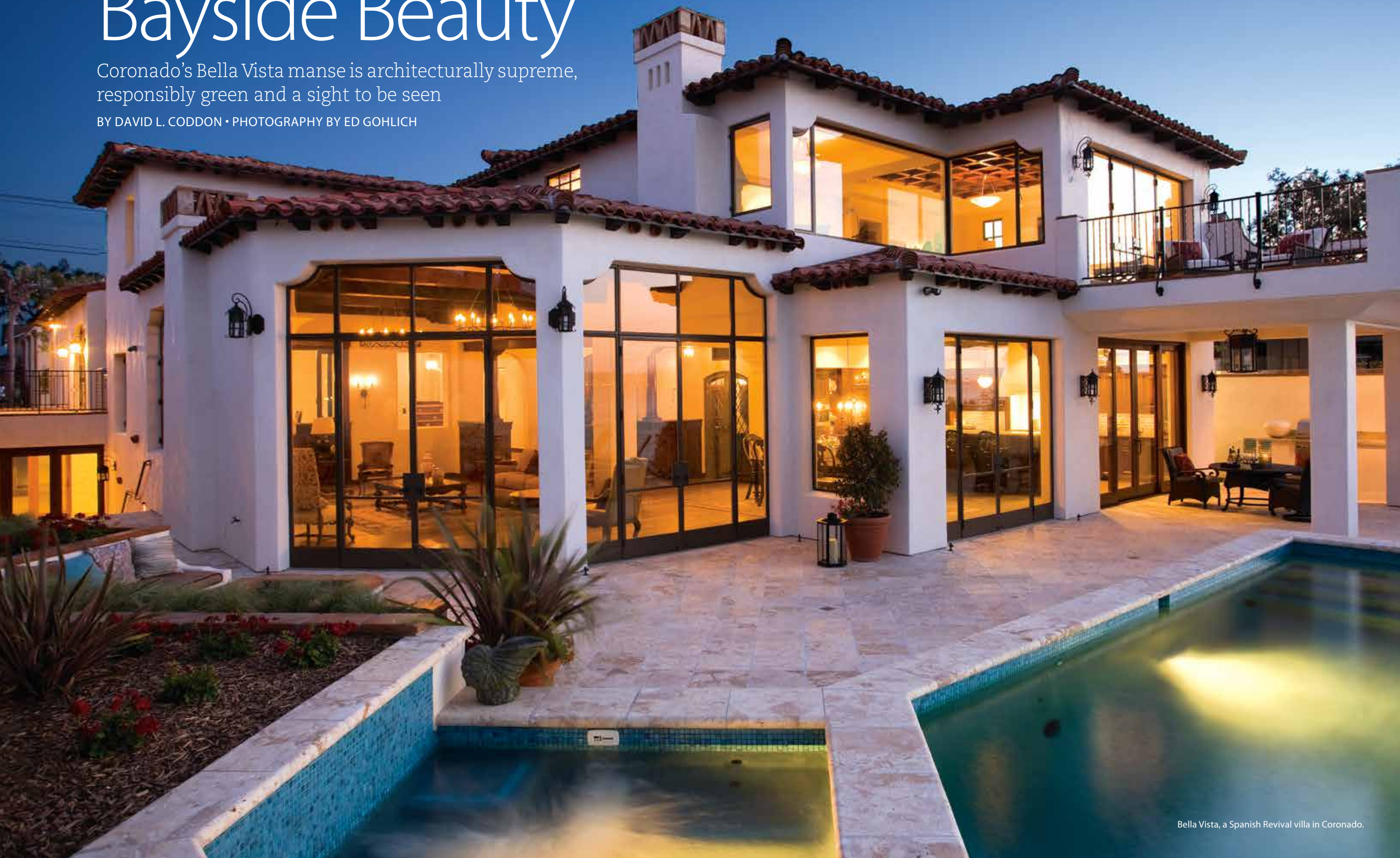


Bayside Beauty

Coronado's Bella Vista manse is architecturally supreme, responsibly green and a sight to be seen

BY DAVID L. CODDON • PHOTOGRAPHY BY ED GOHLICH



YOU CAN MEASURE PARADISE at a little more than 9,000 square feet — if you're talking about the majestic bayfront estate in Coronado called Bella Vista.

The name couldn't be more fitting. Custom-built along First Street just a whisper away from San Diego Bay, Bella Vista (all seven bedrooms and nine bathrooms) boasts a 180-degree view aperture. Longtime Coronado builder Lorton Mitchell and a lot of talented collaborators spent three years bringing Bella Vista to fruition. He calls its view "the 24/7 show."

The stars of that show? The sparkling high-rises of downtown San Diego, their sleek glass glistening from the sun; the colorful sailboats and formidable Navy vessels passing by; the seagulls soaring above and the ospreys diving for fish in the early morning.

"In a house like this, you're constantly drawn to the water," says Mitchell. "It's mesmerizing."



From this sunny deck chair, the skyline of downtown San Diego glistens in the distance.

Architect Dorothy Howard recognized the potential of the property's bayside location from the outset. "It was essential that the view side of the (three-story) home be two-story in order that as many rooms as possible have access to the bay and skyline panorama and to terraces for outdoor living," she says. "But even some of the spaces that don't directly front the view, including the semi-subterranean game room, afford views of the downtown skyline."

Yet this classic Spanish Revival estate is more than the sum total of its many breathtaking views. Built for entertaining, and certainly for over-

night guests, Bella Vista can accommodate 12 denizens easily or 200 guests at a black-tie event. Besides the main house, the walled estate includes a two-bedroom, two-bath 1,160-square-foot guest casita. A separate prep-kitchen and a massive wine vault complement the main home's kitchen. The aforementioned recreation room downstairs is only a mirror ball away from being its own nightclub-size space, and an enormous garage, equipped with a revolving floor that acts like a turntable for automobiles, can house up to six cars.

