

EARTH, SEA

INSIDE A HUBBELL-ENHANCED LEUCADIA HOME



By Debra Lee Baldwin • Photography by Will Gullette

AND STONE



LEFT: A wall of windows looks out to the ocean from the great room of this Leucadia residence, remodeled by artist James Hubbell and his architect son, Drew. RIGHT: Curved pieces of walnut frame the pointed arch of the Hubbell-designed fireplace adorned with ray-shaped pieces of pale glass and black pebbles. RIGHT ABOVE: The home's previous owner built exterior walls and walkways that meander down to the beach.



Much of artist James Hubbell's compound near Julian was destroyed last fall by wildfire, and priceless works of art lost forever. That disaster affects all San Diegans, and makes any house that incorporates Hubbell's nature-inspired artistry even more significant.

This Leucadia home, a remodel completed two years ago, is an outstanding example. Like a geode, its exterior is rock-encrusted; its interior holds gem-like beauty.





"We have the previous owner, Dan Peterson, to thank for all the stone work," says the current homeowner, who requested anonymity. Peterson paved exterior walls, walkways, driveway and even the garage floor with tens of thousands of beach pebbles.

The setting is a bluff top overlooking the Pacific. Although previous remodels had split the home into four residential units, and a fireplace had been installed where a view window begged to be, the new owners decided not to tear down the house.

Instead, they respected what Peterson had accomplished, refurbishing the home in keeping with the informal feeling of their neighborhood and enhancing the interior with sculptural metal, wood, tile and glass.

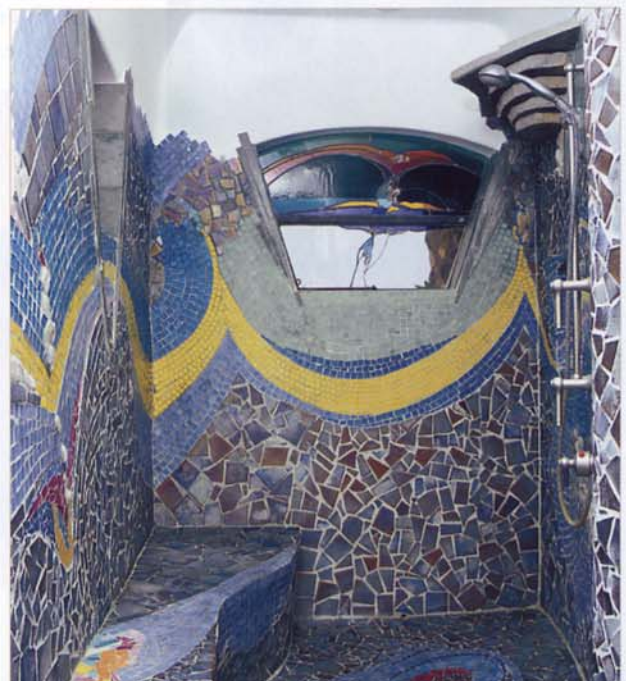
Team Hubbell

Drew Hubbell, an architect who is partner with father James in the design firm of Hubbell & Hubbell, sums up the project's aesthetics: "Our goal was to bring the spirit of the ocean into the house by framing views, adding mosaic and stained glass inspired by the ocean, and using natural materials that relate to the sea."

To expedite this, James Hubbell and his artisans ornamented select doors, windows, walls, gates and

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OPPOSITE: The sound of waves far below is amplified in the cave-like master bedroom, which is warmed by a cobblestone fireplace (below). **ABOVE:** A cobblestone spa designed by landscape architect Leslie Ryan is the centerpiece of the revamped greenhouse. The floor is covered with a carpet of baby tears. **BELOW:** Designed by James Hubbell, the master bedroom's shower is paved with broken tiles, iridescent squares, colored glass and streams of mosaic that mimic the tide's motion.





Hubbell & Hubbell

For five decades, acclaimed San Diego artist/sculptor James Hubbell has designed homes often described as “organic” because of how they harmonize with their natural settings.

