



# view from oz

## THE YELLOWBRICK ROAD HOME

by Marlene Stang

Photography by Weldon Brewster

**A**rrive at the home of Jesse and Kaycee Ramirez at any given time of the day and you will immediately be struck by a sense of quiet that belies the view of the Los Angeles basin below. Situated on a hillside in Palos Verdes, their Tuscan home is designed to provide one with a sense of both tranquil respite from the hustle and bustle of city life and connectedness to the Mecca that is Southern California. I am lucky enough to arrive for an evening tour, and my chaotic journey across the 101 and 405 freeways is quickly forgotten as I pull up to their driveway and take in the majestic beauty of a sparkling view of the city at night. On a clear day, this astounding view encompasses such iconic scenery as The Queen's Necklace (otherwise known as Santa Monica Bay), the San Gabriel Mountains, the Downtown skyline, the Hollywood Sign and The Palos Verdes Country Club directly below. ►



Above: The U-shaped home opens to a courtyard via triple-paneled, imported mahogany French doors.

Right: An elegantly appointed bedroom.

Far right: A domed foyer features a luminous chandelier comprised of glass bulbs.

When the Ramirezes committed to building their dream home in May of 2002, they had already forged a long-standing relationship with the Principal of Douglas J. Leach Architecture. They had commissioned him to design a Redondo Beach residence twelve years earlier and were well acquainted with Leach's great attention to detail and ability to transform a client's vision into reality. The 6,800-square-foot Yellowbrick Road residence is remarkably situated on a 60-foot rise from the front to the rear of the property line and includes five bedrooms, six bathrooms, a library, an enclosed BBQ

kitchen, a wine cellar and an eight-seat theater. It is at once palatial and, at the request of the Ramirozes' two young daughters, "not a museum," affording residents and guests alike an environment in which to feel completely at home yet surrounded by awe-inspiring beauty.

According to Leach, the main challenges in designing the house were maintaining views throughout nearly every room in the home, as well as situating the long and winding driveway along the rise. It was important to Kaycee that she be able to see her children playing in the infinity pool located in the main courtyard from

inside the house, and this is made possible by virtue of the home's modified U shape and the triple-paneled, imported mahogany French doors and windows that span its face. The home's second story is pushed back from the first, enabling a charming street-level view of its roof material. Real stone retaining walls, decking and copper gutters also define the exterior, imparting a charming Old World authenticity to its Italianate aesthetic.

When hiring contractors for the project, the Ramirezes commissioned David Cordone of Absolute Custom Landscape to develop outdoor areas that appeal to all five senses.

Cordone sought to bring color and texture to the environment without detracting from the house's considerable stonework or the view, as well as provide a diverse array of zones in the yard in which one can enjoy the sense of occupying a secret garden. Earthenware pots at the front of the home receive direct ambient lighting at night, casting compelling shadows that in and of themselves are like works of art. Containing such diverse flora and fauna as kangaroo paws, Australian Teaberry and Duranta, they hold vibrant shades of red, yellow, orange, pink and purple plant life that compellingly contrast with the overall earth-toned hues that dominate both the exterior and interior of the house.

Two of the most striking elements of the landscape are the pool area and the path-

and spearmint-like pennyroyal. To the right of the house, the stunning natural artistry of topiary-variety Italian spiral juniper is offset by a backdrop of Starflower, with vines that form a wall of green that is punctuated by white flowers with dramatic purple centers.

From the foyer, one is welcomed into a space that Kaycee wanted to remind her of the many world-class hotels she had the opportunity to visit in her days as a flight attendant for Continental Airlines. Nicole Blackburn of Celedon Studios was commissioned to paint both the dome above it and the niches and coffers found throughout the foyer and house. The dome's ornate pattern is expertly painted to resemble inlaid wrought iron, and from it hangs a large chandelier comprised of luminous glass bulbs and tears that can



ways and gardens that surround the house. Cordone surrounded the courtyard's infinity pool (designed by Skip Phillips of Questar Pool and Spa, Inc.) with firebowl that dramatically merge the elements of fire and water when they are lit at night. Large terra cotta pots act as fountains that continuously pour water into both the pool and the fiber-optically lit trough just beneath it, creating a soothing sound. The olfactory sense is also addressed by the landscaping, from the iceberg roses, citrus and apple trees and herbs in the bered garden off the kitchen to the stone pathways at the rear of the house that are lined with lemon thyme

be lowered via a lift for cleaning. A stunningly crafted tile mosaic on the floor is comprised of hundreds of individually sandblasted stones that form a stately medallion design.

