



2018

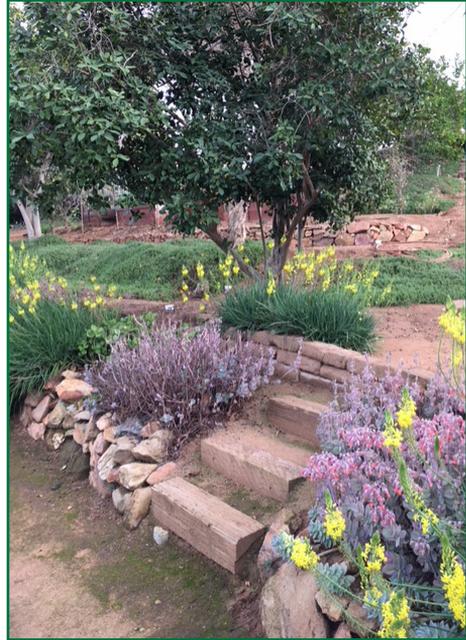


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# THAT'S THE BEAUTY OF ADOBE

## *San Diego's Enduring Love of Adobe Home Construction*

**RECLAIMED TIMBER CEILINGS...** tiled fountains and pools... curving walls, turrets and towers of handmade brick... expansive views across valleys, hills and vineyards... lush, low-water gardens...

Welcome to the Seventh Annual North County Adobe Home Tour! Today you'll experience a different kind of San Diego lifestyle in five semi-rural Escondido homes that celebrate not only the beauty of their surroundings, but also the master builders who made North San Diego County a haven of mid-century adobe homes.

A drive through the inland reaches of San Diego in the 1950s and 60s would have largely taken you through acres of citrus and avocado that rolled endlessly out across the county. But fruit wasn't the only products the region was becoming known for: The local soil and months of hot sunshine also

built in what is now Escondido – an area with a robust history of adobe home-building – date to the era of California's expansive Mexican land grants. In 1834, Juan Bautista Alvarado built several mud-block homes and outbuildings across his rancho, Rincon Del Diablo. Cool in summer, heat-retaining in winter, relatively fireproof and made of readily available and free local clay, nothing made more sense than adobe block.

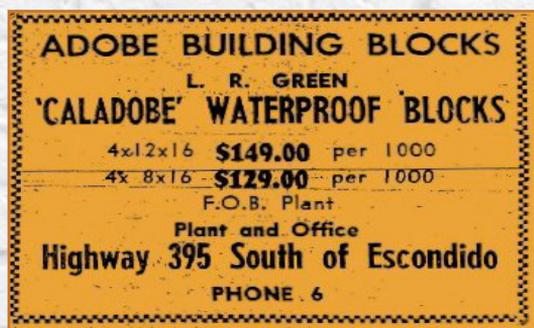
### **Fast forward to last century**

The modern revival of adobe home construction in this region started in the 1930s, but largely dates from post-World War II to the 1970s, when potential homebuyers sought out a unique alternative to the ubiquitous tract developments of cookie-cutter single-family houses. In some San Diego communities, the draw to an adobe house was based on the desire for a rural location combined with the promise of the conveniences of urban living. In Escondido during the late 1940s and early '50s, large expanses of agricultural land were subdivided for housing developments, specifically those carved out of – and often still surrounded by – avocado and citrus groves.

Given this concentration in Escondido, San Diego's North County has a particularly rich inventory of these homes. Their popularity was largely due to the demand created by talented, creative builders such as the Weir Brothers, Forrest Holly, Hyrum Arrowsmith, Don M. Burton, George Patterson and a handful of other con-

produced heavy, durable bricks. Bricks that inspired craftsmen.

San Diego is peppered with adobe brick structures that range from its oldest – Mission San Diego de Alcalá (1769) in Mission Valley – to more recently built public buildings and private residences. The first such homes



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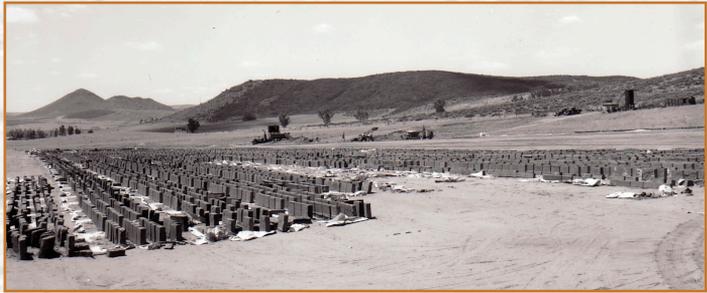


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tractors and builders.