Interiors embellished with colored glass and swirling designs in wood and concrete suggest the inhabitants are elves who whittle doors, pave windows with gemstones, and glean glittering objects from the earth.

San Diego architect Drew Hubbell is the second of four sons born to James and wife, Anne. Torrey, the eldest, runs the bookstore at Southwestern College; Lauren is an actor and professional dancer in New York; and Brennan, the youngest, is a film maker and metal worker.

The boys grew up at the Hubbell compound in Santa Ysabel, near Julian, which was badly damaged by wildfire in 2003. Their grotto-like bedroom barely survived; it has shells embedded in walls, and skylights of stained glass. Living in such surroundings “seemed normal to me,” Drew recalls, adding that it wasn’t unusual for total strangers to drop by “from all over the world.”



James founded the Ilan Lael Foundation, a network of local artisans, in 1982. Two Public Broadcasting Service documentaries have featured his work. His public projects include the San Diego Zoological Society’s Seed Bank facility, Sea Ranch chapel in northern California and Shelter Island’s Pacific Rim Park. He also does pro bono work for the Americas Foundation, building schools for disadvantaged children in Tijuana (volunteers are welcome; visit www.americasfoundation.net).

James, now in his mid-70s, collaborates with Drew’s studio to create what their website describes as “homes that integrate design and art,” and that “make tangible the spirit of nature in glass, wood, metal, concrete and stone.”

Drew also is gaining recognition for his efforts to promote economical, earth-friendly houses constructed of bales of straw.

For additional information, including opportunities to assist in rebuilding the Hubbell compound near Julian, visit www.hubbellandhubbell.com. — *Debra Lee Baldwin*

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fireplaces. Project architects Drew Hubbell and Juergen Zierler (also of Hubbell & Hubbell), reconfigured the interior, creating rooms tailored to a growing family's needs. Chuck Lang served as general contractor, overseeing everything from demolition to the installation of artworks.

Main living areas (office, kids' rooms, kitchen, great room, dining patio) are

at street level, but there's much more to the house than meets the eye. Below the top level are a master suite, laundry room, garage and, outdoors, a lawn, pond and greenhouse — all of which sit high above the beach.

Behind Turquoise Gates

When not busy "rocking" the house, former owner Peterson con-

structed retaining walls and pathways that switch back down the bluff, ending in a sauna at sand level.

From the beach, the house is a distant peaked roof. Viewed from the street, the home is an unassuming cottage partially hidden by a 4-foot cobblestone wall and a pine tree so horizontal it resembles a bonsai.

Hints of what lies beyond can be glimpsed in Hubbell-designed wrought-iron gates with whimsical curlicues painted turquoise blue. One gate stretches across the top of the downward-sloping, rock-lined driveway; another leads to the front door, with ripples of carved wood and swirls of stained glass that suggests waves crashing and sending spray skyward.

Even the doorknob is intriguing: a chunk of brass, verdigris except where fingertips polish it. Seen from inside, sunlight enlivens the glass and makes it glow.

Stylized shells in the door design radiate red and orange flames into surrounding blue-green glass. The shells also are storehouses of treasures; tucked within them are what appear to be gems of faceted amber.

Sensuous Surfaces

Drew infused the home's entry and hallway with light by installing skylights, plus panels of clear glass that extend from tops of interior walls to the ceiling.

Doors along the hallway resemble translucent shoji screens; they're double sliders with glass panels that sandwich rice paper. Underfoot is gray-green Chinese slate, embellished with snake-like ribbons of beach pebbles, aligned narrow side up.

Rooms off the hallway have floors of bamboo, a sustainable resource that is growing in popularity, especially among homeowners, architects and designers who honor the environment.