The home's first-story floor plan is a testament to the Ramirezes' desire for living spaces that address their multi-faceted lifestyle. As an avid grill-master, one of Jesse's favorite rooms is the BBQ kitchen, which features a see-through fireplace, warming drawers for food and a plasma TV. An opulent guest bedroom accommodates visitors, while a glamorous powder room adjacent to the dining room features a silver leaf cabinet from Dennee's





Above: The expansive kitchen can host up to 75 people and features granite countertops and rustic cabinetry.

Right: The Infinity pool.

Far right: The master bedroom balcony opens to majestic city views.



furniture, a silver basin and plaster walls that are faux-finished to look like they are covered with wallpaper.

The Ramirezes' ample theater room features a wide screen that hovers above a stage – a whimsical detail that was added for their daughters, Olivia and Sophie, who have enjoyed using it for impromptu performances. Electronic leather seats are arranged in stadium style for movie-watching enjoyment and also recline to make perfect beds for the slumber parties that the girls enjoy hosting. Gracing the walls are memorabilia commemorating the late Cliff Burton, one of the founding members of Metallica and the son of Kaycee's stepfather Ray, who along with Kaycee's mother Oneda is yet another member of this vital household.

The Ramirezes decided to forgo a formal living room for a great room that is flanked by a large kitchen and dining areas, having determined that an easy, fluid style of living and entertaining suits them best. Defining points of the great room are its 12-foot high ceiling, a

sophisticated yet inviting leather sectional sofa and a grey marble-topped bar, as well as decorative flourishes that include a wrought iron candelabra, a mermaid-adorned fire screen that was once a mantle and a leather-covered secretary desk that also functions as a game table. Sensuously dark walnut flooring can be found here and throughout the house and leads into a kitchen that can accommodate as many as 75 guests at a time. Here, a large seafoam granite island is surrounded by rustic cabinetry provided by The French Tradition that serves as a breakfast bar and contains refrigerated drawers.

The dining room is cave-like and intimate and is centered by a large mission-style table that Kaycee purchased from an estate in Santa Barbara. Hanging above it is an ornate chandelier whose clear crystal luminosity is punctuated by topaz- and garnet-hued stones. Kaycee candidly informs me that she and her friends spent four hours putting this chandelier together one champagne-filled New Years Eve night. Just outside of the dining room are

both a cigar patio and Butler's Pantry, the latter containing its own dishwasher, sink, warming drawers and ceramic cookie jars that were manufactured by the legendary Metlox Pottery of Manhattan Beach, where Jesse's now deceased father worked before he founded the family business.

The home's second floor can be accessed via elevator or a two-sided staircase that curves regally in the foyer and ascends in a practically straightforward manner on the other side. On this level, the goal was to create spaces that celebrate the individuality of the household's members while also providing them with privacy, as well as spaces for communal gathering. The sisters' bedrooms are joined by a youthfully oceanic bathroom featuring blue and green glass floor tiles and fossil stone countertops. The rooms, like the kitchen and upstairs game room, also feature beams that were reclaimed from an old French farmhouse.

Upon entering the Master Bedroom and Bath, one cannot help but imagine having



An intimate dining room opens to the cigar patio.

stumbled upon a European baron's exclusive chateau hideaway, with its spacious balcony, limestone fireplace, walnut ceiling and luxurious details that include an iron chandelier, end tables by Theodore and a large Maitland-Smith armoire that features a secretary and the kind of secret compartments that one would find on a piece of furniture that was very old and possibly even magical.

Kaycee states that she began conceiving of the Master Bathroom before any other part of the house. Its *pièce de résistance* is a Calacatta Oro marble soaking infinity tub with an impeccable view of (you guessed it) the entire Los Angeles basin and the ocean. Above it is a fireplace that is topped with a reclaimed French beam mantle that is set into stenciled stucco walls. The shower features steam units for a full-blown spa experience and is adorned with honey onyx stones that also decorate the base of the tub. Acid-washed, non-slip versions of these stones comprise the bath-

room's floor. Just outside the separate his and hers toilets is a balcony that provides a view of the tiered garden that Kaycee's mother so lovingly tends, as well as the closeted hallway that leads back to the library, game room and bedroom and bath areas that are used by Kaycee's parents.

As we near the completion of our tour, Kaycee leads me to a gate that succinctly represents the eclectic and expansive vision that shaped the building of her home. It is an ancient, weathered-looking object, imported from India and purchased by Kaycee before she even knew what she'd do with it. To hear her tell it, she approached its purchase as she did so many of the items in her home—with the knowledge that she would contend with non-buyer's remorse if she walked away from it and having enough faith to know that both she and her building and design teams would lovingly find a way to make it part of the home's story. •



Leach

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