In a world where little is unique, these homes actually are, and they retain a romantic allure that has stood against the vagaries of design trends, building code modifications, the loss of craftsmen who understand them, and – literally – the elements. (Adobe has a tendency to dissolve.) The beauty of these homes is singular, and our appreciation for them grows as homeowners take on the challenge of their upkeep to ensure their place in history.

Because in California they're not being built anymore.



### The original smart home

Taking cues from their Native American construction predecessors, modern adobe contractors were building environmentally friendly 'green' homes well before the current movement, as the thermal properties of adobe (up to 16-inch-thick walls) translates to less energy use for heating and cooling. By the 1940s, asphalt stabilizers were added to the adobe block for water resistance, strength and durability.

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Many houses were constructed of machine-mixed bricks, poured into molds, and sun-baked right on the construction site. No shipping costs! Others were built with materials from Escondido's Adobe Block Company, near today's Kit Carson Park, where remnants of California's second largest adobe brick manufacturing operation can still be seen at the park's south end.

With local access to bricks, and a growing interest in rustic country living, adobe construction in San Diego enjoyed a vibrant mid-century revival, though short-lived. The building of true adobe structures – as opposed to those with adobe brick facades – became cost prohibitive in the late 1980s due to the advent of new energy and earthquake building codes, and the high cost of heavy labor; these

factors effectively ended California's most recent era of adobe construction. With the renewed interest in original construction and craftsmanship, the focus of today's adobe homeowners is on mindful restoration and renovation.

This year's San Diego Adobe Home Tour provides a rare opportunity to experience five homes that celebrate not only the beauty of their surroundings, but also the master builders who made North San Diego County a haven of mid-century adobe homes. This year's tour illuminates the architectural contributions of several builders, whose stories are in this program. You can see photos of several other San Diego County adobe homes at [www.adobehometour.com](http://www.adobehometour.com).

*By Alexa Clausen & Gretchen Pelletier*

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## RECIPE FOR A GOOD BRICK

*A conversation with George Patterson, July 27, 2014*

**"PEOPLE ASK** what kind of dirt do you need to make adobe? Just topsoil. All you need is dirt off the ground. As long as it doesn't have too many avocado leaves in it, you can use it off the ground. If it has too much clay in it, we put sand in it. It's simple to do, it's an old practice around the world, Africa, other places... If you mix with your feet or with a mixer, it's easy to do."

When asked if earthquake standards and building codes changed the ability to build a reasonably affordable

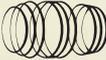
adobe home, Patterson stated that the primary issue was not earthquakes. "It was about insulation. Adobe does not work as an insulator. Adobe works as a thermal mass. When you get a thermal mass that is 16 inches thick and weighs tons, it takes three days to change the temperature of an adobe home. It is entirely a different situation..."

"So they said you can't build out of adobe."

*By Alexa Clausen and Tom McCoy*



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## JAMES AND HELEN BANISTER ADOBE, 1951

WITH ITS LONG, curved driveway, recently installed Santa Barbara-in-



hallway lit by skylights crafted of discarded B-17 bomber parts salvaged

from an old air-plane boneyard. Also, the patriarch of the neighboring all-adobe community, Lawrence R. Green, passed away in his sleep in the room which today is used as an office. Green, 85 and a longtime resident of San Diego, had stayed often with his daughter, Helen

fluenced landscaping and wide-open views, this expansive property is the ideal playground for a family of five (plus grandparents in the detached guest house). Current owners purchased it in early 2017 and have made cosmetic upgrades indoors and out while keeping the original footprint and vibe intact as they learn more about their historic home. It is on the Escondido Register of Mills Act homes.

Visitors will envy the large family room (complete with pool table, pin-ball machine, one-armed bandit and other games) that opens the house to the living spaces outside. More typically mid-century modern than the other tour homes, you can practically hear the parties held here in the '60s, with kids bouncing off the increasingly-rare pool slide and diving board!

Built by Forrest Holly, the house is one of his earliest projects and has its curiosities, such as a long, cloistral

Banister.

After the completion of the construction of their adobe home in 1951, Helen and her husband James lived within view of the Adobe Block Company which her father had purchased a few years earlier from Foster and Kleiser, Co. In 1961, the San Diego Union reported that the daughters of Lawrence R. Green – Helen Banister and Hildreth vonKlineSmid – took over the ownership of their father's company.



