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REGAL RETREAT

NCH&D visits Toni and Pat Burke's
beautifully redesigned Blackhawk estate

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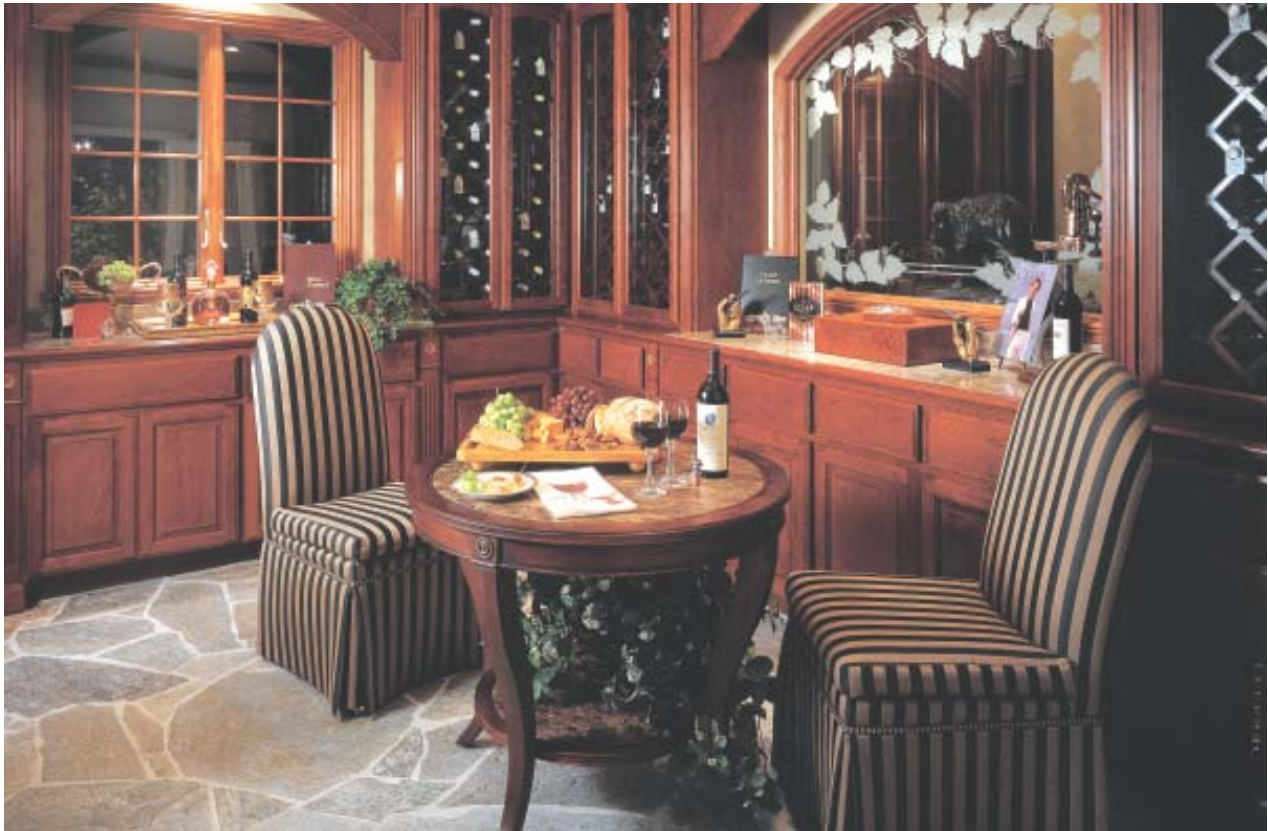
ARCHITECTURE BY CHARLIE MEYER OF THE DAHLIN GROUP

After a stressful day at work, entrepreneurs Toni and Pat Burke retreat to their Blackhawk estate where they turn on soft music, play with their children, Madison, 4, and Jon-Patrick, 3, and enjoy the peace and seclusion of an elegant hilltop estate. Sometimes they have friends in for a casual barbecue or a formal sit-down dinner with cocktails on the balcony to enjoy the breathtaking view of the foothills at dusk.

Their home wasn't always such a welcoming retreat. Built in the French country style as a custom tract home, rooms were small and the floorplan begged for reconfiguration to accommodate their young growing family. But they loved the location on a three-acre knoll overlooking Mt. Diablo, so rather than sell, they called in architect Charlie Meyer of the Dahlin Group and designer Martin Mitchell of Martin Perri Interiors to expand and transform the house into an Italian-style villa.

