

travertine on the beach

By K. Schipper

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Architect of Record: EBTA Architects, Irvine, Calif.

Design Architect: Ade Collie Architect, Orange, Calif.

General Contractor: Mark A. Falcone General Building Construction, Laguna Beach, Calif.

Structural Stone Subcontractor: SMG Stone Company Inc., Sun Valley, Calif.

CORONA DEL MAR, Calif. – People will put up with nearly anything to have beachfront property in Southern California. But, when one couple finally opted to replace what one of their architects calls “a very small home,” they didn’t settle for half-measures.

Despite a challenging lot, the couple opted for almost 6,000 ft² of living space with expansive ocean views wrapped in wood, glass and travertine. Further enhancing the contemporary look of the home, the travertine mimics what has become a local landmark: the J. Paul Getty Museum at the Getty Center in Los Angeles.

To handle installation of the structural travertine, which offered something of the scope of a commercial job in a residential package, the contractor chose a sub versed in both.

The results, everyone agrees, are evidence of the best type of collaboration – and are, in a one word, magnificent.

PLENTY OF CHALLENGES

As with many other Southern California extravaganzas, the home was years in the making.

Ade Collie, principal of Orange, Calif.-based Ade Collie Architect, met the clients well before they even considered building. He explains he had worked with their interior designer on a home years earlier.

“When they finally decided to build, they called me,” Collie says, “and I brought in EBTA (EBTA Architects of Irvine, Calif.) because I collaborate with them on all my projects. Carlos Elenes (an EBTA principal) and I teamed up on developing the design for the floor plan.”

Actually making the commitment to go ahead with the house was a major undertaking, Elenes says. The clients had lived in an existing home on the site, but felt it was inadequate. The architect agrees.

“The scale was very small,” he says. “The rooms were very small, and the ceiling heights were on top of you. You didn’t feel any spacious quality.”

Spaciousness was what Elenes offered by way of a design. He says he focused on increasing ceiling heights and the volumes of rooms, as well as improving the indoor/outdoor connection.

“It’s such a nice site, and we brought the outside in by doing that,” Elenes says.

However, “nice site” is relative. He explains that the lot was narrow, with a 10’ drop from the front to the back.

Still another challenge was the style of the house,



With beach views like these, it’s no wonder the clients wanted something special (left). Because of its beach location, the front of the home basically sits on an alley, and creating an appropriate entry (above) was part of the design challenge. (All photos by Magnus Stark Photography / courtesy SMG Stone Company Inc.)