A home office on the right of the entry doubles as an entertainment room. Dominating the south wall is a built-in big-screen TV that pulls out and swivels. When not in use, it's con-

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cealed behind doors of overlapping walnut and cherry — Zierler's design, expedited by Anderson Woodworks, which also crafted a library of bookshelves along an adjacent wall.

Across the hall is the "fort" (bedroom) of the family's 10-year-old son. Embellishing one wall is a papier-mâché purple octopus by Leucadia artist Dan Townsend.

Hubbell Hearth

The west end of the hallway opens onto a kitchen and, beyond it, a great room. Cupboards line every wall of the kitchen but west, in order not to block the view through new ocean-view windows. *Blue Eyes* granite — a mottled gray-black with flecks of iridescent blue — tops a curved peninsula, and overhead hang blue pendant

lights. Design consultant Cynthia Burke orchestrated the home's overhead, recessed and decorative lighting.

Along the great room's southwest corner is an elbow-high counter with bar chairs. Overhead, a blown-glass light fixture by another local artist, Joel Bloomberg, resembles a jellyfish.

A new Hubbell-designed fireplace, on the great room's north wall, has a pointed arch surrounded by rays of pale blue glass and smooth black pebbles — which in turn are framed by two curved, polished pieces of walnut shaped like the ribs of a boat.

Drew's younger brother, Brennan Hubbell, designed the wrought-iron-and-copper fireplace screen, which incorporates vine-like metal tendrils. Extending the hearth into the surrounding bamboo flooring is another Hubbell touch: a river of pebbles.

To the left of the fireplace is a swivel-TV entertainment center; to the right, shelves designed by Drew's studio and constructed by Anderson Woodworks. Made of quartersawn ash, these are notable for the way the wood curves and bows — a subtle feat of craftsmanship that echoes the form of the fireplace.

Sleeping Grotto

The main level has mere hints of the Hubbell artistry. Downstairs is another matter.

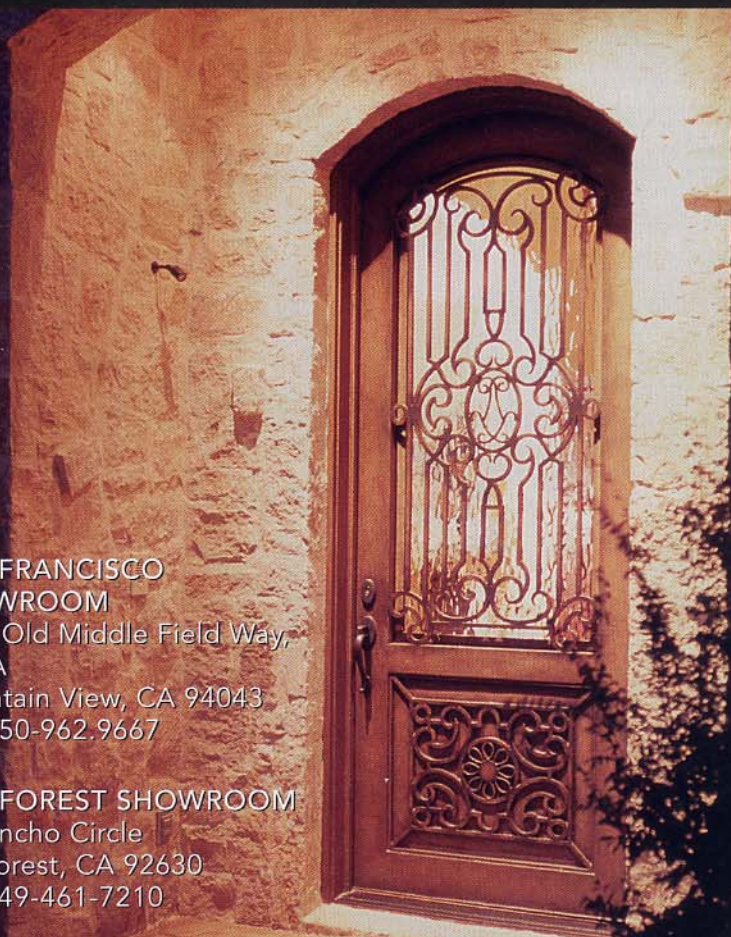
In the downstairs' north wall is a vertical panel with a top half of stained glass and a lower half of mosaic. The design, done in azure and turquoise with sunlight-yellow accents, suggests a torrent of water cascading from a rocky precipice.

