

A Green Oasis in a Hot, Dry Climate



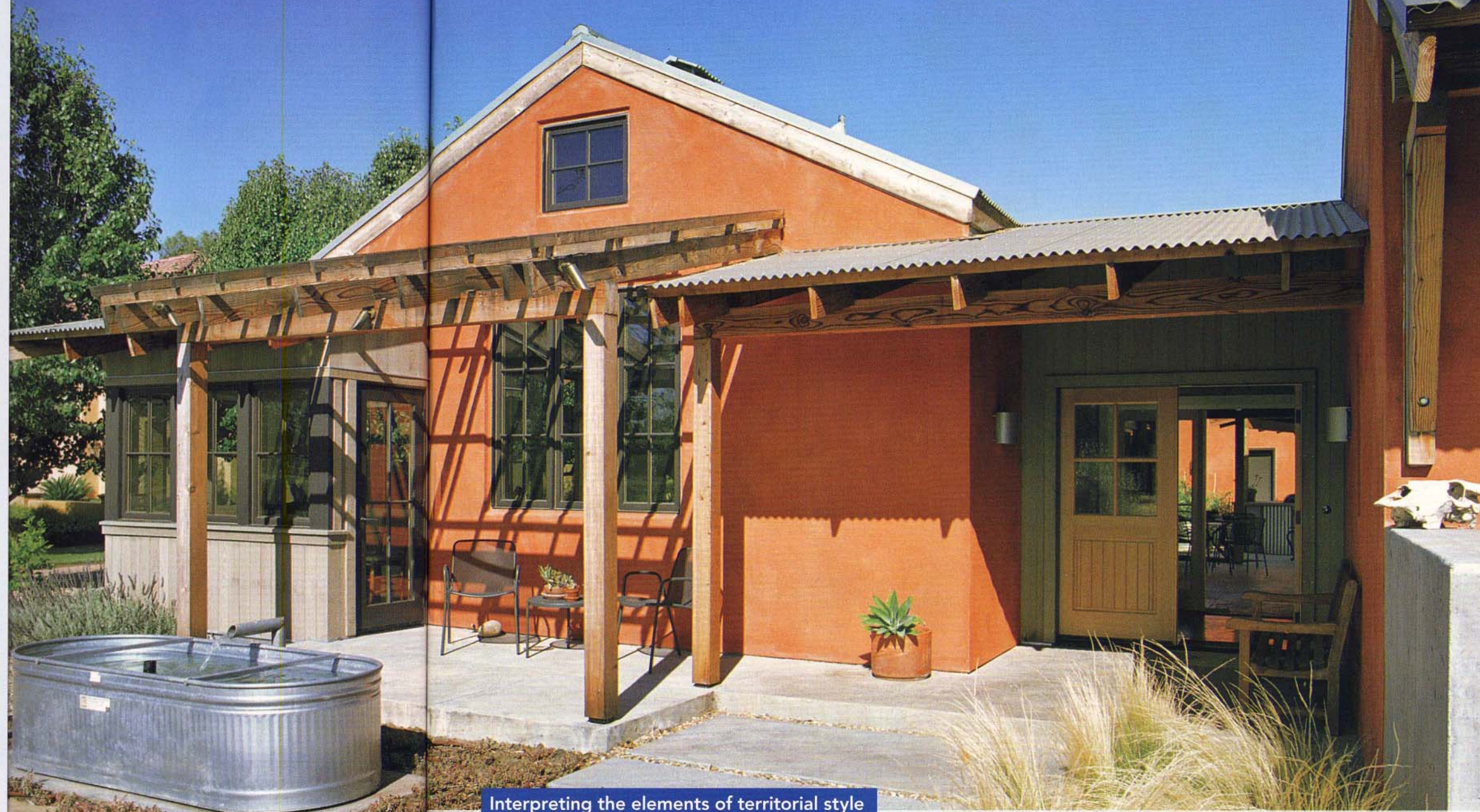
Defined by a mosaic of indoor and outdoor spaces, a new house tames the sun and adapts a traditional Southwest style for an established neighborhood

BY MURRAY SILVERSTEIN AND BARBARA WINSLOW

Jim and Kit Bruner talked about their interest in Southwest territorial-style houses when they first showed us their suburban lot in Davis, Calif. We were fascinated, and a bit confused. The neighborhood around their site was nearly built out, and all the two-story stucco homes were Mediterranean style, with clay-tile roofs and wrought-iron gates.

There were, however, vestigial woods and farmland along one edge of the site, toward the north. It was a little green slice of the old California, where territorial-style buildings with their galvanized-metal roofs and unadorned one-story forms took root long ago.