This home was among the first built in South Escondido Boulevard's Longview Acres (Las Palmas neighborhood), an all-adobe

# PLANNING YOUR ROUTE

Houses may be visited in any order. Program books are available at the Muchow, Weir and Merkel adobes. Please park on the street (parking is available up the long driveway at the Banister Adobe).

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tage in San Diego County.

Do you own an adobe home  
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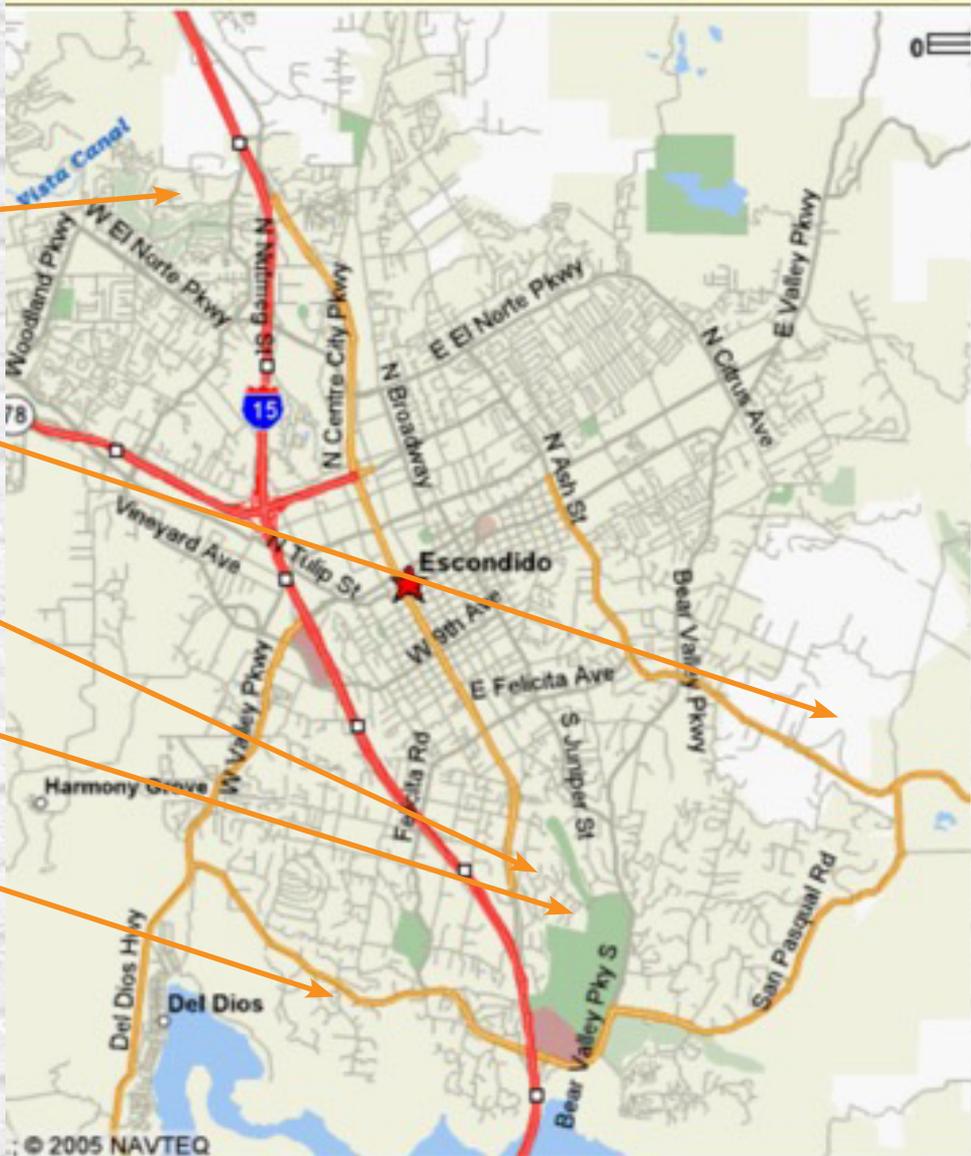
**Banister Adobe**  
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**Merkel Adobe**  
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THESE BRICKS WERE RECENTLY SALVAGED FROM THE ORIGINAL BUSINESS OFFICES OF WEIR BROS. CONSTRUCTION ON ESCONDIDO BOULEVARD. THANKS TO AN ACTIVE COMMUNITY OF ADOBE ENTHUSIASTS, THE MAIN BUILDING WAS SAVED. SALE OF THESE BRICKS TO LOCAL HOME-OWNERS BENEFITTED THE ESCONDIDO HISTORY CENTER.

