

SONOMA VALLEY STYLE

AT HOME IN CALIFORNIA'S WINE COUNTRY

Kathryn Masson
Photography by Steven Brooke

RIZZOLI
NEW YORK

GRACE RANCH



In a landscape of low rambling hills dotted with live oaks in the lower Sonoma Valley, this clapboard ranch compound makes a Zen-like statement and is a fresh approach to the design of a family retreat. Its clean design is the result of a consideration of diverse influences. Brooks Walker, a principal of Walker Warner Architects in San Francisco, gave a new sleekness to the vernacular American form in order to satisfy both the husband, a modernist, and the wife, a traditionalist. The home's exterior, with its simplicity of form and quality of materials, reflects the interior, where precision craftsmanship has highlighted the refined design features.

The first order of business was to integrate this structure into the physical setting and its historically agricultural context. The U-shaped farmhouse, built by Dave Warner of Redhorse Constructors, Inc., is sited so that the inner courtyard, loggias, and a pool that is set down on a lower grade, are protected from the strong winds that whip around the hills and the ocean fogs that prevail in the mornings. A three-story tower, reminiscent of a grain silo, anchors the one-story home and helps create an agrarian aura. Details such as chicken coop light monitors, which appear as small windowed cupolas on the roof, let in overhead light.

The home's voluminous interior is warmed by the use of natural materials and allusions

to historic architectural detailing such as ceilings with exposed barnlike wood trusses. A gigantic cross-boarded barn door that slides on massive iron hinges opens the living rooms to the fresh air of the courtyard. At the main entrance a Dutch door conveys a casual country welcome. The mild, earthbound hues of the interior design by Michael Tedrick of Tedrick & Bennett, Inc., San Francisco, create a soothing atmosphere. Tedrick designed and had fabricated accent pieces such as pendant lanterns, chandeliers, and sconces of handwrought iron. These touches reinforce the country feeling, as does Tedrick's custom furniture that is both comfortable and sophisticated, complementing Walker's refined vernacular design.

Low-impact landscaping of native plantings and a luxurious lawn watered by a powerful well create an intimate, perfectly scaled setting amidst the rustic Western scenery. To complement the warm white paint of the home's exterior, structural forms such as chimneys and exposed bases are made of unfinished board form concrete. Bluestone block in a green-brown range, cut with precision to create an elegant, tight design for the entryway, also blend with the exterior color scheme and create a path of subtle but striking beauty.

The farmhouse, with guest house and other outbuildings, is a tasteful, imaginative

Previous page: Architect Brooks Walker, principal of Walker Warner Architects in San Francisco, designed Grace Ranch as an elegant modern farmhouse set in the low hills of the Sonoma Valley. He selected it comfortably against the cool marine winds while asserting its presence on a spectacular sweeping lawn at its entrance. A low bluestone wall and the lines and warm white color of the main house's exterior are perfectly integrated. The wall creates another relaxed seating area in which to enjoy an evening fire and the rural atmosphere of rolling oak-dotted hills. The compound's design is delightfully bright, well built, and worthy of its setting, one of the most naturally beautiful in the Sonoma Valley.

Right: Brooks Walker anchored the one-story home, a modernist farmhouse design, with a three-story tower reminiscent of a grain silo. The tower, which contains a library and office, as well as the windowed cupolas (which) coop light monitors on the roof, are both creative and functional.

Following pages: Dave Warner, principal of Redhorse Constructors, Inc., helped to create the home's Zen-like peace with precise construction of architectural details and finely crafted soothing wood surfaces. In the living room a natural-toned wood ceiling and open-beam trusses that null bare forms give the pleasantly bright living room both added volume and intimacy. Interior designer Michael Tedrick of Tedrick & Bennett, Inc., San Francisco, has created a relaxed, sophisticated furniture that he custom designed for the space. He also designed the iron and paquet coffee table. At the far end of room, a large reading-lounging niche, or a Hawaiian biche, allows the children to be a part of the scene. Art from John Breggman Gallery in San Francisco completes the room.





The spacious fresh-white kitchen and dining areas are well lit with light from the chicken coop light fixtures on the roof and expanse of bi-folding glass doors that open to the breakfast porch. A series of painted wood trusses bind the two rooms together into one visual space. In the hands of Books Haller, the choice to leave the steel bolts visible on the trusses, and placement of a stainless steel range and hood add to the unique, contemporary flavor of the traditional ranch house form. Michael Tidrick chose paper lanterns hanging from iron stems as appropriate fixtures to add a clean-lined and rustic touch. His choice of a contemporary iron chandelier that uses only candles to light the evening's dinner has started a fun, family tradition in the country home.

solution for a family compound, with zinc roofs, bluestone patios, and a muted warm white-toned exterior. All of these elements reflect the silvery leaves of the olive trees and lichen-covered trunks of the craggy oaks that guard the compound. There is magic and perfection in Walker's design, a seamless blend of historical and contemporary influences that both fits and defines the context in which it exists.

*Madison Ranch Home Compound, 2003
Books Haller, Architect*

102 GRACE BARNES



Right: The breakfast porch that overlooks the swimming pool and courtyard is one of the family's favorite gathering spots. The architect has created an open space that is nonetheless intimate, because of its size, the rusticity of the open-beamed ceiling, and the detail of a low railing. A simple iron lantern designed by Michael Tolbick hangs from the open-beamed ceiling, while his design for a large patio table, with planks of teak for the top, is weather-handy.

Following pages: A view from the back of the house reveals a symmetrical plan where well-considered positioning in the topography provides shelter for the courtyard and house's covered porches. Landscape architect William Peters has planted for lushness and authenticity immediately surrounding the house, using native plantings to complement the rusticity of the various mature oak trees and native grasses on the grounds. He has relocated ancient olive trees from elsewhere on the property to the courtyard.



