

# I LOVE THIS PLACE

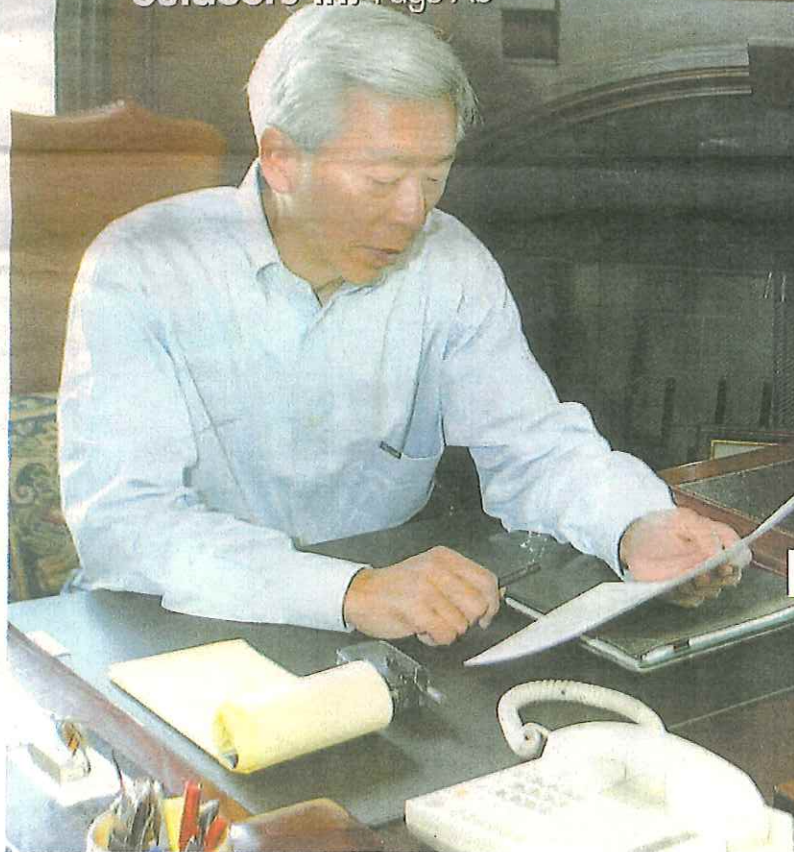
FEBRUARY 2004

When it comes to antiques, the moola is in hula. Page A4

A New York town house invites the outdoors in. Page A5

French châteaux gets a new lease on life

See page A2





# Parlez vous français

## French chateaux gets new lease on life

By ANNA WELDON  
Daily News Correspondent



**TOP:** The 5,100-square-foot, three-level, French Chateaux-style home, left, was completely renovated just eight years after it was originally built. A backyard view, right, show the glamorous swimming pool. Daily News photos by Tony Avelar. **BOTTOM:** The master bedroom, left, with a French-style chandelier. In the living room, right, block-check draperies are a relaxed counterpoint to two classic European-style sofas. Photos courtesy of Christopher Elson. **COVER:** Bruce Nakao in his study paneled in mahogany and anchored by an Italian desk.

**T**HIS is such a pretty house and really reflects the best design attributes of the French Country home," says Marilyn Nakao of the Los Altos Hills estate she and her husband Bruce, a retired software executive, put through an extensive rebuild. Working with interior designers Gina Viscusi Elson and Kathy Orciuoli of Viscusi Elson Interior Design in Los Altos, the couple transformed their home after an unplanned rebuild of exterior led to a complete redesign of the interior.

Driving through the gated entry leading up to their elegant home, it's hard to fathom that four years ago the couple toyed with the idea of tearing it down — just eight years after it had been originally constructed. Bruce built the house in 1992 after finding the lot just a few minutes from the heart of downtown Los Altos. A bachelor at the time, he worked with the home's original architect/builder in conceptualizing the French Chateaux-style structure that still exists today. When finished, the 5,100-square-foot, three-level, four-bedroom, four-and-a-half-bath home, with recreation room and wine cellar, looked every inch a showplace on the outside, yet structural problems started to surface the first winter after it was built.

