

# ITALIAN ACCENT

THE MATERIALS AND NUANCES OF TUSCAN ARCHITECTURE  
INFORM A JACKSONVILLE HOME

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acksonville's Pablo Reserve sits in the midst of a densely wooded area, where deer live among stately old pines. The vast green surroundings recall a more genteel era, when homes were subservient to and entwined with the land.

When asked to design a home on an estate lot surrounded by this nature preserve, Stephen Reinel regarded the landscape as an important factor in the architectural expression. "The attachment of the house to the natural setting is a key feature





The stair tower required precise engineering, particularly on the octagonal pecky cypress ceiling.

of this project,” he says. “It’s a Mediterranean house in a pine forest.”

Because the owners wanted an Italian design, Reinel turned to the noble architecture of the Tuscan hillside villas, which are beautifully integrated with their surroundings. “They asked for something very traditional looking, with the use of traditional materials,” he says. “They wanted the

home to feel like it had been there for a long time.”

Reinel granted their wish by adhering to classic Italian style both in terms of materials and design. “The exterior stucco is genuine, applied by artisans who were brought here especially to do this,” he says. “The roof is a traditional terra cotta clay with slight variation in color. And the material around the windows and doors is a true stone, cast





Pecky cypress decking is used on the dining room ceiling. Other elements, such as the arched windows and richly textured fabrics, underscore the Italian flavor of the interiors.

in highly detailed molds." Italian homes tend to have more intricate detail than other Mediterranean styles. This prompted Reinel to look very closely at such features as the stone work on the exterior. A stone ribbon wraps around the base of the house and culminates in a series of steps leading up to the front entrance. Stone also appears around windows in the form of surrounds, caps, and columns. The most elaborate of these is to the left of the front door. The three windows of the dining room are defined by an arched colonnade. Above this element is a highly carved stone frame surrounding the arched French doors of the husband's study.

To balance the substance of the stone, Reinel introduced wood accents for warmth. Mahogany doors are complemented by exposed wood rafters beneath the roof line and an ipe wood balcony

above the front entrance. The orientation of the house was as important as the use of authentic materials. Because the lot is situated on one and a half acres on a cul-de-sac, Reinel was able to spread the house out in a loose L shape. "There is an expansive lawn in the back that looks out into the woods," he says. "It's a sprawling view, almost like a bowling green. Most rooms have this view because we stretched the house out."

The splayed design also allowed the architect to create a unique enclosure for the pool and spa. At the very edge of the house is the spa pavilion - a stucco structure surrounded by arched, columned openings that admit the peaceful woodland view. Just behind it is the pool structure, which attaches to a separate pavilion housing the summer kitchen. These areas are all screened in, without the usual aluminum screen enclosure.



Inside, the Italian expression continues. Pecky cypress and stone are used throughout to maintain a consistency with the outdoor materials, and elements that are used outside - the columns, for example - reappear in the interiors. From the foyer, arched openings lead from room to room, restating the use of the arch that dominates the architecture. "The arches all align in an axial arrangement," Reinel says. "They create a gallery through the center of the house."

The materials were carefully chosen by designer Juliana Catlin to lend the type of warmth and detail that might be seen in a classic Mediterranean home. "We took the details that are classic to that style and brought them into the building envelope," she says. She points to the travertine floors as an example. "They are cobbled and rustic, which feels right for a house with a







terra cotta roof," she explains. To maintain a sense of authenticity, Catlin chose rich fabrics like chenille and cut velvet in a warm palette of camel and burgundy. In the great room, she began with a heavy linen fabric, printed with prancing deer and botanicals, to set the old-world tone. This she complemented with stone and wood accents - a cast stone fireplace with a tapered flue that could easily belong in an Italian villa, hand-scraped walnut floors, and a wood built-in entertainment center. Tuscan columns capped by mahogany beams define the great room in the open floor plan.

The dining room has a similar flavor. Italian-style walnut chairs, upholstered in a patterned chenille fabric and trimmed with nail heads, complement a hand-hewn table with turned legs. Cut velvet curtains with a damask pattern hang from wrought iron rods, adding yet another layer of richness.





**Intricately carved stone, authentic stucco, and terracotta barrel tile place the home within the Italian context. The home splays out across the site, taking advantage of parkland views.**

Perhaps the most impressive room is not a room at all, but rather a transitional space. The stair tower, with its circular staircase and pecky cypress ceiling, was a feat of architecture and craftsmanship. "The octagonal shaped ceiling was built in place, as opposed to being built on the ground and lifted," Reinel says.

Builder Jonathan Knight seconds that remark. "We spent a tremendous amount of time in that room," the builder explains. "The geometry of it made it a challenge." It took two skilled craftsmen and a great many hours to build the ceiling. "We put scaffolding up, and they sometimes had to work on their backs," Knight says.

If the ceiling construction conjures images of Michelangelo, the powder room brings to mind other old-world masters. "The walls were painted,

then gessoed and carved in a floral and vine pattern," Catlin says. "Tissue paper was then applied over the gesso, and a deep coppery red color was rubbed on, followed by a glaze. There were a series of steps involved to achieve that finish."

A burl walnut chest, an onyx top with scalloped edges, and a dark copper sink contribute to the room's patina. Though it's a small space, it has such an incredible amount of detail that it would be right at home in an Italian palazzo.

That could be said of just about everything inside this home - and out. "The homeowners insisted on this level of detail because they wanted to ensure that the home would be warm, soft, and inviting," Catlin explains. "They are extremely warm and generous people, and this home is a reflection of their character." ▲