In spite of its size, custom interior design and appointments (a four-stop elevator, vaulted ceilings, terra-cotta tile floors, hand-distressed walnut kitchen cabinetry, Douglas-fir ceiling beams and knotty alder raised panel doors), the feel of the estate is laid-back Southern California.

"The house is very casual," says builder Mitchell. "It's flip-flops and shorts." Bathing suits, too: the outdoor diversions include a sizable vanishing-edge pool, fire pits and two spas.

As far as interior designer Stephanie Davis (of the firm Davis-Pugh Inc. in Coronado) was concerned, the bayfront location was a major consideration. "We (she and partner Mark Pugh) wanted to keep it very outdoor-oriented," she says. "We didn't want anything on the inside of the house to compete with the view. We concentrated on the quality of the materials and making sure that we brought in classic details from that (Spanish Revival) period."

The beauty of Davis' interior design is in the details. "Every cabinet has a different knob to it," she points out. "The light fixtures change throughout the house. Everything is different, and yet it just has such a nice flow to it."

For Mitchell, the principal challenges of building Bella Vista were the "waterproofing issues" posed by the house's location literally on the edge of San Diego Bay. He wasn't intimidated. In fact, Mitchell has a personal connection to this bayside spot along First Street. He grew up a couple blocks away from the site, and at the age of 12 he built his first boat and launched it off a beach not far from what now is Bella Vista.

In the spirit of Southern California's green consciousness, Mitchell built this estate, which he likens to a Santa Barbara-like Spanish villa, with energy-efficient and environmentally sensitive features throughout, such as heated floors, photovoltaic panels on the roof to promote warmth, and 12 separate air-conditioning "zones" ("you can heat one room at a time").

Recently, the property earned a gold-level LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) rating from the U.S. Green Building Council (USGBC). It is the only home in Coronado to have done so, Mitchell says.

The estate's centerpiece living space is the master suite, which takes up the main house's entire third floor. Besides the wide-open view of the bay, the sitting room with fireplace and a wet bar, the suite boasts an adjoining room that could serve as office or exercise salon, and a 200-square-foot closet that would make *Sex and the City's* wardrobe-worshiping Carrie Bradshaw green with envy.

Architect Howard deems the gallery that leads from the guest casita courtyard to the main house as Bella Vista's most dramatic element. "The groin vault ceiling, combined with the view of the bay beyond as the focal point, makes moving through that space really magical," she says. "Also, the wood ceiling treatments in the entry, dining room and master suite add a level of detail typically reserved for the highest examples of Spanish Revival architecture."

Bringing Howard's vision to life was where the satisfaction came in for Mitchell, who acknowledges that building can be a "stagnant science." For the onetime Coronado High student who said he would have taken wood shop six periods a day if he could have, this was higher education. It's no wonder that, as Mitchell stood out on the bay-facing deck and looked back at Bella Vista gleaming in the sunlight, he bore the satisfied smile of a graduation day. ♦

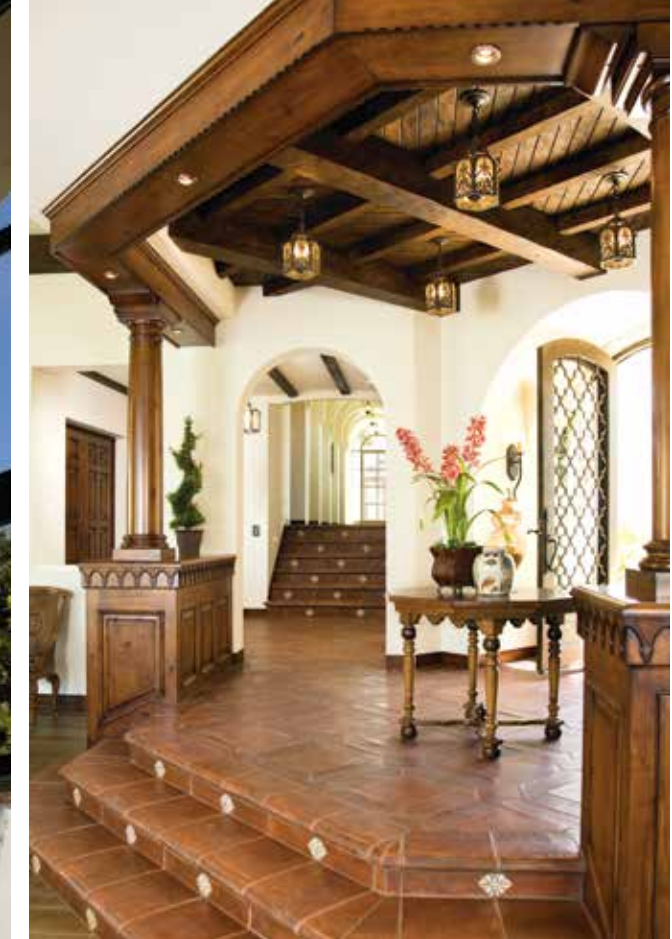
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More photos follow



This spacious patio separates Bella Vista's main house from the estate's 1,160-square-foot casita.



With its wide-open view and warm ambience, the Coronado home's living room is fit for either entertaining or relaxing.



Terra-cotta tile floors and Douglas fir beam ceilings enhance the home's elegant-yet-casual feel.



A lavish wine bar and vault make the estate ideal for parties or intimate gatherings.



The view from an upstairs bedroom at Bella Vista is just as breathtaking as on the ground floor.



Walnut cabinetry and a marble countertop provide a luxurious yet cozy setting for kitchen dining.