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THE LAKES  
AT SAHARA

INTERIOR DESIGN: ALISANNE FREW  
OF SOURCE FRANÇAISE

CONTRACTOR: MERLIN CONTRACTING

STORY: MATT JACOB

PHOTOGRAPHY: SCOTT VAN DYKE

5,180 SQ FT



none have received as much acclaim from the press and admiration from industry colleagues as this one. The home has been featured in more than 50 publications across the country, from a feature story in *Builder Magazine* to an article in the *Wall Street Journal*.

And when it came to revealing their work to their colleagues, about 5,000 conventioners attending the four-day International Builders Show in January 2004 filled busses for tours of the home—a tour so popular, it sold out every day.

Shortly after the convention ended, the home went on the market. It sold in 24 hours to a local attorney who paid \$1.9 million for the house and all of its furnishings.

Two years later, walking through the house that was both a dream to design and a nightmare to complete, is Jones thinking it was worth it in the end?

"It was a labor of love, it wasn't a profit center for us," he says. "If there was any money to be made, you'd have to work five days a week—and not 24 hours a day. But we gave our word to get it done, so we got it done." ❦





# LAKE HOUSE

AN INSPIRING WATERFRONT PROJECT REDEFINES DESIGN IN LAS VEGAS

**I push through the weathered, hand-forged wrought-iron gate**—which at one time fronted the entrance to a Paris men's club and now leads to the expansive pool deck of the 2004 New American Home in The Lakes at Sahara—and Steve Jones pops out of the home's interior and greets me. I've arrived for a tour of the home that Jones' locally based firm, Merlin Contracting, built two years ago at the behest of the National Association of Home Builders.

It doesn't take but a minute to realize that all the hype surrounding this one-of-a-kind loft-style structure was legitimate. It also doesn't take but a minute to realize that, for Jones, being here on this hot summer day is very much a trip down Memory Lane—and Nightmare Boulevard.

"Totally amazed," he says, shaking his head while referring to both the finished product and the grueling process it took to get there.

The quick background: Back in late December 2002, the National Association of Home Builders (NAHB) was looking for a source to build a custom home in Las Vegas to showcase for attendees of the 2004 International Builders Association's convention in Las Vegas. Having asked around for a reputable builder to tackle the project, the NAHB quickly narrowed its focus to Merlin Contracting, which has built dozens of high-end custom homes in the Valley since local brothers Steve and Bart Jones formed the company back in 1989.

This wasn't the first time the Jones siblings had been approached about doing a showhouse. But it was the first time the request was coming from the home-building industry's leading trade organization, and it was the first time they accepted. "We thought this was kind of an honor and a real challenge."

How big of a challenge? Merlin Contracting signed



The large, round clock sourced through Source Francaise contrasts with the steel stairway that leads up to the master suite.

Opposite page: The dining area features a custom lampshade designed by San Francisco-based designer Jiun Ho. Previous page: The Arco floor lamp, designed in 1962 by Achille Castiglioni, adds a modern touch to the sunken living room. See Resources.

on in January 2003 and was given until November to find a suitable location, as well as conceptualize, design, engineer, obtain permits, build, furnish and landscape the entire project. "I guess we just weren't thinking straight," Jones says, half-jokingly. "Had we had more time to think about it, we probably would've said no."

**The NAHB's parameters were few:** The home had to be relatively close to the Strip so that conventioners attending the 2004 International Builders Association show could tour the home; it had to be energy-efficient; and it had to be built almost entirely out of concrete. Other than that, Merlin Contracting had free reign, including picking the lot. They settled on a plot of less than a quarter-acre that abutted a manmade lake inside a gated community in The Lakes at Sahara, which sits in the shadows of Summerlin, about 15 minutes from the Strip.

"It had been here a long time and kind of gotten stepped over on the way to Summerlin," Steve Jones says of The Lakes. "So we thought this was a good place to start."

After settling on a location, Merlin partnered with the Dutch architecture firm Food for Buildings, and also teamed with Alisanne Frew of Source Francaise, a Northern California interior-merchandising firm. Together, they decided on a loft-style, tri-level design that would feature a lot of steel, copper and concrete.