"Things clearly were not right," said Bruce. "Every summer the builder would be out fixing what was wrong, and every winter something new would crop up again. There were major issues such as water seeping into the stucco, unsound stone work, and just about everything else. I came to realize that this needed to be attacked in a much more fundamental way."

What followed was a three-year protracted lawsuit against the builder, resulting in a hefty settlement in Bruce's favor. By this time, he had married Marilyn, who had been with him throughout the ordeal. After the settlement, the couple had forensic architects come out and assess the long-term structural potential of the house.

"Emotionally, I had gotten to the point where I just hated the



## I LOVE THIS PLACE



**SCRUB-A-DUB-DUB** — In the Master bath, pictured above, new arches were built into the structure and all new fixtures were installed. Designed in soothing neutral tones, the bathroom floor is composed of Murgiano Beige and Sierra Stone. Daily News photo by Tony Avelar

place — for a time we just wanted to get rid of it and start over. But our new builder convinced us it still had lots of potential. Plus, we didn't want to just leave it as is," said Bruce.

Bruce and Marilynn hired forensic architect Steve Minor of SMC and Associates, Inc. in Los Altos to help with the restructure design. In the end, the entire exterior of the house was replaced, including the stucco, walls, crown molding, roof and gutters. In addition, updates were made to adhere to changes in building code that occurred in the eight years since the home had been built.

As the exterior work was being completed, it became very clear to Bruce and Marilynn that the newly built exterior conflicted with the existing interior design. "The formal English interior really clashed. This project forced us to deal with issues such as the lighting, heating, and the home computing system that impacted the existing interior design. That's

when we decided to go for a look that would fully complement the French Chateaux exterior," said Marilynn.

So the transformation began. Marilynn worked with Gina and Kathy and poured through favorite design books that influenced key cosmetic components of the home. This started with the impressive double front doors, custom built of solid mahogany and gently curved at the top featuring glass window insets protected by ornamental ironwork doors.

The doors swing open to allow easy cleaning of the glass and then close to provide a secure and beautiful decoration. "My favorite project was the front door," said Marilynn. "I found a picture of a door I liked and worked with Kathy and Gina to find someone who could replicate the ironwork. It ties in so well

See **CHATEAUX**, page A6



## CHATEAUX

FROM PAGE A3

with the railings around our house. It makes me happy when I enter the house," she added.

A gracious staircase also crafted of mahogany greets visitors when entering the home. High ceilings are predominant throughout and the eye is drawn to the massive beams that provide a strong focal point in almost every room of the house. What appears to be exotic imported wood is actually paint-grade wood artfully faux painted in a rich brown. The beams help soften the rooms and bring a cozy feel to the classic elegance of the surroundings.

Over the French mantel is a colorful and whimsical painting of a Green Street backyard in San Francisco where Bruce once resided. The painting was a gift to Bruce from the artist, a former neighbor.

In the living room, sunny gold and cream block-check draperies are a relaxed counterpoint to two classic European-style sofas upholstered in cream fabric and accented with yellow floral and blue striped pillows. Armchairs that previously resided in the master bedroom were restained and recovered in a rich red- and khaki-striped fabric. Over the French mantel is a colorful and whimsical painting of a Green Street backyard in San Francisco where Bruce once resided. The painting was a gift to Bruce from the artist, a former neighbor. Flanked by playful red and white candlesticks — a designer's touch from Kathy — the entire room says "make yourself at home."

The study just off the living room is pan-

## THE DETAILS

*Gina Viscusi Elson and Kathy Orciuoli of Viscusi Elson Interior Design in Los Altos used many resources in helping Bruce and Marilyn Nakao achieve a French Country look for their home. Here are some of their favorites:*

➤ Custom built mahogany front doors by Douglas Interiors in Napa, CA. Copper Iron Designs in Napa, CA did the ironwork on the front door.

