

Details make the design

History is the reference for tasteful use of Spanish revival architectural elements.

The Southern California lifestyle is so special that people the world over dream of living it, even going so far as trying to duplicate it in their countries.



DAVID-MICHAEL

I see it firsthand every day as I continue my work through-out China, Europe

and the United States. It is something that can never be duplicated. Our amazing California Riviera-style architecture also evokes excitement.

We are surrounded by many new interpretations of California Riviera architecture, some of it wonderful, others lackluster or overdone. So what distinguishes a tasteful rendition from the rest?

To get answers, I had a discussion with architect Homer Oatman, one of the genre's leaders in Orange County. A design principal and partner at KTGy Group Inc. in Irvine, Oatman has designed many California Riviera-style homes. Here, he talks about the significance of detail and historical research in creating new homes:

David-Michael: When did you become interested in California Riviera-style architecture?

Homer Oatman: I can't remember not being interested in it. Growing up in San Diego it was all around me. The old neighborhoods of Mission Hills, Point Loma, Kensington, La Jolla and Rancho Santa Fe were filled

with some terrific examples of Spanish revival architecture. Also, there were the historic adobes in Old Town, the Casa de Estudillo, the Casa de Bandini, the Casa de Machado y Silva, and the Presidio, the Mission de Acala.

D-M.: Have you spent much time traveling the world for inspiration?

H.O.: I have traveled throughout Mexico since I was a child. It's so accessible. It's like a second home for me. However, although I studied in Europe when I was in graduate school, I visited Spain for the first time only about four years ago.

D-M.: How did you like it?

H.O.: I loved it. We spent about two weeks touring through Andalusia just looking at architecture. I took literally over 3,500 photos.

D-M.: Do you refer to those images often in your work?

H.O.: Absolutely, almost daily in fact. Digital photography and computers make cataloging, storage and retrieval of imagery so easy. Original source imagery is so crucial when you're designing historical theme architecture. Purity and accuracy is everything, from the overall massing down to the smallest details.

D-M.: What other design resources do you use?

H.O.: All of the great early 20th century practitioners of Spanish revival architecture were students of the architecture of Spain and Mexico. Consequently, there were a number of fantastic resource books written from between about 1910 and 1929. I've collected



THE ARCHITECT: Homer Oatman designed this Shady Canyon home. Known for his Spanish revival-influenced works, Oatman is careful about accurately reflecting the architectural influences of Spain and Mexico.

PAUL RODRIGUEZ, THE ORANGE COUNTY REGISTER

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There are also a number of good books on Spanish revival architecture that have come out since the early '90s.

D-M.: Can you tell me about the role of architectural details in your work?

H.O.: There are only a handful of details that are particular to any given architectural style which, when appropriately designed and incorporated in the architecture, distinguish it from other similar or related styles. It is the obligation of the architect to understand which details are unique to each style and their appropriate use and application.

D-M.: How do you use these details?

H.O.: First, we must differentiate between detail and ornamentation. Detail is the careful design of architectural components to achieve a functional and aesthetically pleasing result. Ornamentation is decorative embellishment separate without functional

need or necessity. Today, in the post-postmodern age of architecture, when one designs architecture within a particular regional style or period, the challenge is to strike a tasteful and appropriate balance between austere functionality and excessive ornamentation within the selected style.

Architectural ornamentation is metaphorically referred to as jewelry. Just as jewelry is a matter of personal taste and expression which should be carefully chosen and judiciously applied, architectural ornamentation should be ap-

proached in the same manner. Too much jewelry, no matter how expensive or intricately designed, will look like an overly exuberant collection of refrigerator magnets. However, with the right piece in just the right location, the effect is perfect.

D-M.: What's the role of architectural history in choosing details?

H.O.: All elements of detail originated as functional elements of the structure. Understanding the struc-

tural origin and function of these elements is necessary to design them correctly today, even though in many cases they are no longer required to fulfill their original structural purpose.

For example, stone door and window surrounds originally provided the structural reinforcement. Today, they are purely ornamental.

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