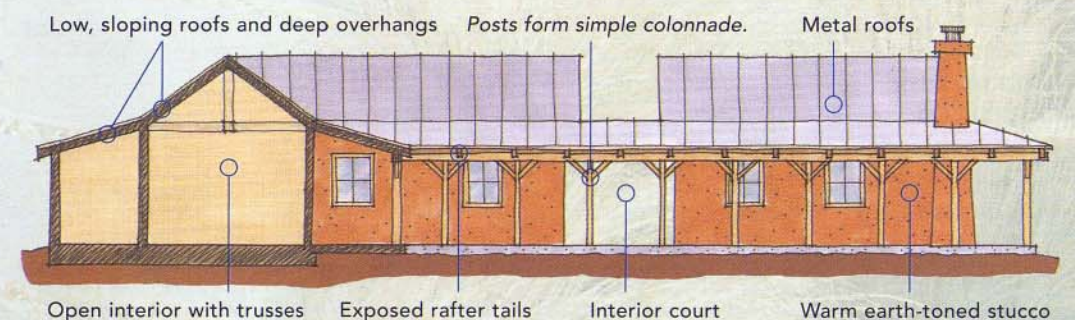
We knew there would be a design-review process for the Bruners' house, and we worried that a territorial-style building might be judged a bad neighbor to the faux-Tuscan villas. In words dear to our architects' hearts, however, the Bruners said, "Don't worry. Create a building that honestly adapts the style to this lot, this climate, our lifestyle—and we'll take care of design review."