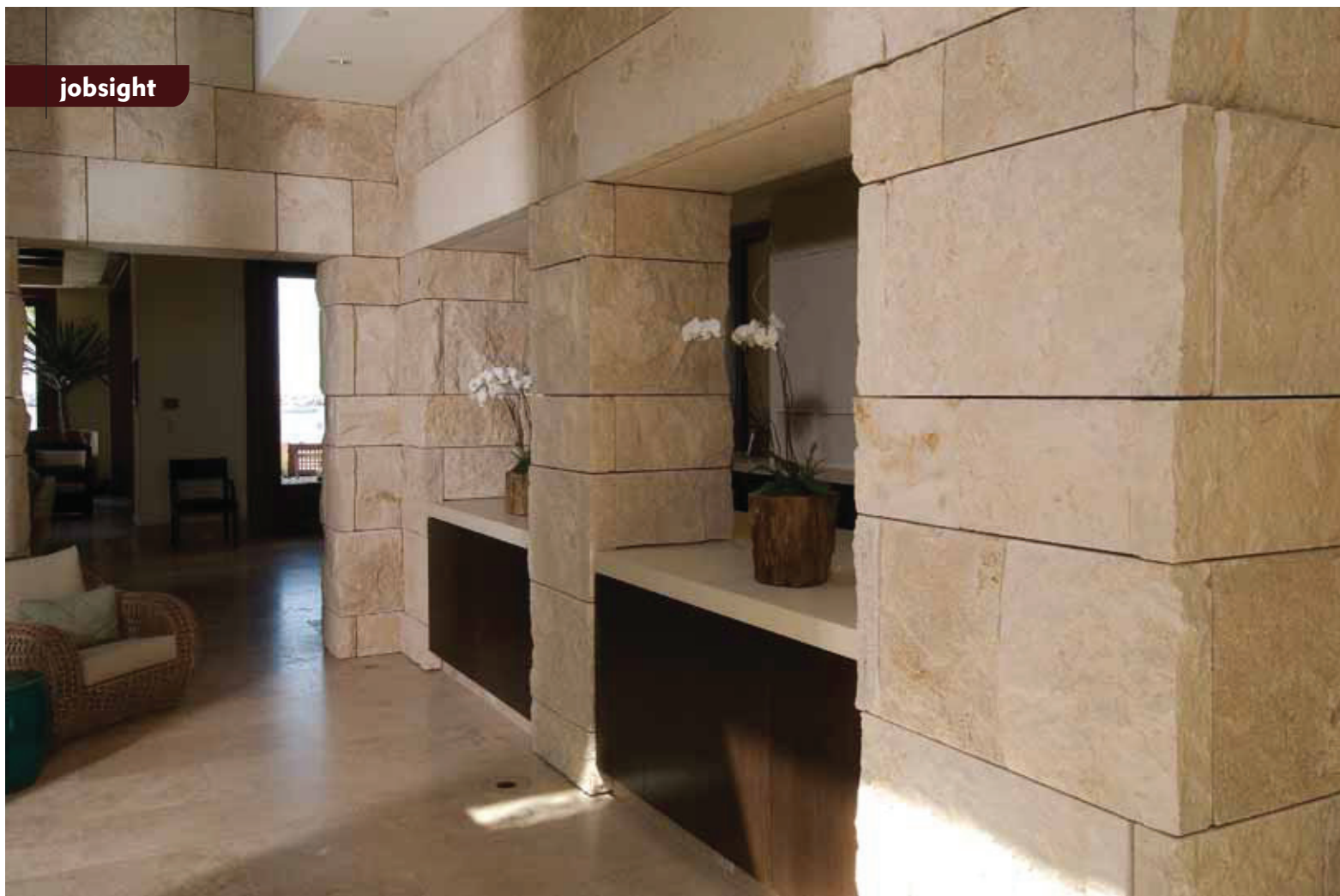
which Elenes says went through several iterations. Initially the clients wanted a more-traditional look.

“Because of the ocean view, they became open to getting more contemporary,” he says. “We added a lot of glass and pocket doors, and ended up with a style that’s more like island architecture. It has traditional roots, but it’s still a contemporary solution.”

As for the stone: “We had seen it at the Getty and they really liked the look. They fell in love with it and that’s the direction we took.”

ENHANCED EFFECTS

Once Elenes and Collie came up with an acceptable floor plan for the project, Collie proceeded first with the exterior architecture; once that was approved, he moved to the interior architecture and details in collaboration with the interior designer.



Large stones with tight tolerances were the order of the day on the project. Edges were hand-chiseled in the field to match the faces.

Of the home's overall appearance, he says, "This is essentially the same stone that was used on the Getty Center. It's a guillotine-cut travertine from Italy that's ungrouted and hung from stainless-steel clips."

Collie compares the look of the home to a contemporary resort with the mix of glass, wood and stone.

"The primary materials are the stone and mahogany, and we did a lot of mahogany," he says. "I didn't want it to be a cold contemporary; I wanted a warm feel, and the travertine with the guillotine face has a warmth that another texture wouldn't have."

The only place Collie strayed from that finish was with the bush-hammered exterior lintels.

Collie says the idea of putting the travertine both on the interior and the exterior is to get movement.

"I wanted the stone to feel like it wrapped from the outside into the house," he says. "There's a seamlessness to it."

To further enhance that effect, at least one window in the media room is designed so that the glass disappears into the stone. And, the doors – with their lintels – are also a part of that.

"The door looking directly to the bay is 12' that pockets back into the wall," says Collie. "On the other side is a 16' door that pockets back. That helps give the house its open quality, and the sense that the inside and the outside don't have any real contrast."

