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AMERICA'S BEST-SELLING
COMMUNITIES

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PLUS:

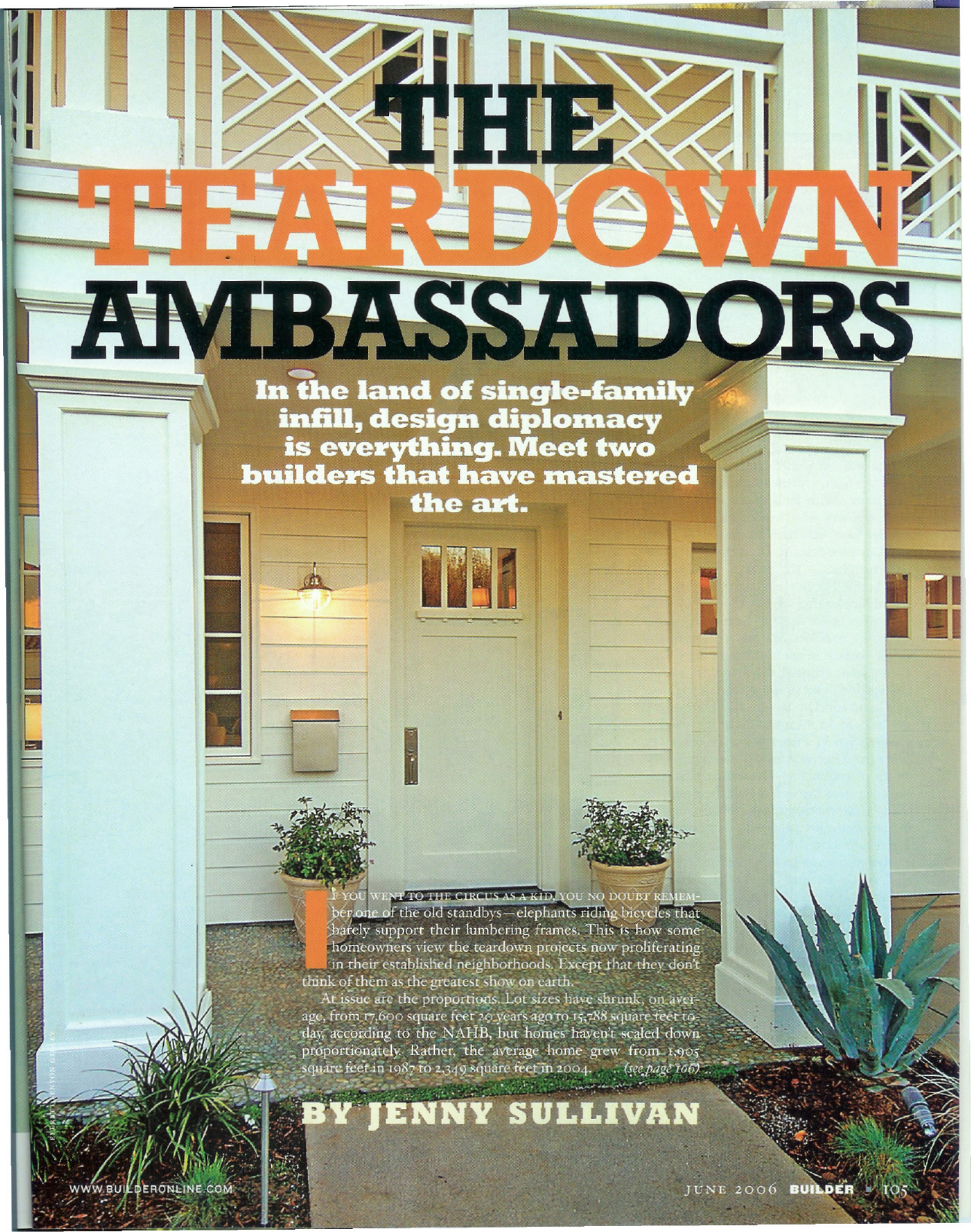
**LOCAL LEADERS:
THE NATION'S
TOP 75 MARKETS**
Some still elude the
grasp of the biggest
builders

A two-story white house with a prominent front porch supported by square columns. The porch has a white lattice railing. To the right is a two-car garage with white doors. The house is set on a green lawn with a concrete walkway leading to the front door. The house number '737' is visible on the right side of the porch.

