



Legendary architects William Albert Edwards and Joseph Plunkett designed Ranchito Bendito to take advantage of its unique location, including panoramic views of the Pacific Ocean, above, and what was once 40 acres of orchards and ranch land, at right.



ranchito BENDITO

Elegant Edwards & Plunkett Estate

BY **CHERYL CRABTREE**
PHOTOGRAPHED BY **AMY BARNARD**

AT THE EASTERN FLANKS OF MONTECITO, Romero Canyon Creek flows from Santa Ynez Mountain peaks down to East Valley Road. Near the top of the road that follows the creek lies a peaceful, secluded estate that once encompassed 40 acres of ranch land. Panoramic views of the Channel Islands, the Pacific Ocean and acres of orchards and ranchland unfold from every angle.

These are the same views that captivated prominent Los Angeles businessman Ernest Eloy Duque, Jr. and his wife, Louise Fleming Duque, and prompted them to purchase the property. The couple hired legendary architects William Albert Edwards and Joseph Plunkett to design a residence they could use as a horse ranch and weekend getaway where their family could relax, entertain guests and connect with nature.

Edwards & Plunkett drew plans for a classic Spanish-Colonial Revival-style home with red-tiled roofs, carefully



While the attention to detail, fine craftsmanship and timeless design of Ranchito Bendito are stunning, the breathtaking views of the surrounding land and the Channel Islands command attention from almost every room.

positioned to make the most of the 360-degree views and to provide for morning sun and afternoon shade over the course of a day.

The stunning residence was completed in 1929. “Its classic Spanish-Colonial Revival Style echoes the architectural duo’s romantic designs for the Fox-Arlington Theater, the National Guard Armory, Rockwood Women’s Club, the Santa Barbara Airport Terminal, the El Presidio complex and Cold Spring School, among other commercial and residential buildings in the area,” according to a 2010 *Montecito Magazine* article.

Since the Duques sold the estate, Ranchito Bendito has had only a handful of owners. The third owner, Eliphalet Nott Potter IV, was Fred Astaire’s stepson. According to the article, Potter said that “...Astaire—who danced and sang in films with Hollywood lovelies such as Ginger Rogers, Rita Hayworth, Audrey Hepburn, Leslie Caron and Cyd Charisse—would often lead guests for a spin around the living room.”

The current residents, Sue and Roger Kritz, bought the historic property in 1976 and have lived there ever since. During that time, they totally restored the house. While consulting the original plans—much of them hand-drawn by the architects—they stripped off wallpaper, refurbished wood floors, put the original hardware back on many of the doors and performed other tasks that enabled the home to closely reflect the classic character of the 1929 design. “We wanted to go back, not forward,” the Kritzes explain. “We wanted to do it right and just tried to put it back the way it was. We tried not to outdo the great job Edwards and Plunkett had already done.”

The Kritzes’ efforts paid off. Today’s Ranchito Bendito—now sitting on three acres—serves as a stellar example of Edwards & Plunkett work. A circular courtyard and exquisite old-growth California redwood door welcome visitors into the home’s “showcase” room, a spacious two-story expanse with a large fireplace and an

open ceiling made of 15- to 18-foot redwood beams. Two magnificent custom-tiled stairwells lead up to a wrap-around galleria. An antique wrought-iron chandelier, originally installed at the Santa Barbara Biltmore hotel, hangs from the massive beams in the center of the living area. Ocean, mountain and ranchland views spill from the multiple floor-to-ceiling arched windows.

Other original decorative elements still in place include the oak floors, an outdoor tile painting of a Fiesta-style celebration, mahogany countertops in the kitchen and pantry, the distinctive balustrades on the staircases and indoor balcony, and colorful Malibu tiles.

The east wing on the first floor once served as quarters for the butler and other household help. It now holds the home’s kitchen, dining room, bath and the “sunroom”—a cozy den with panoramic views that’s typically warmed daily by soft morning light.

The Kritzes were unable to restore all items in the home, but did their best to replicate the original flavor. For example, they worked with Steven Handelman Studios to install newer wrought-iron lamps and fixtures.

Going back to the original design also meant returning to the original flavor and purpose of the setting. “This was meant to be a getaway,” says Roger. “At the time, this didn’t have a lawn, a pool. There were horses.”

Outdoors, the Kritzes consulted with landscape designer Eric Nagelmann to create a drought-resistant succulent landscape. Nagelmann designed the cactus garden at Lotusland, just a few miles down the road. Nagelmann was able to acquire cuttings from Lotusland to plant around the Ranchito Bendito gardens.

After 40 years, the Kritz family still thoroughly enjoys living at Ranchito Bendito. “Everything is so open and happy. It’s a happy house....We love the whole experience, the whole feeling of being part of this. Life is a journey, and this is one of the wonderful parts of this experience. We just happened to find this—it’s magical.”