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Sustainable Home & Garden

SUMMER 2013

Jewel of the Hill

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IS A TIMELESS BEAUTY

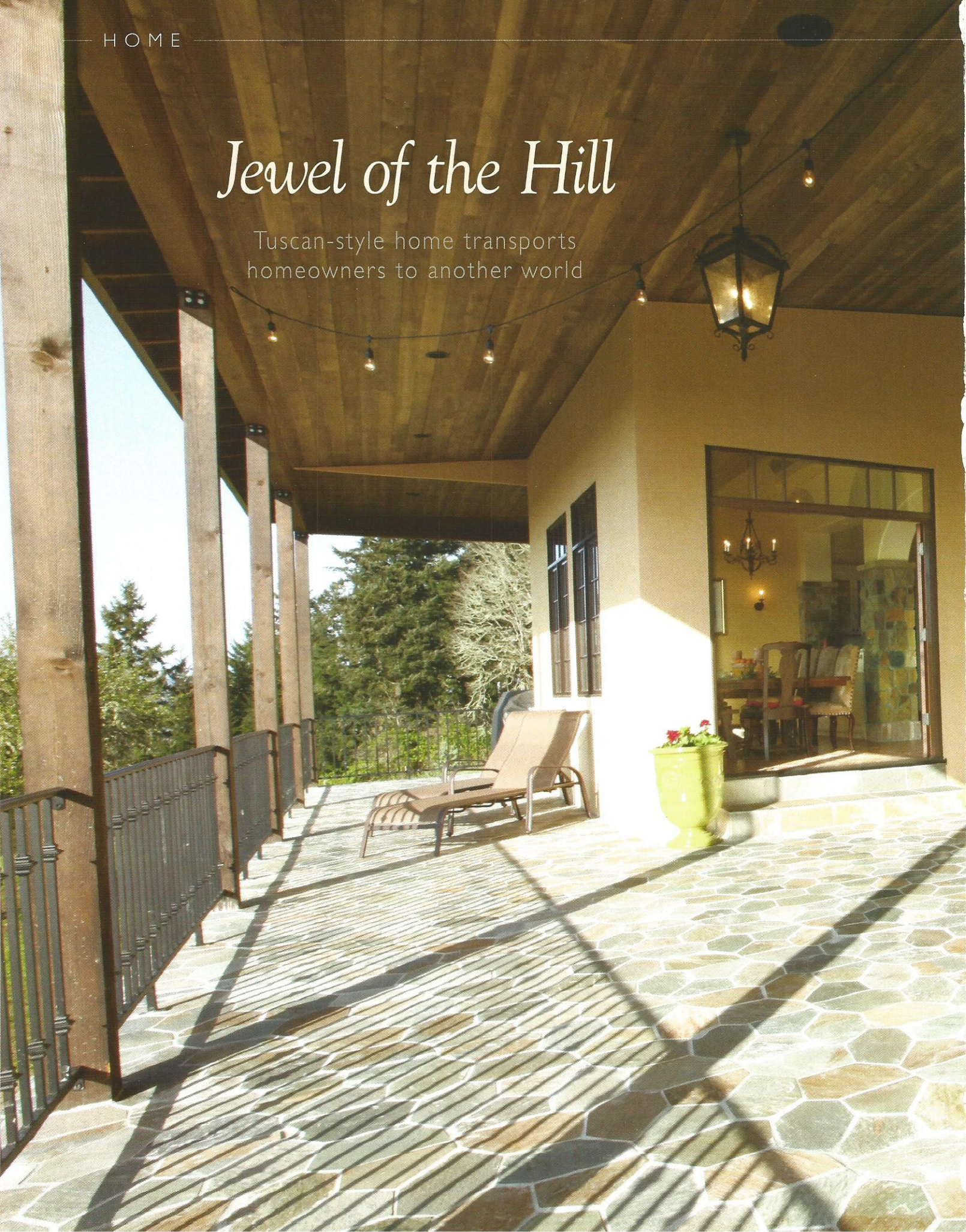


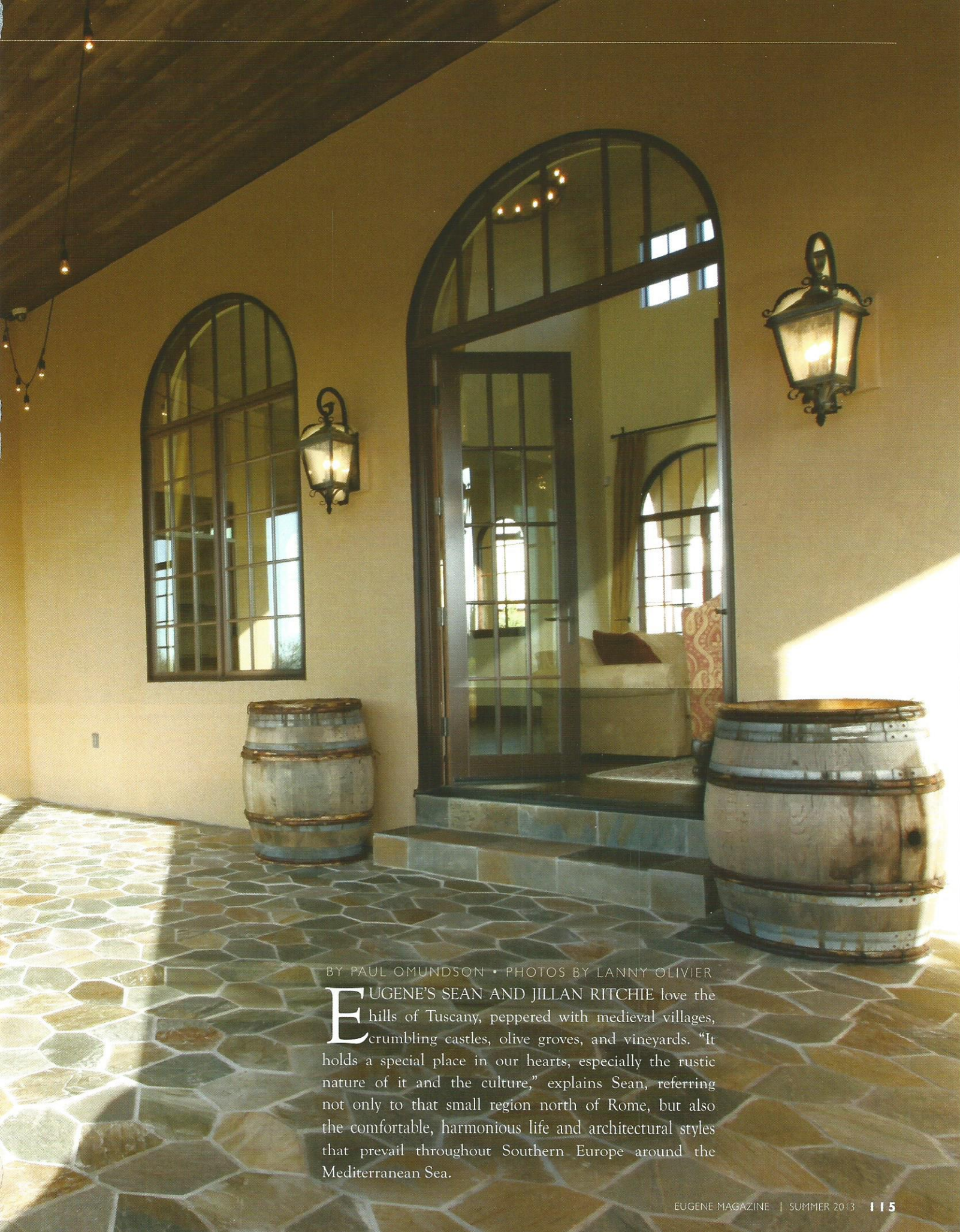
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HOME

