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DIVINE INSPIRATION



A SUNNY VILLA BRINGS THE BEST OF THE
MEDITERRANEAN TO LAS VEGAS

VILLA
SPERANZA

DESIGNER: TULLIO TRAMAZAYGUES

CONTRACTOR: ROBIN HAYES

STORY: KATE BENNETT

PHOTOGRAPHY: FRANCIS GEORGE

10,000 SQ FT





Previous page, left: Owner Evi Allen is seated on the master bedroom's balcony overlooking Lake Las Vegas. Previous page, right: The living room features a custom 1920s Steinway piano made for B.P. Moss. The portrait over the fireplace is an 18th-century Dutch piece, and the smaller painting, "Girl with Red Hat" is from the Braswell Antique Gallery in Stamford, CT. See Resources.

Many of Las Vegas' high-end houses boast styles reminiscent of Old World Europe. But for Evi Allen, going to Europe for inspiration meant looking beyond reproduction furnishings and actually going to Europe for the real thing. And in her SouthShore Lake Las Vegas home, interpreting a historic style quickly evolved into living among some of the most beautiful treasures ever gathered by one person under one terra cotta-tiled roof.

"I've always had a passion for antiques, the history that goes with each piece, be it furniture, art, a piece of pottery," says Allen. "So when we came out here and Lake Las Vegas suggested that you build a Tuscan home, well, let's just say I took it seriously."

A quick glimpse at the sunny yellow exterior of her home, Villa Speranza, and you can see she did just that.

A thorough tour of the exquisitely appointed rooms, complete with detailed stories and interesting facts about each painting, statue and piece of furniture therein, and it becomes the understatement of the year.

Taking the Tuscan theme seriously for Allen meant never being far from the home she designed from the ground up—even when it meant moving into an adjacent trailer during construction, something practically unheard of for most homeowners.

Then again, Allen, an attractive blonde originally from Westport, Connecticut and the mother of three grown children, was fueled by a passion so intense, even her husband of 39 years, Jay, knew to step aside.

"Jay saw how much enjoyment I was getting from this project and he just let me go to it," says Allen, who



The carved wooden French bishop is an antique, circa 1790, bought at a Parisian flea market. The lamps are Louis XV bronze candelabras that the owner had converted. The table is an early 19th-century antique from Spain, purchased at Licombe Antiques in Los Angeles. Opposite page, far left: The figure that stands on the Steinway piano in the living room is a 17th-century German antique. Opposite page, near left: The figure of the Virgin Mary is an early 18th-century piece. See Resources.







The center island contains a bronze sink by Herbeau, purchased at Klaffs, Inc. in South Norwalk, CT. The rug is an antique dhurrie from the Antique Rug Center in Las Vegas. The stove is La Cornue, above which was placed an antique French carved stone circa 1821 that was restored by Hlosek's Architectural in Las Vegas. The tile is from Country Floors in Los Angeles. See Resources.

The hand-painted mural was done by Arkansas-based artist Jane Garrison. The antique table and chairs are from Keith Skeel Antiques and Eccentricities in London, England. The ceramic plate collection features 17th- and 18th-century tin-glazed pieces from Spain. The chandelier is circa 1890 and was purchased from designer Adele Simpson's estate. See Resources.

spent more than two years finding pieces to put inside the house, combing antique shops from New York to Barcelona, filling each corner of her homey villa with European *santos*, sculptures and stunning 17th and 18th century heirlooms. "I had a vision of what I wanted, from the ironwork to the art, the balustrades, everything really—I did extensive research."

The challenge of actually building a home around the owner's collection and her personal vision went to Allen's contractor, Robin Hayes of Merlin Contracting.

"Any custom house of that magnitude is not easy," says Hayes of the 10,000-square-foot Villa Speranza, which translates to "hopes and dreams." "I lived and breathed that house for about 27 months and most of it really was built off of Evi's pictures and ideas."

Hayes and Allen established a symbiotic working relationship: she would show him a picture—perhaps of a plastered wall, a type of iron sculpting, a carved door—and Hayes would produce a sample and bring it over for Allen to approve or disapprove. "It's taken me ten years to weed out the best craftspeople in the business," says Hayes, "and they're all there in this house."