## ADOBE HOME TOUR



- ARROWS ARE APPROXIMATE.
- PLAN ON 45 MINUTES TOTAL DRIVING TIME.
- NO RESTROOMS ARE AVAILABLE AT THE HOMES.

**- NO PHOTOGRAPHY, PLEASE!**

## ADOBE HOME TOUR

residential community developed by Green. The 3,529 square-foot home's appraised value was \$25,500. At the time, a typical three-bedroom adobe in this same area for sold for \$5,000 to \$7,000. The Banisters hired Ramona-based adobe block manufacturer and builder Forrest Holly to design and build their home. According to Dennis Banister, his mother Helen had an influential role in the design. The property was called View Crest Ranch.

James Banister owned and operated a San Diego-based grocery store, Big Ace Market, which he successfully expanded into a chain of stores. From that platform, he advanced into the busi-

ness of constructing shopping centers. In time, Banister formed a corporation with wife Helen, father-in-law L.R. Green and several other trusted friends, shifting his focus to real estate investing. The Banisters raised three children in their home, Dennis, Lynne and Lawrence. The current owners were delighted to have met with Dennis Banister who shared photos and many memories of growing up here.



## Master Adobe Builder Forrest Holly

Forrest Holly predates the Weir Bros. by several years in terms of arrival on Escondido's adobe building scene. In 1951, he was quoted in the *San Diego Union* as having dreamed of a housing community dedicated only to adobe home construction. Holly was blind, yet in 1948 he launched his own adobe construction and block-building company in Ramona.

In July, 1948 Forrest Holly took out a loan to purchase equipment to make adobe blocks, establishing Holly Adobe Brick Company in Ramona. By 1951, the *San Diego Union* reported that Holly had a prosperous adobe brick and building contractor business. The Banister adobe had followed several other homes that he had built in the San Diego North County. The journalist described Holly adobe homes as very high-end, and further stated, "Holly dreams of a community given over entirely to adobe construction. Architecturally, he muses, it would probably be along Spanish or Mission lines which lend themselves admirably to adobe. Deep windows, he points out, exude an atmosphere of massiveness and perfect blending of earth from which adobe comes."

Forrest Holly lost his eyesight from a football injury during his junior year at Ramona High School. A television movie was made about the life of the Holly family. It follows Holly's story of how he overcame his disability, met and married a young woman who also lost her eyesight, and in time moved to Escondido to raise his family and develop a design and building construction business.



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## ANTHONY AND ELIZABETH PINTER ADOBE, 1958

**THIS HOME** has had three owners and certainly many memories! The current owners purchased it two years ago, and have been updating interior details, remodeling the “big room,”



restoring hardscapes and tackling many other projects. Visitors will enjoy southeastern views, bathroom remodels, kitchen updates such as terrazzo countertops – a nod to the popularity of terrazzo in the 1950s – and an extensively remodeled pool patio area.

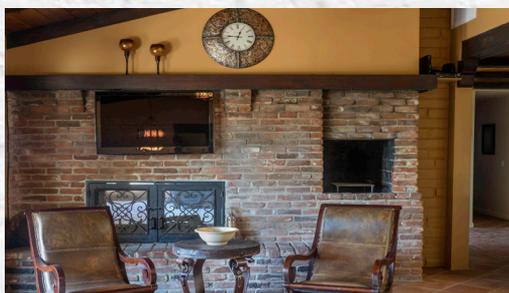
The Anthony and Elizabeth Pinter adobe had been intended to be both a family home and to serve as the headquarters of the Pinters’ newly



formed educational student program, Study Abroad, Inc. A native of Hungary and educated in both Vienna and Paris, Pinter served with both British and United States in-

telligence forces in Spain and Morocco during World War II. Elizabeth served as the financial CEO for Study Abroad, and both had served as directors. The Pinters raised four children in this home.

After her husband’s passing in 1980, Elizabeth continued to live here for several more decades, at which time she devoted much time to the Escondido community. She was among one of the founders of the California Center for the Arts in Escondido, served on the Board of Directors and was name chairwoman in 2004. Her other tireless project was the Escondido Public Library where she promoted bi-lingual and diversity



programs.