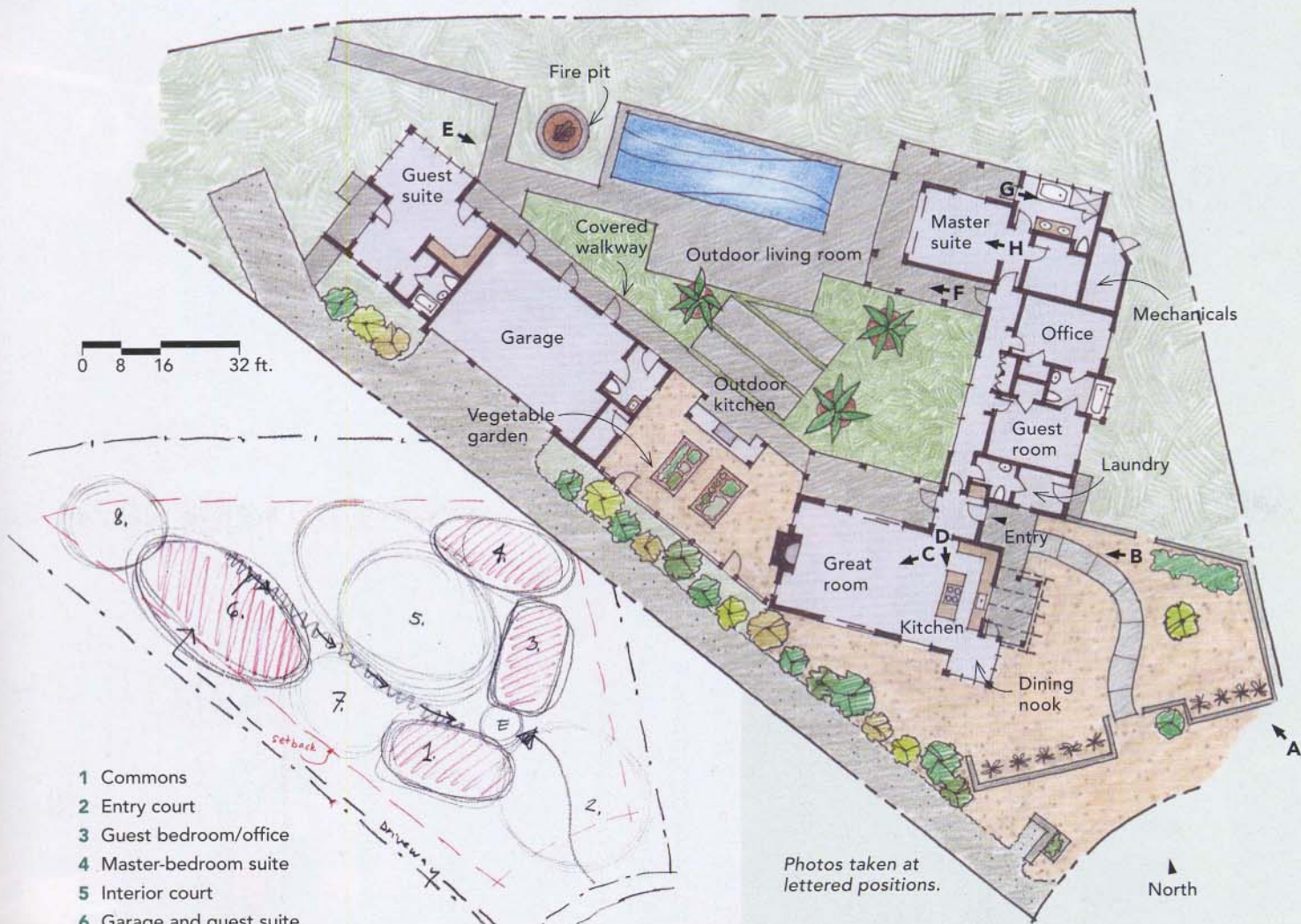


Midday at the oasis. The front entry court, with its low concrete walls and drought-resistant plants, leads to an entry tucked between two gabled wings. A stock-tank water feature creates a cool approach on a hot day. The palm tree peeking over the entry roof hints at the oasis within. Photos taken at A and B on floor plan.

Interpreting the elements of territorial style

Humble, unembellished, and one room deep, the territorial style's flat-roofed adobe houses of the Southwest evolved into wood-framed, gabled ranch houses in California's Central Valley. This diagram highlights the patterns we drew on to create our new California hybrid of the territorial style.





Photos taken at lettered positions.

BALANCING THE BUBBLES

Once they had identified the number and types of spaces desired by their clients, the architects assigned each space its own zone, drawn as bubbles loosely in scale with one another. Then they shifted the bubbles around on a site plan, finding the right balance between light, privacy, views, and breezes. Wrapped in one-story wings that include sheltered outdoor spaces, the courtyard is the jewel at the center of the house.

And that is what happened. We adapted the style to the Bruners' needs and to the climate. The result is a building that, while visually an "outlier," is generally considered to be entirely at home in its neighborhood.

Creating rooms, inside and out

Well before imagining a floor plan, we studied the site plan, thinking of it as a sequence of indoor and outdoor spaces. Our goal: Identify the zones on the lot best suited for particular kinds of spaces. To give the Bruners the house they envisioned, we needed eight distinct zones: four interior and four exterior.

At the drawing board, we shuffled these eight zones around the site plan to study their potential relationships to one another and to the land (drawing above). We knew the common areas—kitchen, living, dining—would be one large space: a great room near the front of the site, closest to the street (1). Immediately to its east would be a front-entry court (2). Close to the entry, an office and a guest room would form another zone (3). These two rooms act as a buffer to the master bedroom and bath (4), which are the most private spaces in the house, with views to the woods and farmland along the northern edge of the site. We knew an interior court—a protected oasis, so to speak—was central to the territorial tradition and ideal for this climate, so we let

SPECS

Bedrooms: 3, main house; 1, guesthouse

Bathrooms: 2½, main house;
1½, guesthouse/courtyard

Size: 2075 sq. ft., main house;
475 sq. ft., guesthouse

Cost: \$325 per sq. ft.

Completed: 2006

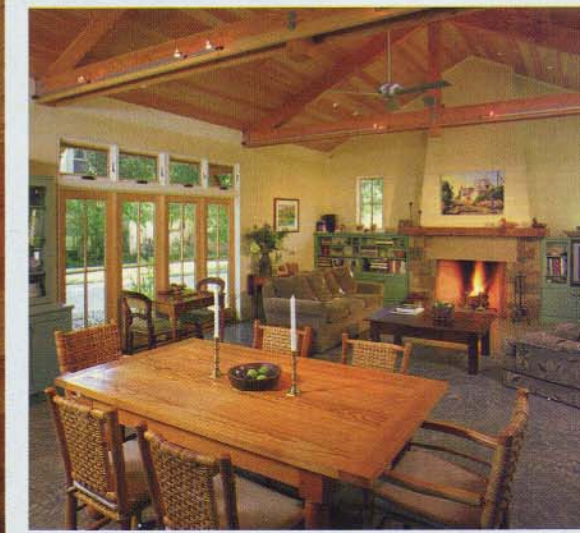
Location: Davis, Calif.

Architects: Murray Silverstein, Barbara Winslow

Builder: Barry Landy, RBL Construction

Landscape architect: Randy Thueme

Kitchen/bath interiors: Alma Gardner



Natural light from four sides. Simple trusses and a wood ceiling emphasize the territorial style in the great room. Windows and sliding doors on all four walls ensure plenty of light and cross ventilation. Burnished concrete floors help to moderate indoor temperatures. Photo taken at C on floor plan.