Unlike many couples who run their own businesses—Toni has a successful accounting firm and Pat works in health care—they wanted to be involved in the design process. On top of their list was finding the best layout and using the highest quality materials available. Working with Meyer and Mitchell, the couple decided to keep the existing living and dining room configuration, but demolish the left side of the house and





restructure the roofline. The original wood shake roof was replaced with lightweight tiles, and cast concrete—rather than stucco—was used as trim around doors and windows to enhance the feel of a European villa.

Guests enter through a mahogany front door and high-ceilinged entry to the living room with its abundance of windows. Mitchell replaced the outdated brick fireplace with hand-cast limestone, then added Old World details like Doric columns and an egg and dart pattern mantle.

The two neoclassical claw foot chairs were reupholstered in antique gold and black woven chenille, and walls were hand troweled and faux finished for an ancient fresco effect. To the right of the fireplace was a breezeway, later enclosed to create a niche for artwork and books. Silk drapes frame the windows and are lined and interlined for a rich, billowy look.

The room originally opened to a den, which they expanded and converted to a wine cellar. They pushed out one wall to add depth, and installed French doors and an Idaho quartz floor in a random stone pattern. An etched glass window looks out to the foyer. Details like French rubbed mahogany with fluting and rosettes carry through the theme of an inviting country estate.

To the left of the entry is a magnificent rotunda, linking the addition to the main house and acting as an axis to the master suite, children's bedrooms and game room. The Burkes fell in love with an Italian tile medallion handmade in Venice and had it inlaid in the floor as the focal point of the room. They also designed an ornate stained glass dome in the tower so when the sun shines through it casts a jewel-like glow on the walls. Bronze sculptures

on pedestals and an alabaster and crystal chandelier round out the setting.

A grand hallway leads to the game room. Mitchell repeated ceiling arches in the hall for architectural interest and to break up the repetition of one endless space. Doorways are recessed, and he illuminated the soffit ceiling with low voltage lights.





A former den, pictured top left, was transformed into a spectacular wine cellar with French rubbed mahogany cabinetry. An Italian tile medallion, bottom left, is a grand addition to the home's rotunda. The master bath, this page, is a spa-like retreat complete with a fireplace at the end of the deep whirlpool tub.





At the end is the game room with 15-foot ceilings and a dramatic eight-foot-wide fireplace with marble surrounds. "It's a wonderful entertainment area," says Mitchell, "formal enough for after-dinner drinks, yet casual enough for the family to gather and watch the big screen TV". They stained cherrywood cabinets to give the appearance of age, and stripped and refinished the tables in a similar patina to complement the surroundings. By recessing the entertainment center into an arched niche, Mitchell added interest to an otherwise mundane wall elevation. "It's a multi-purpose room," he explains. Besides a full marble bath and walk-in closet, there's a wet bar and refrigerator, so it can serve as a guest suite with all the comforts of home.

Of all the rooms, the master bath is one of their favorite havens. Pat Burke had stayed at a Las Vegas hotel with a luxurious spa suite and wanted the same feeling. They found oversized slabs of Etruscan Rose marble at Alpha Granite & Marble, which they used in the shower and on the whirlpool tub walls. The floor is 12x12-inch marble tiles with Etruscan Rose diamond inserts, and even the mirrors are framed in Etruscan Rose marble. Mitchell ingeniously designed bath cabinetry to look like furniture. Against one wall is a bombe chest with fluted columns and rosettes, which serves as storage for lin-

ens. Other ingenious touches include double-stepped molding and an open soffit surrounded by incandescent, low-voltage lighting with dimmers to change the mood of the room. The fireplace adds romance and warmth.

The exterior was also completely redone, including re-landscaping the grounds. They ripped out the concrete driveway and reconstructed it so that it sweeps up to the front door for a stunning view of the foothills. Large oak trees were backlit, and a balustrade was built along the perimeter of the house with sets of stairs every few yards for easy access to the lawn. One of their favorite possessions is a pair of Atlas warlords at the front gate salvaged from the old London-Anglo Bank in San Francisco and stored in a warehouse until the Burkes found just the right setting. "We wanted something to say we are here," says Pat Burke. The warlords let visitors know they've arrived at a very special home.

The game room, above, features oversized chairs and sofas for relaxing around the marvelous eight-foot-wide fireplace. The Burkes chose an unusual pair of stone warlords salvaged from the old London-Anglo Bank in San Francisco, pictured right, to embellish their entrance.