Jewel of the Hill

Tuscan-style home transports homeowners to another world





BY PAUL OMUNDSON • PHOTOS BY LANNY OLIVIER

EUGENE'S SEAN AND JILLAN RITCHIE love the hills of Tuscany, peppered with medieval villages, crumbling castles, olive groves, and vineyards. "It holds a special place in our hearts, especially the rustic nature of it and the culture," explains Sean, referring not only to that small region north of Rome, but also the comfortable, harmonious life and architectural styles that prevail throughout Southern Europe around the Mediterranean Sea.



The symmetry of the windows and door arrangements allows for a visual connection between the indoor and outdoor spaces.

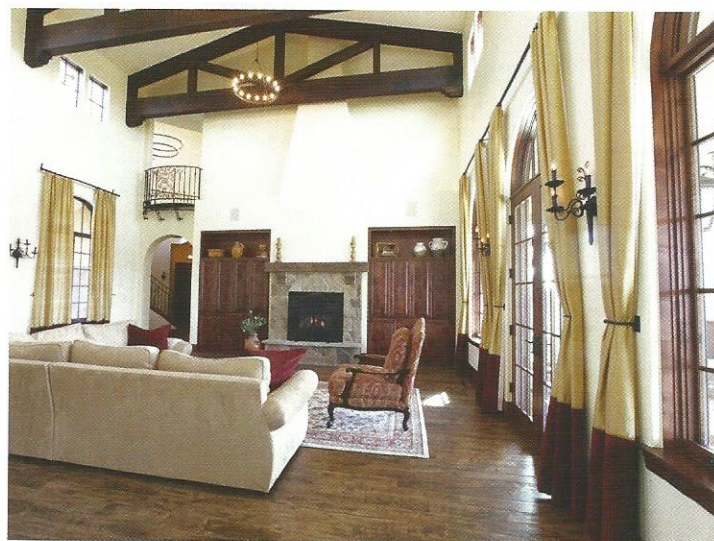
So, when the Ritchies embarked on building their new home in Blanton Heights last year, “we absolutely wanted to capture that Old World feeling that will be timeless,” says Jillian. “Rustic and relaxed, yet ready for entertaining our friends and family with its open floor plan,” her husband emphasizes.

That pretty much sums up what the popular Tuscan style is all about. For designer/builder Dan Cooper, whose DC Fine Homes specializes in making such dreams come true, this was a challenge he savored.

It also inspired his name for the project, Gemma Della Collina, Italian for “Jewel of the Hill.”

“As a builder you really appreciate clients like Sean and Jillian,” Cooper says. “They’re so passionate about what they want their home to be. They’ve travelled all over Europe and are really drawn to the organic features of Italian architecture. They love that rustic, elegant blend—exposed timbers, worn terra cotta floors, chandeliers, things that look old.”

The couple came to Cooper armed with ideas and plenty of pictures from books representing what they like about Italian architecture, from a sun-baked look and feel to earthy, unpretentious hues that evoke a Tuscan hillside.





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Terracotta floors, salvaged beams in the ceiling, and an Italian-made Bertazzoni Range were integral to making the kitchen feel authentic.

That sparked a collaborative design process where Cooper helped guide the couple to achieve the features they wanted most.

"It's little things and the details," Cooper says. Probably nothing captures that better than the string lights and lanterns draped across the backyard patio, shimmering in evening breezes.

One of the biggest challenges for Cooper was to get proper materials that stand up to Eugene's seasonal coolness, heat, and wetness. "We tried to make this look Old World, and Eugene doesn't have many sources," he explains. "We got the materials we needed from literally all over the world." For example, Cooper needed to find a way to make an acrylic stucco look aged, since it was impractical to use a true concrete stucco. "It's hard to replicate it exactly but we achieved that aged, mottled look the family was looking for," he says with pride. "It took a bit of trial and error."