Near the driveway entrance at street level, note the “melting” adobe walls; you’ll see similar vintage brick walls in adobe homes across the region. Exposed to irrigation, weather and wear over 60 years, they are an example of the challenges of adobe, especially such exposed bricks, and what today’s homeowners face in terms of restoration. Yet even returning to simple earth, there’s an appealing effect.

## Master Adobe Builders Hyrum Arrowsmith & Don M. Burton

As land for residential construction in Los Angeles became less profitable, Arrowsmith and his son-in-law Burton left in 1955 and headed to Escondido, where they purchased lots to build spec houses of adobe block. As the Weir Brothers' reputation (and fees) for home construction rose, Arrowsmith and Burton filled the gap with prices accessible to customers with middle incomes. This team brought from Los Angeles a modified mid-century modern flavor to their designs.

Burton took particular pride in the meticulous straight lines of the adobe walls he constructed. Although the partners contracted work in other areas of San Diego, they built a combined total of 20 adobe homes in Escondido's Las Palmas neighborhood, including the Pinter home featured on this year's tour. Don's son Mike also built several adobe homes and provided information on his family's adobe construction business.

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## JOHN H. AND GERALDINE MERKEL ADOBE, 1959

**THIS HOUSE** offers a mystery that county records and personal anecdotes



have not solved. There is strong evidence of Weir Bros. construction, such as the view-capturing yet private siting of the home, the rounded dining room with its original steel casement windows and the three immediately adjacent Weir houses. However, the home exhibits decidedly un-Weir-like “post adobe construction” elements. The answer may be that the house was largely designed and built by the Weirs with substantial input and involvement of the original owner, John Merkel, a builder himself. Of the 25 homes featured on the Adobe Home Tour since 2011, only one other has been post adobe.

In post adobe construction, after the foundation is poured, the wood frame and beams are built, then adobe bricks are placed between the posts. According to the San Diego County Residential Building Record, eight-inch adobe blocks were used

to build this house. Since the weight of the roof rests on the posts and not the adobe block, a smaller block can be used.

Visitors will note the heavy use of wood throughout, which is lightened by lots of windows and access to the outdoors. The kitchen was remodeled and enlarged in 2003 by the current homeowner. The most recent changes were the transformation of the asphalt driveway to an attractive patterned brick surface, and a complete overhaul of the landscaping. Visitors will be treated to the latest in water-efficient planting choices and design, from the terraced hills in the front to the lush new and mature landscape around the pool, spa and waterfall, shaded by a massive flaming eucalyptus. Capitalizing on Escondido’s comfortable evening temperatures,



the current owners make frequent use of their outdoor living spaces, including a bar with seating, and a covered

## ADOBÉ HOME TOUR

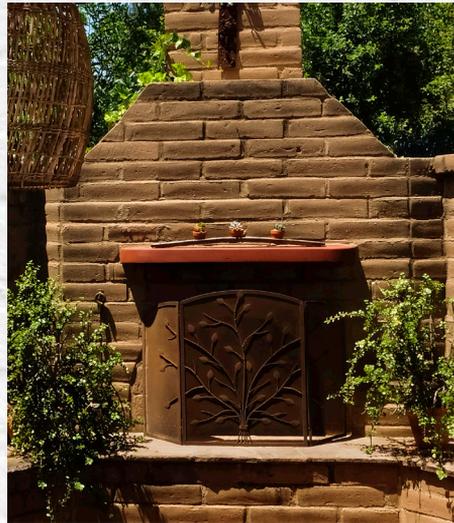


outdoor dining room complete with a brick fireplace. Note the latticed wall made of half-round clay roof tiles.

Construction of the Merkel adobe was completed in 1959 in this development called Quiet Hills. The homes on Montesano Road were once part of Quiet Hills Ranch owned by famed turn-of-the-century writer Howard Bell Wright. In 1944, Reuben H. Fleet, founder of Consolidated Aircraft Corporation, purchased the ranch. In time, the property was subdivided into 33 lots curving around Montesano Road and Quiet Hills Drive. The lots were sold off through the Fleet Corporation which had restrictions that limited builders to single-story homes with modest garages.