TEARDOWN TACTICS

Making nice with the neighbors

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THE TEARDOWN AMBASSADORS

In the land of single-family infill, design diplomacy is everything. Meet two builders that have mastered the art.

IF YOU WENT TO THE CIRCUS AS A KID, YOU NO DOUBT REMEMBER one of the old standbys — elephants riding bicycles that barely support their lumbering frames. This is how some homeowners view the teardown projects now proliferating in their established neighborhoods. Except that they don't think of them as the greatest show on earth.

At issue are the proportions. Lot sizes have shrunk, on average, from 17,600 square feet 20 years ago to 15,788 square feet today, according to the NAHB, but homes haven't scaled down proportionately. Rather, the average home grew from 1,905 square feet in 1987 to 2,349 square feet in 2004. *(see page 106)*

BY JENNY SULLIVAN

PRODUCTION MEETS INFILL:

Structure Homes makes its livelihood revitalizing Los Angeles' most pervasive land unit—the 50-foot-wide lot. The builder/developer's product portfolio includes 30 floor plans and twice as many elevation styles for homes ranging from 2,800 square feet to 5,500 square feet. Every home is tweaked to buyer specifications.

The reasons for the inverse ratio are apparent. New-home buyers want it all: tree-lined streets, proximity to public transit, downtown jobs, good schools, parks, and cultural amenities. Oh, and a minimum of three bedrooms, two baths, a two-car garage, a great room, an island kitchen, walk-in closets, a spa bath, a media room, a home office, and more. With land prices skyrocketing, even builders who would prefer to build smaller footprints have had to double down on floor plan features to continue to make their margins.

Therein lies the paradox fueling the so-called McMansion wars, the reason so many have sought to squeeze oversized homes onto tiny infill lots. Skirmishes continue to erupt weekly in metro zones where land prices have eclipsed the value of existing homes. Teardown proponents tout the practice as an antidote to sprawl, a boon to the tax base, and a means of replacing obsolete housing stock. Preservationists decry the loss of architectural history and predict the death of community. Homeowners in renaissance areas live in fear that their modest, turn-of-the-century abodes will be dwarfed by replacement castles whose imported architecture shows little regard for the neighborhood's vernacular heritage.

Municipal lawmakers, in turn, have countered with an array of anti-mansionization ordinances that cap roof heights, limit footprints in proportion to the lot size, and, in some cases, dictate massing, cladding, and other material details. Some have enacted temporary moratoriums on new construction simply to buy time and cool tensions between opposing forces.

What's a builder to do in the midst of this political three-ring circus? Meet two builders on opposite coasts that have bet their livelihood on teardowns, executing them with sensitivity and finesse. It's all about building bridges, they say. And tearing down false assumptions.



FRESH START

A whole-lot makeover in the Palisades gets props from the neighbors.

NAME-DROPPING IS A TIME-HONORED tradition in Los Angeles. Happily for Structure Homes, its moniker is one that's tossed around frequently and favorably in Pacific Palisades, a tony suburb just up the beach from Santa Monica. The builder/developer had already completed four other teardown projects in the community when its partners laid plans to raze their latest acquisition, a 1,600-square-foot rambler overridden with mold.

By then it was a familiar scenario: The land value of the lot in this coveted zip code far exceeded the worth of the decaying home occupying its turf, and the cost of remodeling was prohibitive compared with

the price tag for new construction. Fortunately, the neighbors weren't sad to see the old place go. They'd been pleased with the builder's previous transformations—which spruced up the streetscape and bolstered property values—and were eager to see what was in store this time.

Especially considering that the new residence that emerged on El Medio Avenue—on a lot for which Structure forked over \$1.1 million—would become one of two spec houses the Woodland Hills, Calif.-based builder/developer creates each year to showcase its talents. (The remaining 15 to 18 infill homes it builds annually are pre-sold or fee-based.)