A concave ceiling in the master bedroom amplifies the sound of waves far below.

"Jim (Hubbell) will tell you humans evolved in caves," says the homeowner. "It's only recently we've lived in boxes, and we feel most secure and relaxed in a cave. It's true — I sleep better here than anywhere."

On the bedroom's north side is a

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Hubbell fireplace surrounded by cobblestones and rays of sand-colored flagstone. Where stone meets hearth are chunks of turquoise glass that flicker and glow when illuminated by fire. The S-curve in Brennan's wrought-iron fireplace screen is as graceful as a manta ray.

Showering in Middle Earth

An arched opening on the master bedroom's south side leads into a walk-in shower paved with broken earth-tone tiles, iridescent squares and glass in blue, green, yellow and turquoise. Mosaic streams that ebb and flow around the walls mimic the rocking motion of the tide.

A V-shaped window of blue, mauve and yellow glass incorporates translucent orbs that glisten like bubbles. The glass itself, cut into shapes that resemble leaves caught in a current, appears fluid, as, indeed, glass is.

Overhead, water cascades from the top of a step-like inverted pyramid of flagstone. Smaller designs in characteristic Hubbell streams and sunbursts ornament a built-in bench, and appear to flow down the drain.

"I use the shower every day, yet continually discover things Jim included that I hadn't noticed before," the homeowner says.

Shimmering mosaic extends along the wall beyond the shower, breaks like a wind-swept wave, and cascades toward a niche that holds a Jacuzzi tub. Ice-like glass set into a niche above drips blue tiles into a cobalt-blue "lake." Above the tub rises a mosaic sunset, which continues into the window's stained glass.

Outside, landscape architect Leslie Ryan designed all the spaces and also revamped an unusual aspect of the home: its cliff-top greenhouse. This rock-walled room's dirt floor is carpeted with baby's tears (*Soleirolia*) and stepping stones.

On the east side of the greenhouse is a second home office, separated from the rest of the room (and its humidity)

by wood-framed sliding glass doors. West windows overlook the ocean; those on the north, a lawn, pond and sitting area.

During the remodel, Ryan added a whirlpool spa below cobblestone walls that incorporate niches for orchids and Hubbell-inspired mosaics. A clamshell sink Peterson had installed was removed during construction, then

replaced in such a way it looked like the original owner had built it.

Set into an interior ledge is a cluster of stones etched with names and dates. Among them are both Hubbells, all of the family members, Lang, Ryan, "supervisor Brian Kay" and "former owner Dan Peterson." One stone simply has a trident, the symbol of Neptune. ■

