

# AT HOME

SATURDAY, MAY 7, 2011 • SECTION D



**SONOMA DESIGNER SHOWCASE**

Incorporating Old World artifacts, Jon and Susan Reiter created a home with the feel of having stepped back in time



Jon Reiter in the European-style home he built in the hills above Kenwood, which will be featured in this year's Sonoma Designer's Showcase in May. Top, the master suite.

# Instant History



By MEG MCCONAHEY  
THE PRESS DEMOCRAT

It looks like it might have been made by one of the many Italian immigrants who settled in the Sonoma and Napa valleys more than a century ago. The outside is unfinished weathered wood and fieldstone.

But this charming "old barn" didn't exist a year ago. Builders Jon and Susan Reiter imagined it from the ground up, piecing together what would become "Fox Hill" with European cast-offs — 200-year-old Carrera



Above, an Edison light bulb; left, furnishings reflected in a mirror

marble sinks, a front door that once kept the cattle inside a French barn, a walkway of authentic old cobblestones from France and even an ancient wellhead from Aix-en-Provence fashioned into a charming fountain that bubbles through an iron bucket.

The couple wanted to create "instant history," a house that would convey the feeling of stepping back in time, and that would also be solid enough — just like the European farmhouses it evokes — to

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ONLINE: See the online version of this story for a photo gallery and Web links at [pressdemocrat.com](http://pressdemocrat.com)

# INSTANT: Owners wanted to create feel of an old European barn made into a residence

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the passed down from one generation to the next.

"We're shooting for the look of an old European barn that had been around for a long time and somebody found it and rehabbed it into a modern home," said Reiter, a custom contractor based in Kenwood. "That feeling of permanence and age gives it a homey feel."

The brand new 4,500-square-foot house in the hills above Kenwood has just been sold to a couple who want to turn it into a family getaway compound. But before the new owners move in, the Reiters have invited designers from Sonoma County to come in and have their way with the interior.

The Wine Country chapter of The Interior Design Society trade association is taking over Fox Hill for the first few weeks of May. Twelve local designers will decorate the home, which invites a soothing mix of new and old, rustic and contemporary and European and California features. It will be the chapter's first local Designers Showcase event in five years and will be open to the public May 12-15 and May 19-22. Visitors will check in at Chateau St. Jean Winery and be taken by shuttle up to the home.

All the vendors who have provided furnishings, accessories, art and other elements for designers to use for the showcase are from Sonoma County.

"One of the things we focused on was bringing the entire Sonoma County design community together," said Julia Bombardier, a designer who is doing the main living/dining area.

Set on 13 acres with views of Annadel State Park, the house from the exterior looks like a weathered barn. But inside, Sonoma architect Vic Conforti has laid it out a bit like an old-world country villa, with a long great room and two twin wings extending out and embracing a private courtyard. Massive lift-and-slide doors completely open the room to this cozy patio, shaded by mature olive trees set in raised boxes.

The house, with its earthy simplicity, is a great backdrop

## SONOMA DESIGNER SHOWCASE

**Where:** At Fox Hill Estate in Kenwood

**Sponsor:** The Interior Design Society, Wine Country Chapter.

**When:** May 12-15 and May 19-22

**Hours:** 11 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

**Tickets:** \$25. Available at the Kenwood Press, 8910 Sonoma Highway 12, Kenwood, Cokas Diko, 529 4th St., Santa Rosa; World of Carpet One, 3023 Santa Rosa Ave., Santa Rosa; H Frank, 28 Spain St., Sonoma and Traditions Home & Garden, 127 4th St. Santa Rosa, in Railroad Square. Tickets are also available at the "door" at Chateau St. Jean Winery, 8555 Sonoma Highway 12, Kenwood, the days of the event.

**Access:** Guest depart by shuttle from the Chateau St. Jean parking lot. The last departure is at 3:30 p.m.

**Benefits:** The United Cerebral Palsy of the North Bay, the Rohnert Park Boys & Girls Club and The Kenwood Education Foundation.