PHOTOS: EVERETT EUSTON GIDLEY



WEATHER PROOF: A seeming extension of the rich walnut flooring inside, the rear loggia deck is actually Brazilian paopoe, a durable hardwood that doesn't bend or warp. The home's exterior is clad in Hardiplank, which holds up better to salt air than traditional wood siding.

careful massing. The project required no variances and sailed through the approval process in less than four months.

"We had to navigate city zoning codes, plus the requirements of the Pacific Palisades Civic League, which holds the reins on architectural controls, but this was something we had done before," Kleiman explains. "The rules dictate that you can't have a wall exceeding 40 feet on the side

yard without a 2-foot minimum step-back on the second level. Their principal intent is to avoid two-story massive boxes, so articulation is always an important focus."

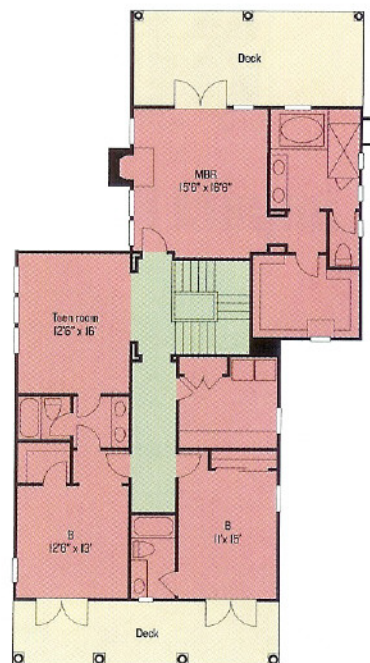
In this case, that mission was accomplished with a four-sided design by architect Eric Zuziak of JZMK Partners that softens any sense of boxiness. An artful interplay of windows, balconies, a front porch, and a covered back loggia creates a

Maybe it was the karma of Hollywood close by, but for this dwelling, perched on a bluff overlooking the ocean, architectural inspiration came from the movies—specifically, the whitewashed Hamptons retreat owned by playwright Erica Jane Barry (Diane Keaton) in the 2003 hit *Something's Gotta Give*. Structure co-founder Robert Kleiman describes the style as a "coastal cottage with a plantation feel."

East Coast transplant though it may be, the architecture blends seamlessly into an old-growth neighborhood long populated by Cape Cod shingle-style residences and New England farmhouses. With 3,777 square feet of conditioned space (4,688 including the loggia, decks, and porch), the new house is considerably larger than its predecessor, but its size is downplayed with