And the research didn't end once construction got going. Allen would hand pictures she had found or taken herself during her travels over to her decorator, her painter, her Venetian plasterer, her ironworker, tile maker, fabric company—until the home took on an uncommonly tangible personality. This villa, unlike so many other faux-filled fantasy Tuscan houses, is the real deal, from the hand-painted green tiles in the loggia's reflecting pool, to





The Fosterlown Road chair-and-a-half is from Morlise & Tenon. The fabric for the pillows is from Old World Weavers. Opposite page: A wooden figure of Santo Deloras, the Patron Saint of Sorrows, was purchased at Lepretto Anticuano de Carlos Lepretto in Buenos Aires, Argentina. See Resources.





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The outdoor eating area adjacent to the living room features Old World iron furniture from In and Out in Scottsdale, AZ. The antique credenza to the left was actually a counter used to salt fish and was bought in La Bisbal d'Emporda in Spain. Opposite page: The tile in the reflecting pool was custom-made for the home by Country Floors in Los Angeles. The balconies are by Las Vegas Wrought Iron. See Resources.







One of the upstairs guest bathrooms features a mural by Tullio Tramazaygues, the designer Evi Allen worked with on the home. The tile is from Country Floors in Los Angeles, and the pedestal sink, medicine cabinet and faucet are from Klaffs, Inc., in South Norwalk, CT. The chandelier is a 19th century antique purchased at the Braswell Antique Gallery in Stamford, CT. Opposite page: The ceiling of the downstairs guest suite features a hand-painted Jane Garrison mural of the Spanish Armada. A 17th-century altar piece was hand-crafted into a king-sized headboard by Tramazaygues. The lantern is circa 1850 and was purchased at Minton-Spidell in Los Angeles. See Resources.

the 18-karat gold-leafed fresco of the Spanish Armada in a guest suite, which was painted in a week's time, freehand, by Allen's Arkansas-based mural artist, Jane Garrison.

Garrison, a friend of a friend, is a member of what could be called Allen's dream team, which was assembled by word-of-mouth, others through Hayes, and one courtesy of serendipity: Allen encountered her decorating soulmate, Tullio Tramazaygues, an art consultant and studied master restorer and historic detailer, on her first major buying trip to Spain.

"At first, he helped us navigate stores and point out pieces," she says of Tramazaygues. "But then he became invaluable to the entire process."

At that point, Tramazaygues came to Las Vegas and lived with Allen and her husband on and off for a year, helping decorate, design, distress and lovingly restore certain pieces to immaculate perfection and absolute authenticity. His subtle touch is in every room.

"I love antiques," says Tramazaygues, who has a fine arts degree from the University of Barcelona. "I know that special world quite well. Each piece has a different personality, a different story to tell. And blending these pieces with the architecture, it's something magical."

As difficult as adjusting to blueprints dictated by heart and soul might have been, Allen's entire team had one inspiration: the mistress of the house herself. "I really get into what the house says to me and I let it speak to me," says Allen, who wanted warmth to exude from the villa's soft angles, painted ceilings and plentiful arches. The effect is a home that seemingly bends to enfold you in its beauty, and may even go so far as to bless those who cross its threshold.

"I was teased on this one," she says of the overtly pious pieces, including crosses, iconic imagery, Virgin Mary statues and an amazing collection of santos, that appear in practically every room. "I'm personally not that religious, but I knew the house accepted these religious items and that they would somehow just fit." The result is convincing and credible, and not the least bit hokey.

In fact, to say that Allen has succeeded in her quest to build her villa in the style of Old Europe is to barely scratch one hand-painted surface. Through her unwavering passion for finding just the right antiques, just the right colors, the right craftspeople, the right light and so forth, Allen has created a masterpiece. And although this enormous villa has room upon room upon room, there is no question that Villa Speranza is as intimate and welcoming as a real Tuscan villa. Spend a few hours dining alfresco under its backyard floral arches, soaking up the dry air, smelling the fresh rosemary and lemon trees and you just may find Lake Mead slowly morphing into the Mediterranean. It's a stretch, perhaps, but it's just what Allen was hoping you'd see. **■**







The master bathroom features a Kohler Vintage bathtub and a faucet from Barber Wilson, London, both from Klaffs, Inc., in South Norwalk, CT. Opposite page: One of the upstairs guest rooms reveals more work by artist Jane Garrison and an armchair upholstered in Old World Weavers fabric. The alabaster chandelier is circa 1890 and was purchased at Carlos de la Puente Antiques in New York, NY. See Resources.