"We wanted to do something different for Las Vegas," Jones says of the home, which features 5,180 square feet and includes three bedrooms, three full baths and two half-baths. "We didn't want to do the typical red-tile roof and stucco. We thought the loft style would fit well on the water, and it's very sustainable environmentally, with a lot of solar shades inside and out. And we used really new technology for Las Vegas."

Some of that technology included making the walls out of insulating concrete forms—known as ICFs—rather than the typical wood frame-and-drywall. The concrete theme was carried throughout the home, including the interior flooring in the family room and dining areas (decorative concrete) and the pool deck (large concrete pavers). In all, about 500 cubic yards of concrete was poured.

Another design highlight is welded copper, which was used for the roof, as well as a decorative railing that wraps around the exterior of the top-story balcony. Also, a steel staircase that leads from one level to the next gives the home a completely modern look—all of which pleased Jiun Ho, a San Francisco-based furniture and interior designer whom Frew hired at the 11th hour.

Ho was given about six weeks to furnish the bulk of the home's interior. That meant the main level, which features the kitchen/dining area, plus a sunken living room; the basement, which includes two guest rooms, two bathrooms, a media room and a wine cellar; and the







upstairs "loft," which houses the master bedroom and bath, plus an adjacent multifunctional open space that could be set up as an office, gym or fourth bedroom.

"The whole concept for the interior was loft living, and a lot of people are very afraid of that, especially in Las Vegas, because it's not something that people living there are used to," Ho says. "So the challenge was to show them that loft living could be very warm, very inviting and could actually have personality."

The designer did this using different kinds of materials, colors and textures, combined with brick veneer, a stained concrete floor and touches of steel. Ho added such things as an oversize square mahogany dining table from the Jun Ho Collection, a black lounge chair in the media room from Donghia and several bronze sculptures Ho found from a San Francisco supplier.

One striking design element is an oversize copper chandelier with a bright red shade that sits over the dining room table. About the chandelier, which he custom made, Ho says, "I made it oversized because they have a big dining area that opens up to the living area and the kitchen and outdoors. So for me, it was the perfect piece to bring the visual down to a focal point."

Frew, who provided all the direction on what to bring into the home, also had a major hand in the interior look, importing various materials from France, including lighting treatments, antiques—and that weathered iron gate at the home's entrance. Perhaps her greatest challenge, though, was recruiting and coordinating the dozens of subcontractors, suppliers and vendors—the majority of them NAHB members and some of them locally based—that contributed to the project, and convincing them to donate their time and materials. In the end, more than 150 companies agreed to do so, working around the clock to ensure the home—which would normally take at least 18 months to complete—was finished within the 11-month deadline.

"This house could never have been built if not for the Las Vegas tradespeople who love what Steve and Bart do," Frew says. "They're the ones who came with their belts strapped on, their trucks filled with materials and their time meters turned off."

**Steve and Bart Jones had built dozens of bigger** custom homes prior to signing on to do the 2004 New American Home. And they've built many more since. But

"We wanted to do something different for Las Vegas," says Steve Jones of Merlin Contracting, who partnered on this project with the Dutch architecture firm Food for Buildings and Ailsanne Frew of California-based Source Francaise, an interior merchandising firm. "We didn't want to do the typical red-tile roof and stucco." Over 500 cubic yards of concrete was used throughout the exterior and interior, in addition to brick, mosaic tile and steel.



One of the home's guest bedrooms, which is built into the ground and leads out to a private terrace, features bedding from Del Adora Home and a large planter from the Jun Ho Collection. "The whole concept for the interior was loft living, and a lot of people are very afraid of that, especially in Las Vegas," says designer Jun Ho. "So the challenge was to show them that loft living could be very warm, very inviting and could actually have personality."



The blend of antique with new items, of ethnic pieces with more modern design, is part of what gives the home such a welcoming atmosphere. Opposite page, top: A second guest room has fabric secured to the ceiling to create a canopy, and bedding from Del Adora Home. The plaster on the wall was done by Night Shift, Inc., a local company that textured and painted all the walls in the home. Opposite page, bottom: The master bathroom features fixtures from Kohler. See Resources.