➤ The furniture was recovered and or reupholstered by Recover Me in Oakland, CA. Most fabrics came from the San Francisco Design Center and the Los Angeles Design Center.

➤ To select special furniture and accessories for the home, Gina and Kathy relied on Guy Chaddock, Bausman & Co. products, as well as a variety of antique stores in the Bay Area and Los Angeles.

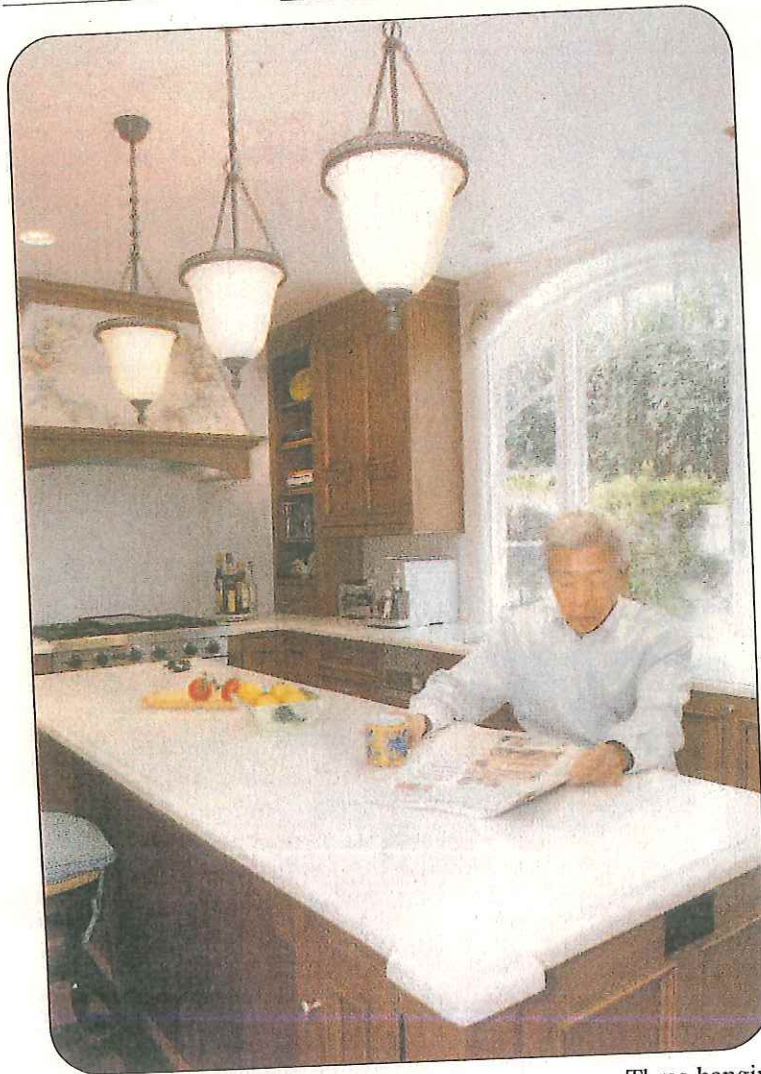
➤ Benjamin Moore paint colors Palace White, Lady Finger, and Bone White was used predominantly in the home.

➤ Favorite reference books include "Provencal Interiors" by Betty Lou Phillips and "Signature Style" published by Traditional Homes.

eled in mahogany and anchored by an Italian desk. It is a fully functional office for Bruce, who in retirement is an avid fly fisherman and duck hunter. His passion for these hobbies are reflected in the antique pen and ink water-colored drawings of fishing flies and ducks that were purchased by an art dealer in San Francisco. The fishing flies drawings are originals by Mary Orvis Marbury, daughter of Charles



## I LOVE THIS PLACE



### CUP 'O JOE

Bruce Nakao reads the paper and enjoys a cup of coffee in the newly remodeled kitchen. The new kitchen retains the original 'footprint' as every component is still located in the same area. The green granite countertops and island were replaced with unhoneed carrera marble designed to age as it does in old European homes. Daily News photo by Tony Avelar.