John Merkle was employed as a

construction superintendent for the McNeil Company, which, although Los Angeles based, won a contract bid in 1956 for the construction of the Atlas Missile Plant in San Diego for Convair Astronautics (sold by Fleet to General Dynamics). McNeil also won a bid to build 300 homes in Linda Vista for employee housing for the missile plant. With easy access to old Highway 163, the location of the Merkle home was only a 20-minute commute to Kearny Mesa.



### Master Adobe Builders Weir Brothers Adobe Construction Co.

**JACK AND LARRY WEIR** were the most prolific of the region's adobe design/builders, and many signature features of a Weir adobe represent a fusion of the past with the contemporary elements of the decade in which each was built. Primarily ranch style, they feature single-story floor plans, exposed ceiling rafters, deep eave overhangs, low-pitched roofs, expansive picture windows and hints of Spanish Colonial Revival artistry.

Many Weir homes also incorporate unique and eclectic touches, including rotunda entries, heavy exposed beams salvaged from old structures, emphasis on outdoor living spaces and views, and whimsical design elements such as small towers, rounded walls, seemingly odd angles (that prove to be quite functional) and other surprises. Wagon-wheel elements are a recurring theme.

## ROBERT AND MARIE WEIR ADOBE, 1966

**BECAUSE THE NEW HOMEOWNERS** are waiting in order to take a thoughtful dive into restoration, this home offers an



exceptional opportunity to view much of the original design and craftsmanship of Robert Weir, the youngest of the Weir Brothers. Unfettered by a client's wishes / demands, Bob built this adobe to his own specs – because he was the owner. Weir was a talented craftsman who collaborated with Jack over several decades. For his own family, Bob built this modest mas-



terpiece adobe in 1966. As you walk up to the entrance notice the original iron lamps with amber glass, a popular Weir touch. The iron "W" gracing the front porch also identifies it as a Weir home. Floors

throughout the main rooms of the home are original Saltillo tile with a hand-painted tile border. The home features wooden built-ins and niches throughout.

This home bears the unmistakable influence of Bob Weir's brothers, especially the creativity of Larry, starting with the rotunda entry foyer. A rounded

wall of windows and clerestory glass overhead brighten a room made of adobe with wood built-ins. Check out the heavy central beam of reclaimed



timber that forms the backbone of the house, and while looking up, note the wagon wheel placement of wood beams – a classic Weir touch. The kitchen still has its original cabinets and terrazzo countertops, a material that was also used in the master bath and sunken shower and tub.

Though the lot is smaller than many Weir homes, it shares many classic outdoor features such as low adobe retaining walls and walkways, a courtyard fountain (decommissioned for now), privacy and plenty of fruit trees. The front yard has a mature succulent garden which provides beautiful views from the living room and provides privacy from the street.

## ADOBE HOME TOUR

Bob is remembered for his wood-working and detailed finish carpentry, and visitors will note how he was strongly influenced by his brother Larry's creativity in such

details as turret-style entrances, round walls of windows, and decorative iron-work. His home has undergone very little remodeling, and retains much of its original appeal.

### Adobe Master Builder Robert (Bob) Weir

**AFTER WEIR COMPLETED** his military service, he settled in Encinitas and opened a jewelry store. His brothers had launched an adobe home construction business in Encinitas in 1948, but moved several years later. In time, Bob joined his brothers Jack and Larry in Escondido where they had re-established their construction company in 1953.

Bob applied his artistic talent to woodworking and cabinet finishing. As the Weir Bros. Adobe Construction business expanded, Bob took on an important role in the daily operation and is remembered for his high standards and craftsmanship. Bob's work for his brother Jack involved follow up on homes with lifetime warranties; he would reseal adobe surfaces exposed to water, take care of maintenance issues and ensure the company's reputation for personal pride. When Bob retired in the 1990s, he and Marie move to the Phoenix area where he continued his hobby of wood carving.

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## LEVERNE AND LA VERNA MUCHOW ADOBE, 1980

**THIS SHOWPIECE IS** the most recently built home on this year's tour. At the time of construction, LeVerne (Vern) Muchow had retired from the flower growing industry in Encinitas, where in the early 1960s and '70s he specialized in cultivating and growing carnations.



The home is also notable as one of the last true adobe structures to be built in the region, and by George Patterson, a master builder whose work is gaining recognition for artistry, complex craftsmanship and livability. Patterson named the adobe Casa de los Balcones, or House of the Balconies – “The most exciting house I built.”