The half-round windows, also a hallmark of the Tuscan look, was another challenging element that took a lot of detailed custom work. That's true, too, of the 11-foot-tall, 4-foot-wide, 2-inch-thick front door, weighing in at more than 300 pounds—it's "like opening a vault," Cooper chuckles.

But this rustic Tuscan villa is a modern Eugene home, too, which works well for the Ritchie's growing family. Even though the house has an overall Old World-timeless ambiance, "there are modern elements within that," Cooper explains. "The master bath has a clean, contemporary edge. On the other hand," he adds, "the kitchen has more rustic elements represented in the distressed cabinetry, salvaged barn beams, terra cotta floors. But all the modern appliances and conveniences are right there, too, nicely tucked away, along with an Italian-made Bertazzoni range for a great, authentic European feel."



A natural stone fireplace, salvaged barn timber mantel, scrolled Iron Work chandeliers, and arched wood windows add a romantic feel to the home's interior.

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Favorite Tuscan elements

For a look at the Tuscan elements they love most in their new home, Jillian and Sean walk out front and point to three key mainstays they had seen and admired in countless homes in Italy: a distinctive stair tower—"a bit similar to the one at King Estate," Sean remarks—a decomposed granite walkway, and a beautiful fountain to greet visitors. Cooper adds: "The stair tower anchors the whole place. In European architecture a turret or tower is a common element."

Another favorite architectural aspect is a triple groin vault, a European feature Cooper really wanted to add, with arched windows to pick up on outdoor walkway arches. The lighting, feeling,

The master bathroom features a bright, neutral palette, polished fixtures, and furniture-styled cabinetry.



and textures are so dramatic in that spot, you almost feel swept into the Middle Ages.

An evening walk under the triple groin vault also showcases one of the many ingenious lighting systems Cooper and crew wove throughout the grounds to underscore the desired Mediterranean feel. It's an example of the soft, subtle, evocative lighting throughout that absolutely delights Jillian and Sean.

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The master bedroom is privately perched at the back of the second story to take advantage of westerly sunsets. The Travertine fireplace was meticulously chosen to match the future color arrangement of the space.

"The lighting is our other favorite aspect of the home, especially at night," Sean says. "We wanted the light fixtures to fit the environment, so we spent a lot of time looking for just the right ones, and the result is a lot of hanging lanterns and chandeliers. With most of the lights on dimmers we're able to create that warm, romantic feeling." There's pretty good manipulation of light during the day, too. Tuscan architecture is renowned for ingenious and odd-shaped windows, such as the clerestory windows above the indoor balcony, that help stream light inside in magnificent ways.

Another popular spot for the family and their friends is the backyard covered patio with those swaying hanging lanterns and ubiquitous string lights that Italians seem to stream everywhere around them for outdoor patio eating. A terrific outdoor fireplace—made from vintage bricks once part of a public building in



downtown Portland, circa 1800s—completes the outdoor ambience.

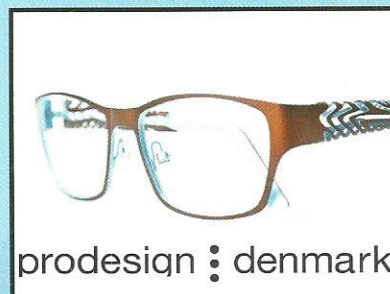
Perhaps their favorite Tuscan feature, however, “is the rustic flooring throughout the main living area and kitchen,” says Jillian, pointing out the main living room with its hand-scraped wood that looks like it was plucked from an ancient Italian monastery. “It gives an Old World feel and blends into the kitchen, where we have the terra cotta tiles.”

Just like Tuscan villas in Italy, their home features a marvelous interplay between indoors and outdoors. The barriers between each blur. “It’s just a continuation,” says Sean.

“This is a home where we can be transported to another world,” adds Jillian, giving an ultimate compliment to her designer/builder. ■

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