F. Orvis, founder of the The Orvis Company. As is common in most homes, guests like to congregate first in the kitchen and it's no different for the Nakao's. As part of the interior redesign it was the last room to be done. "Everything was done around the kitchen first and though it was still in good shape the formal style just didn't fit with the rest of the house anymore," said Marilyn. The new kitchen retains the original 'footprint' as every component is still located in the same area. The green granite countertops and island were replaced with unhoneed carrera marble designed to age as it does in old European homes.

Three hanging Bella Figueroa pendant lights illuminate the island. Custom-built Rutt cabinets in maple finished with pewter knobs are a warm contrast to the creamy white walls. Over the 6-burner Viking cook top, the stove's hood has also been painted the same creamy white then hand-painted with a floral design by artist Noelle Kiamos, whose artistry is evident over the sink area as well. Appliances include a Sub-Zero refrigerator, GE Monogram oven, Bosch dishwasher, and a GE Profile Advantium oven that is a combination of microwave and light technologies. This tech-

See **KITCHEN**, page A9



## KITCHEN

FROM PAGE A7

nology allows traditional microwave usage as well as baking and roasting. The adjacent breakfast spot is located in a sunny corner near French doors that open to a terrace overlooking the pool area.

Floral blue and white roman shades are on the windows and the French doors next to the nook's dining table. It is a favorite spot for Marilyn and Bruce to enjoy their morning paper.

The formal dining room on the other side of the kitchen is painted in a rich gold accented by the red and gold roman shades that sit in the windows. The dark wood dining chairs surrounding the traditional European dining table continues the theme and are each covered in either a red or gold wide-striped fabric.

The couple love to relax in the family room that overlooks a creek and nearby park. The plasma screen T.V. is enclosed in a built-in entertainment cabinet located next to the stone dual gas/wood fire-

place. The sofas are covered in a floral scroll fabric of cream, tan and rich beige.

An overstuffed armchair is covered in a deep red and gold floral pattern. The existing metal sofa and coffee tables were given a new look by replacing the glass tops with light colored limestone. They are a good resting place for the colorful wood duck decoys.

The upstairs master bedroom suite is inviting and elegant. Wood beams were also installed and painted as part of its remodel. Despite trends to install track lighting, the couple opted to remove it and install light fixtures, including a gilded hanging lamp by Paul Ferrante, to better suit the character of the house. Built-in bookcases decorated with family photos and personal mementos flank the

fireplace that warms the room. The Duxiana bed was a challenge to install and had to be craned in over the balcony. It is covered in European linens of soft creams and beiges all sporting the Napoleon bee. Colorful pillows with red and green stripes provide bright accents.

His and hers walk-in closets by Closet Dimensions are a transition to the master bathroom that was completely redone. New arches were built into the structure and all new fixtures were installed.

Designed in soothing neutral tones, the bathroom floor is composed of Murgiano Beige and Sierra Stone. The vanity countertops are made of Botticino Fiorito marble. Pewter-toned fixtures from Waterworks add a stylish sophistication to the stone and marble ambiance. There is a separate seated shower that Bruce favors as well as soaking tub for Marilyn who takes a bath every day. "The tub does not have the Jacuzzi jets as I've never

really enjoyed that option — I just enjoy relaxing in a large soaking tub," she said.

From start to finish the project took 20 months and Marilyn and Bruce couldn't be more pleased with the elegant warmth their home now exudes. They credit Gina and Kathy as well as SMC Associates for their help and vision in realizing their home's true potential. "Now, this isn't just a pretty house — we're at peace knowing that it's solid inside and out," said Bruce. "A house like this has a million details. I've learned that is doesn't cost you any significant amount more to do the details right the first time. But if you do them wrong it can cost you significantly more both financially and emotionally the second time around."

---

The adjacent breakfast spot is located in a sunny corner near French doors that open to a terrace overlooking the pool area.

---