As you approach, note classic Patterson touches like the dramatic rotunda and the use of vertically laid blocks in serpentine walls. The entrance to this home poses a mystery: While the mission bell can almost be heard in the Mission Revival courtyard, is the architecture defining a modified Alpine chalet? Balconies are edged with curved wooden pickets that seem Bavarian, echoed in hand-painted scenic tiles indoors. Observe the *nichos* built to house religious figures that stand guard over the entrance. Above is a quatrefoil window, a style popular in the Renaissance era, often filled with colored glass. Some-

how the blend works.

A subsequent owner enhanced the “California early days” feel in the courtyard by adding sago palms, bougainvillea and a water feature which the current owners revitalized with a rebuilt fountain, Mexican tiles and walkways by artisan mason Larry Ray. (Look for his signature dollar coin laid in the decorative tile of the fountain.) Three-foot eaves direct rainwater away from the structure, providing protection to the adobe walls, as do scuppers under the balcony that move water onto the gravel drainage below en route to the pond.

Enter through a dramatic circular rotunda where the first striking feature is the floor, which radiates from this center point out-



ward throughout the home, and not only underfoot. Look up and follow the beams which extend like a sunburst to support adjoining living areas, even out onto the back patio. The 13-rafter wagon-wheel pattern on the ceiling is more than decorative; there is a concrete, circular enforcement so that the rafters are not held in place or reliant on adjoining rafters. The hardware for the turret was made

## ADOBE HOME TOUR

painstakingly on-site to hold the turret in place. Arches provide fleeting glimpses into other living spaces, a request of the original owners, who wanted such vantage points.

The kitchen is original, with cabinets that match those in the bathrooms. The size of the dining room was designed to the wishes of La Verna Muchow who requested the room accommodate a particular hand-carved table. At any point, one can peek through the narrow arches guarded by wrought iron barriers to view the guest entrance and check on activities in the den.

In the family room, a massive kiva-style fireplace is unique in that the trim is double-arched with no mantle. The fireplace draws your attention as



its earth tone color contrasts the white walls. Notice that the heavy flagstone hearth stands above decorative tile, which reveal a Bavarian theme.

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## ADobe HOME TOUR

### Master Adobe Builder George Patterson

**GEORGE PATTERSON CAME TO CALIFORNIA** as a baby in 1932, when his father found work in the garment business in south Los Angeles, and would eventually have his own factory. As a teenager, he says, "I started going to Mexico because that was the place where there was clear water to go spearfishing. It was the early 1950s. As soon as I got a car, that's where I wanted to go." In Mexico he gained appreciation for local architecture and building methods.

George entered the adobe home construction arena late in its revival; he produced a small number of homes in the late 1970s and early '80s. Still, his designs are among the most interesting, including the home featured on this year's tour. A solo builder, Patterson credits his love of adobes and the hacienda style of construction to his youth, when he frequently traveled from Los Angeles to explore Baja California in search of fishing spots. The local architecture seeped into his imagination, influencing the custom designs created for his clients using unique details inspired from his travels throughout Mexico.

Patterson built his own house in Escondido in 1976, his first adobe. "I had been working on the plans for three or four years prior to that because I did not have the money to build." He estimated that he built about 20 homes and performed additional work in adobe repair, remodeling and minor restoration.

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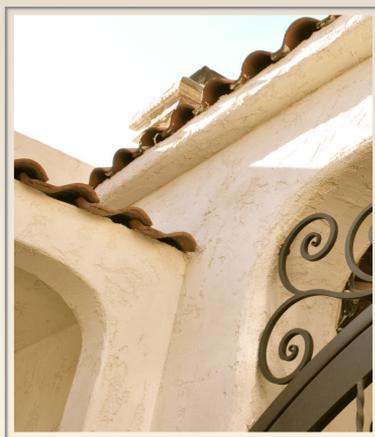
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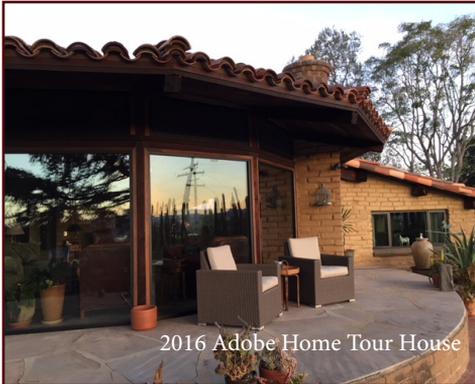
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