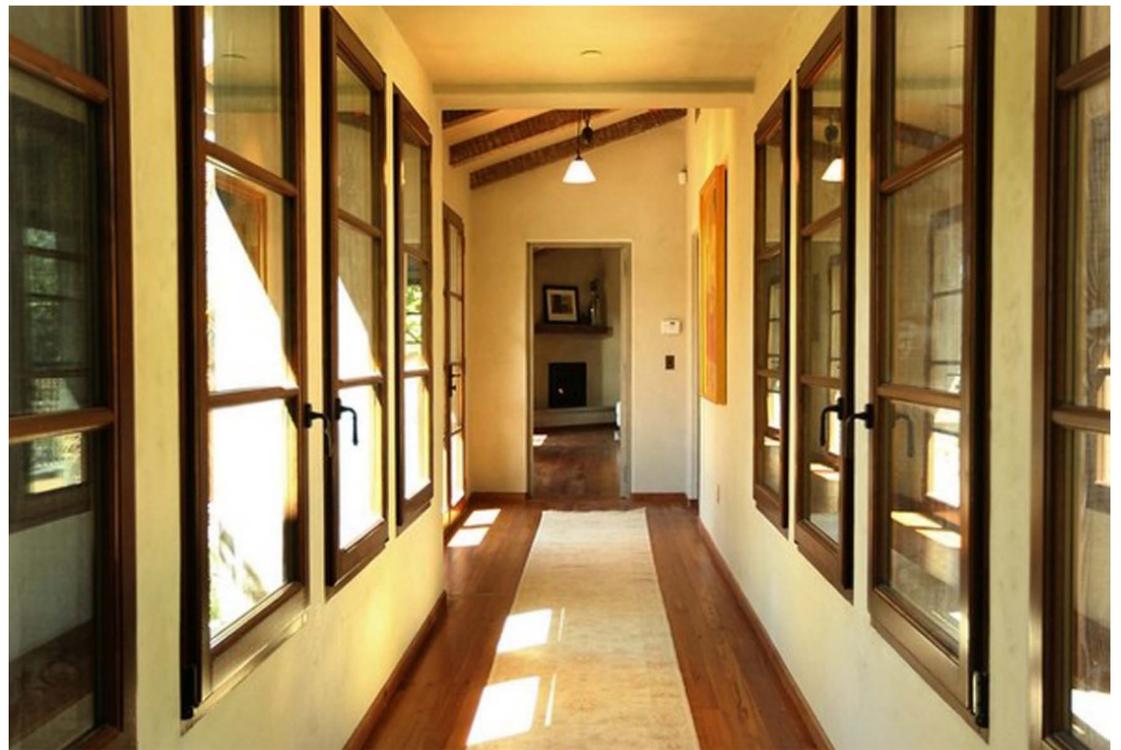
**Information:** [idswinecountry.com/local](http://idswinecountry.com/local)

design, said Susy McBride, vice president of the design society chapter.

Reiter builds only several homes a year, putting a hand-forged touch on each one. He and Susan take their clients directly to the source for key materials — to San Miguel de Allende in Mexico for stone, for example. For windows and doors, he escorts them to a special supplier in Certaldo in Tuscany to choose their own wood. For antiques or light fixtures, they may go to the south of France.

Reiter mixes his own mortar the old-world way, with hay and sawdust and natural aggregates — a workmanship in evidence in the wine cellar.

"When you look at walls in the old country, they're there 300 years later because of the clay and straw. Everything that will hold the water and let



**Bathroom lights, left, in a home built by Reiter Fine Home Building near Kenwood. Above, a hallway that doubles as a breezeway of sorts, begins in the living area and ends at the master suite.**

Photos by KENT PORTER /The Press Democrat

dry slower. I'll bring a chunk of the stuff back to the guys and we try to figure out what's in it."

Because so many of the details are specially sourced and selected, the house is brimming with stories. Look closely at the floor tiles in the center of the master bath. They contain tiny pawprints, impressions left when the tiles were drying in France 150 years ago.

Look down as you enter the master bedroom wing. You'll see faint splotches of red in the wooden floor. That's not paint. It's wine. The floor is laid with Hungarian oak, reclaimed from 14-foot tall wine vats salvaged from a

Napa Valley winery.

McBride used the same old staves to design wall sconces and twin mirrors for the master bathroom.

Designers typically are responding to a client's tastes and expectations. But with a designer showcase, it's a chance to create an environment and a look unfettered by anyone's expectations but their own, and their personal reaction to the space.

For the master bedroom, McBride went for understated luxury. Because the distinctive architectural elements of the room are hard and rustic, she softened the room and contemporized it with a custom upholstered

Regency bed with nailhead trim. At the foot of the bed, she placed a Liz sofa that looks out to the courtyard, with its olive trees and the fancy wrought-iron rail that marks the entrance to the wine cellar — almost like the entry to a Paris Metro stop.

The olive trees inspired the palette for the interior.

"The colors in the house are all like what you would see on an olive tree," said McBride, "with the golds and greens and the bark."

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