Collie adds that the design process was not a quick

one. He estimates it took about two years to reach an approved design, with some of the delay caused by reviews by at least three government agencies.

Finding a general contractor to execute the plan, by comparison, was quite simple. Elenes explains that his firm provided the clients with recommendations of three builders, and they chose Mark A. Falcone General Building Construction of Laguna Beach, Calif.

"They interviewed builders and settled on Mark," says Elenes. "Mark builds our *high* high-end homes. He's done about a half dozen of our homes, and he's the best that we've found."

"My company specializes in high-end estate homes," says Falcone. "I like to do projects that are unique and challenging."

He adds that it wasn't surprising he chose SMG Stone Company Inc., of Sun Valley, Calif., to install the travertine cladding following a bid situation.

"I have a track record of successful projects with them," says Falcone. "I appreciate the quality of their shop drawings and their planning and installation. In this case, the shop drawings they did were really great, and that allowed me to order the material effectively."

SMALL SCALE

SMG president Solomon Aryeh says having the contractor order the stone directly from a supplier – in this

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A residential project with commercial sensibilities left little room for motorized equipment. All the stone for the project – including the lintels – was hand-placed.

case, in Italy – is a trend he’s seeing more frequently, although it isn’t his preferred approach.

“It’s not a standard way of doing things,” he says.

“But a lot of contractors – especially residential contractors – believe if they buy the stone and provide it to a sub, they save 20 percent.

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To help bring added warmth to the interior design, a large amount of mahogany complements the stone. The interior designer worked closely with the architects to achieve just the right combination of elements.

“Most have also admitted they’d never do it again.”

However, he and Collie agree that the superior quality of the SMG shop drawings made the process of get-

ting stone to the project a smooth one.

“We didn’t have problems because our shop drawings and cut list were very accurate,” says Aryeh.

"We did complete plans and detailing for the project, transferred our files to Mr. Falcone, and he took them to the supplier who fabricated the materials."

"They took my drawings and made them into shop drawings, which I corrected and revised in some cases," says Collie. "The fabricated stone was then shipped over here, although there was some cutting and fitting in the field."

Although the fabricated stone was delivered to the SMG plant and then shipped to the site, Collie says he was impressed by the quality of the fieldwork done by the company's craftsmen.

Massood Assad, senior project manager for SMG, says much of the onsite work involved chiseling edges to get those faces to match the split-face finish on the rest of each piece. And, the shop drawings allowed for the pieces to be slightly oversized to accommodate the field finishing.

Large pieces were the order of the day anyway.

"These were all rectangular pieces, 4" thick with a height of 24"," he says. "But, the length varied from 12"-60". And, the lintels, because of the size of the doors, were 6'-8' and longer."

From an installation standpoint, the lintels proved to be the biggest challenge of the project, Assad adds.

"Every piece had to be handled by hand," he says. "There was no forklift at the jobsite because there just wasn't any space for it. It was difficult trying to hang them, too, because they were heavy."

By comparison, the actual installation of the stone

wasn't that difficult, both Aryeh and Assad agree. Although the stone was hung using a mechanical system that's more typically seen on commercial jobs, SMG crews are trained to work both commercial and residential projects.

"The hardest part was to bring the commercial aspects of the job to the residential project," says Assad. "The tolerances were small and the jobsite was small, so we had to improvise."

Where the underlying wall had been waterproofed, the company utilized both a self-sealing system and each penetration was caulked. Given the location, "that was definitely a concern," says Aryeh.

Assad estimates that SMG's portion of the job took about three months utilizing four three-man crews.

The home was finished in early 2007 after almost five years of effort – and is now for sale.

Still, Mark Falcone and Solomon Aryeh believe the project was a success, in part because of the other's involvement in it.

"SMG is very good," says Falcone. "That's why I chose them for this project; I have a track record of successful projects with them, and this is a unique installation, a very interesting house."

"The job goes a lot smoother for us when the contractor is a facilitator who works with us, and makes the work go easier," says Aryeh. "Falcone has a lot of concern for his subcontractors and makes sure we succeed. When we work for Mark we know we have a good project." ■