickly turned into Saturday (late) afternoon, and it seemed as if a moment had not gone by. I ran outside to give a quick look-see to my Golden lab pup Charlie who was happily sprawled out soaking up the sunlight as it intermittently peeked through the clouds. As I returned back into the home to say good-bye and thank these women for such an enjoyable afternoon, I found both Inga and the homeowner in the long hall adjacent to the kitchen giggling over the latest conversations that they believe their antique portraits-on-the-wall were having amongst themselves. In jest I said, "OK, we might need a bottle of wine here shortly." With a huge smile on her face, the homeowner replies: "I just remembered that you haven't seen the wine cellar yet - would you like to?" I gave her a look of "what do you think?" "Of course", I said.

She opened this magnificent studded antique door that floated opposite the portraits in the hall like a piece of art itself. And there it was - my worst fear. Right in front of us was a winding, thick stone-walled tunnel leading down, down, down. My anxiety and claustrophobia set in. Light-headed, my knees started to feel weak and I worried that I might have to decline. Avoiding the risk of embarrassment, I reluctantly followed both women down the stairs. After all, they were in front of me. It seemed like a really long way down, at least a full level and a half. But at the bottom of the stairs was the most quaint, authentic intimate wine cellar I've ever seen. "Beautiful", I quipped. "Let's go." They didn't hear me. They continued down the exterior hall to show me other guest quarters and I want to ask (but don't) "So, who has the courage to stay down here?" The words barely cross my mind when my eye catches this room (shown below) to the right. Really? A game room with 9 ft. ceilings, a custom pool table, regulation shuffleboard, a bar, big screen, two convertible beds, and yes - two sets of "exit" doors leading out to a huge side yard! Wait, what? You mean that we are not buried beneath the earth's surface?

Yes, once again, the master of architectural illusions, Don Ziebell, got me good. My sincere thanks to him, Inga Rehmann, and the homeowner for this day well spent.

