

BY D.J. PALLADINO | PHOTOS BY CARA ROBBINS with additional photography by Jake Cryan and Holly Lepere

# SUBURBAN RHAPSODIES

## *A House Full of Wonders on the Mesa Bluffs*

You enter this cliff-top sea-view home not from a shady Montecito lane or seaside Hope Ranch roads, but from the streets of Santa Barbara's more modest Mesa neighborhood. Rather, it's the gateway to canine paradise (otherwise known as Douglas Preserve), where one end of the long street just won a Santa Barbara Beautiful award. This home won one, too.





Although their real estate agent called this house a “mid-century modern with potential,” Joan and Ed Tomeo saw it as a “1950s tear down” but bought the property due to its bluff top location and ocean views. The remodel maintained the original footprint of the house, and its clean rectangular lines, making the home more comfortable and energy efficient with calming Zen influences guiding the garden design.







(Above) It's straight blue view to the islands from the backyard; merging the original living room, dining area and kitchen offered this view to an airy and light main room (below). (Right) A bocce ball court brings endless friendly competition to the bluff, with a sculpture by John Tyler nearby.



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eat and then we realize there are no restaurants with a view like this, so we get take out and bring it back here." She nods toward the Pacific.

The Tomeos grew up seven blocks from each other in the Philadelphia suburbs, but met at a University of Pennsylvania rugby party. Free beer, says a nursing school friend, drew Joan. Ed studied mechanical engineering; Joan was in nursing. After college, they moved around the east coast, and Ed's growing interest in energy and renewable sources drew them west, where his part in a management buyout made him CEO of Enpower Corporation in post-Enron California. They settled in Tahoe's Incline Village, but missed the seashore and began exploring south. One day, realtor Becky Kracke (Sotheby's International Realty) called. "She said, 'I have a property I want to show you on the water.' We saw it and we said, 'We're not prepared to buy it, but we have to buy it.'" They purchased the house from its original owners.

Ed is proud that they only made minimal changes to the existing ranch house's "footprint," extending the house out to the garage. They only went up into a space already enclosed near the garage, which became his office. Inverting a roofline over the kitchen not only helped create a gargantuan common living area—the beam over the inclining roof was the largest wooden beam ever brought to town by Hayward Lumber—but also created space for solar power panels coming soon, his deepest pride. "Before going solar, we had to be inspected," says Ed. "The inspectors found it was already 35% better than California energy standards."

Joan's pride is in the elements of design and decoration best seen in the four bedrooms, each with a distinctive, yet aesthetically cohesive bathroom. The kitchen features a glass abalone wall and a 900-pound glass prep counter.

"I consider the house itself to be the release of all my artistic juices," says Joan, who left personal touches everywhere, from flooring that is meant to suggest the





boardwalk on the Jersey shore to the selection of an outdoor sculpture by John Tyler. It went from ranch to vacation rental to something she likes to call “mid-century contemporary,” which is, almost to say, modern postmodern.

Most amazing of all, Joan and Ed say, their marriage survived the year-and-a-half rebuild, and, according to everybody, their conscientious and considerate approach to neighbors and permitting agencies was almost completely smooth.

They had a lot of help, which they are happy to acknowledge (they mainly used local people and suppliers). Margie Grace felt that such problems as the pool (“It’s such a large object, especially for something that isn’t really useful.”) were solved, well, gracefully. “It was a great combination of great site, great owners and budget.” The biggest unexpected problem solved was draining water off the cliff per geologists’ orders, but Grace left subtle jewel-like plants and a calming Zen-like influence everywhere you look.

Like her, construction manager Bryan Henson has nothing but praise for the hands-on couple. In fact, Henson, who helped improvise features like sculpture niches in a front hallway, feels his construction company learned business

(Above) The original hallway ran down the center of the house; moving it to the front offered greater views and more space. Numerous skylights illuminate the way. (Below, left–right) Redwood siding from the original home creates this quaint powder room, while the master bathroom boasts Ambra wave tile, Caesarstone countertops and Trader Thompson sinks.





(Counter clockwise from top) Subtle changes to the master bedroom include adding large sliding glass doors. Art by Dan Das Mann hangs in the corner. Ed can check the local surf before heading into the water. Buff Mexican beach pebbles and golden barrel cacti line the bocce court. The Tomeos enjoy escaping to "Joan's beach."



acumen lessons from Ed, and although the job took longer than expected—including a long wait for the impressive glass doors—it was, as he put it, “the funnest project we’ve ever done.”

“If we had any philosophy building this house, it would be that we wanted the indoors to be integrated to the outdoors,” says Joan. The outdoor shower off the west end of the master bedroom’s glass and Ipé wood aesthetic sums up a lot of the virtues of the construction just like the front yard and the glass doors. Completely private, yet it feels integrated into the neighborhood weirdly, too.

Just before parting, Joan says, “Wait, I almost forgot,”

heading back to the cliff in a corner not far from the master bedroom where two Adirondack chairs looking out to sea nestle in a small patch of beach sand. “I call this Joan’s beach,” she says, proudly. “I like to come out here and read and drink coffee,” she says, obviously wanting to get even closer to her view.

“We wanted to build a house that had a lot of places in it,” explains Joan, back at the front door. She looks around satisfied and adds, “You know my mother said you should build a home where your children will want to visit,” and gestures back through the gate at her home, full of visitable worlds just waiting to be discovered. ✨