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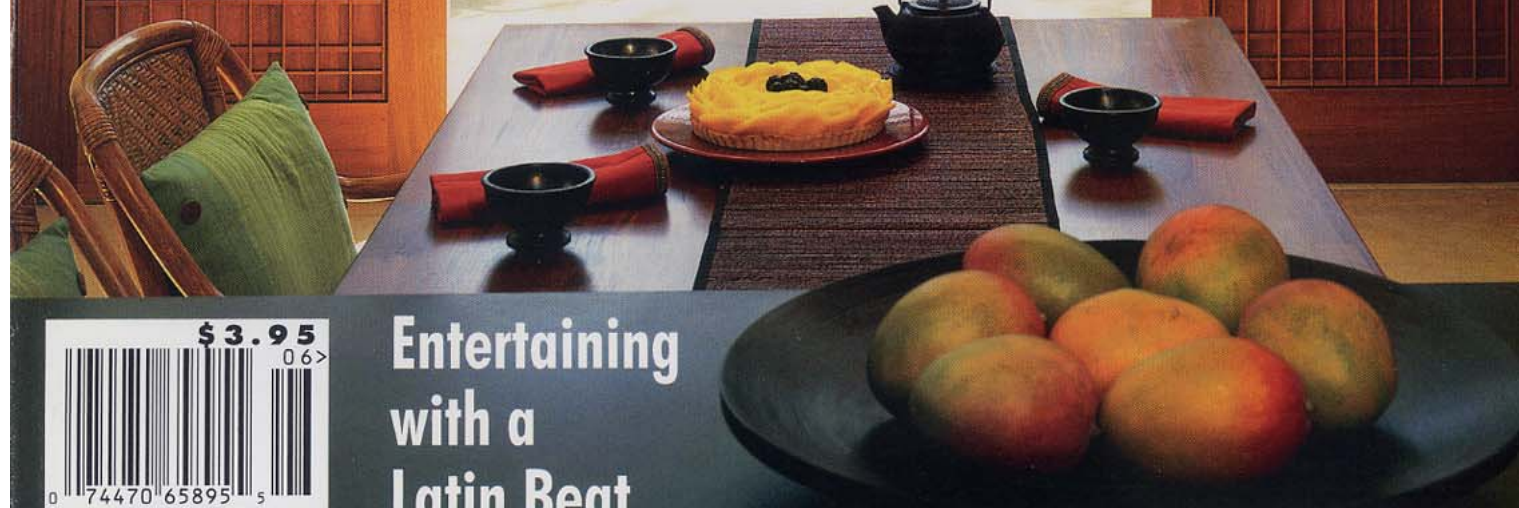
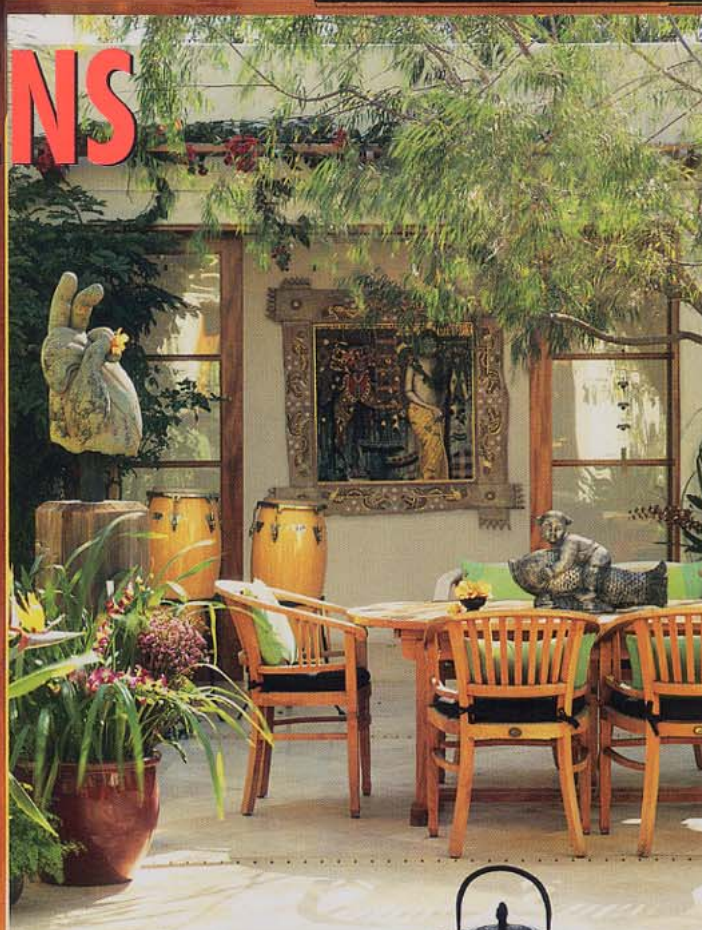
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