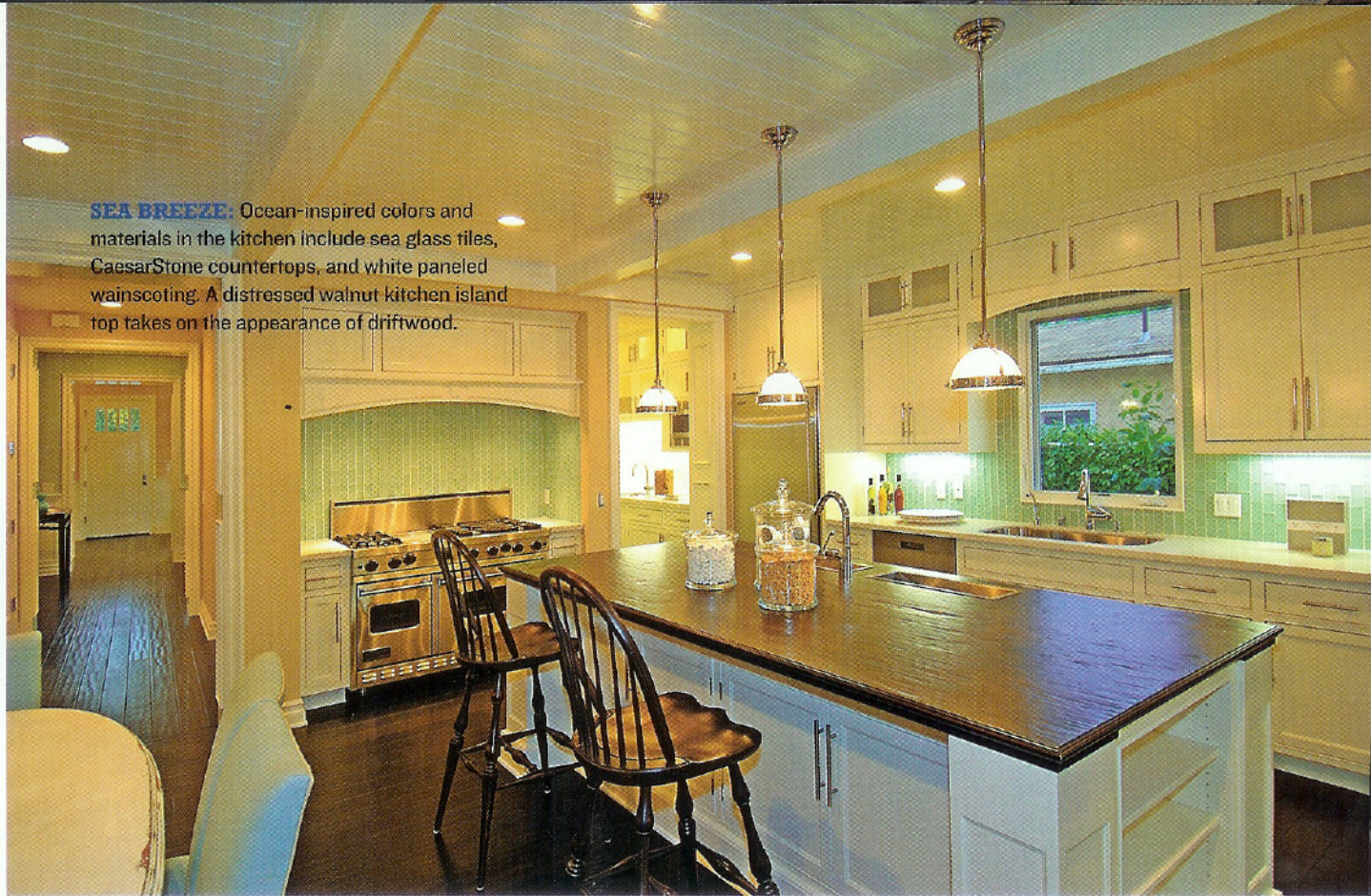


FIRST FLOOR



SECOND FLOOR

SEA BREEZE: Ocean-inspired colors and materials in the kitchen include sea glass tiles, CaesarStone countertops, and white paneled wainscoting. A distressed walnut kitchen island top takes on the appearance of driftwood.



transparent layering of indoor-outdoor realms, taking the focus away from the home's overall mass. Inside, interior designer Jill Wolff offset traditional millwork and painted wood ceilings with contemporary materials such as milk glass door inserts and sandblasted glass tiles in the kitchen and baths. The aesthetic is eclectic, crisp, and clean.

And, like the movie, the construction cycle had a happy ending. The home was snapped up five days after it hit the market in a competitive bid, for considerably more than the asking price.

"When you build houses that are brand new in infill neighborhoods, they are competing with homes that are being resold, so they become highly desirable," says Kleiman, who co-founded Structure with Mark Sapiro in 1996 to pursue an alternative to the merchant builder model. (Both men previously worked for The Braemar Group.) Structure now has seven more teardown projects underway in Pacific Palisades alone.

"We have a nice rapport with the neighbors," says Kleiman. "They love our product and the way we do it. The entire neighborhood toured this house before we sold it. Our goal is to make a building look as though it's been there for 100 years the day it's finished. If we do that, we've achieved something fantastic."

Project: 737 El Medio Ave., Pacific Palisades, Calif.; **Unit size:** 3,777 square feet; **Lot size:** 6,800 square feet; **Sale price:** low \$3 million; **Builder/Developer:** Structure Homes, Woodland Hills, Calif.; **Architect:** JZMK Partners, Newport Beach, Calif.; **Interior designer:** Wolff Interior Design, Calabasas, Calif.

ROOM WITH A VIEW: Bold groupings of Jeld-Wen aluminum-clad wood windows (in standard sizes) connect indoor living spaces to the outside.

(see page 112)