Morning sunshine on kitchen counters. Facing east, the tall windows over the sink take in light filtered through the trellis in the entry courtyard. The dining nook in the far center of the photo has garden views on three sides. Photo taken at D on floor plan.

The outdoor spaces are not leftovers;
they have as much shape and definition
as their indoor counterparts.



zones 1, 3, and 4 wrap themselves around a large open space (5) that has two parts: an “inner” green court and a swimming-pool area. A garage and a mudroom, along with a guest suite, form the last of the interior zones (6). Placing them toward the rear of the site allowed us to create two more outdoor rooms: a raised-bed garden court with an outdoor barbecue (7) and a small entry court for the guest unit (8). The final site plan is a mosaic of indoor and outdoor zones that interlock and define each other (site plan/floor plan, p. 50).

The river-of-space approach to circulation

We used two principles to create a simple plan for moving through the house and the site. First, rooms feel settled and comfortable when movement toward and past them is tangent, along their edges, and not directly through them. Second, in the territorial style, circulation

spaces are both inside and outside, where covered walkways wrap around and form the edges of an interior courtyard.

The circulation pattern in the Bruners’ house is a river of space that runs tangent to all the major rooms, indoors and out. At the front door, you step into a foyer that leads directly into the most public portion of the house, the great room. The foyer is also the point of arrival for a long covered path from the garage and guest suite. Inside, this path continues northward, past the guest room and the office to arrive at the master bedroom. All but the entry foyer and the bedroom segment is outdoor space, covered with broad roof overhangs.

Taming the sun

In Davis, with its blazing summer temperatures, cooling is the decisive factor in energy design. In addition to conventional insula-



Inside the courtyard. Exterior hallways sheltered by low-pitched roofs ring the private side of the house and create a unifying colonnade. From a bench outside the master bedroom (above), the garage/guest suite is seen in the background. The far breezeway swells to include an outdoor kitchen and barbecue area between the garage and the main house. Note the gravel-filled drainage trench in the foreground; it takes the place of gutters and downspouts. Photos taken at E and F on floor plan.



No shades necessary. On the most private part of the site, the master bath (photo above right) has plenty of windows overlooking a secluded wood. A few feet to the west, the master bedroom is on axis with the pool, linked by double doors and a patio. Photos taken at G and H on floor plan.

tion and double-glazing, the house employs three traditional methods for cooling the house.

Deep roof overhangs shade walls and windows, and create cool outdoor living areas. By flattening the roof slope, from 6-in-12 over the main rooms to 3-in-12 at the edges, we were able to create habitable extradeep overhangs. The area to the north of the great room is sheltered by an 8-ft. overhang, and in the summertime, it's the coolest outdoor room on the site. The overhangs that protect the master bedroom extend 5 ft. beyond the walls, creating porchlike sitting areas.

Cross ventilation cools all the major spaces. Because of their proximity to the Sacramento River Delta, the residents of Davis enjoy reliable night breezes during the summer. These cooling breezes are best captured by floor plans that allow cross ventilation and casement windows that can be adjusted to funnel night air through the rooms. The territorial style, with its one-room-deep floor plan, makes cross ventilating a house easy.

A thermal-flywheel effect is provided by concrete-slab floors throughout the house and by the masonry fireplace in the great room. Their substantial thermal mass mediates temperature swings. Night air cools the concrete, which in turn keeps the house cool on summer days.

This approach to energy design is often called passive solar, but it requires active participation. Jim Bruner describes a typical summer day: In the morning, he closes the windows and draws the shades; throughout the day, the deep overhangs protect the walls and windows. In the evening, when the numbers cross on an indoor/outdoor

thermometer, the process is reversed: The windows and sliding doors are opened to invite the breeze and to cool the slab. Following this pattern, Jim has discovered that he rarely uses the air conditioner.

Landscaping reinforces the house's style

Jim worked with Randy Thueme to develop a landscape plan in keeping with the regional style of the house. Clusters of drought-tolerant native plants and grasses ring the site. At its center, in the heart of the courtyard, a trio of mature Canary Island date palms recalls a bit of California history. The palms were among the earliest brought to California by the Spaniards and were found inside the courtyards of many California missions.

Approaching the house from the street serves up another iconic rural image. Beside the path to the front door, a galvanized stock tank fitted with a recirculating pump makes a down-to-earth fountain that broadcasts the soothing murmur of bubbling water across the entry courtyard. □

Murray Silverstein and Barbara Winslow are partners at JSW/D Architects (www.jswdarch.com) in Berkeley, Calif., and coauthors, with Max Jacobson, of the book *Patterns of Home* (The Taunton Press, 2005). Photos by William Helsel.