

Community

VOICES

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Architect Robert Senn is

**Making
History**

*One Dream
at a Time*





Making History

One Dream at a Time

Photo opposite and upper right: Brent Winebrenner; upper left courtesy Santa Barbara Architecture, Inc.

Sitting with Architect Robert Senn on a sunny weekday overlooking the picturesque Santa Barbara coast is an incredible way to spend the morning. A true moment to remember, however, is the beautiful surroundings that Mr. Senn created—a 7,000 square foot Cape Cod shingle-style estate with the ocean breeze flowing through disappearing slide-pocket doors that provide an expansive opening between the living room and the sand and surf. This home is a testament to Robert Senn's fine work and the contributions that he continues to make on the local residential architectural community.

Mr. Senn has contributed his expertise to an impressive collection of estates in Montecito, Santa Barbara, Hope Ranch as well as Brentwood and

Pacific Palisades as the owner of Santa Barbara Architecture since 2005 and project architect for Sorrell Design since 1994. His design styles range from a French Country estate complete with carriage house garage doors, to a romantic Tuscan villa with hand carved Doric stone columns and an authentic pergola passageway. He has also designed several traditional Spanish Colonial Revivals in the community, complete with stair towers, courtyards, Monterey-style balconies, archways and plenty of wrought iron work. Mr. Senn even created a beautiful Americana playhouse for his younger sister when he was just 12 years old.

From the time he was a child growing up in Santa Barbara, Robert Senn knew he wanted to be an architect. His passion began at the young age of

five creating structures out of Legos™. “

Back then, Legos™ were just a bucket of colored blocks. You had them and your imagination. That's it,” stated Mr. Senn. He also began sketching ships and planes with every detail meticulously drawn by the time he was seven years old. Upon entering Santa Barbara High School, it was an easy decision to enroll in the school's drafting class and at graduation Mr. Senn was off to the University of Colorado in Boulder where he earned a Bachelor of Environmental Design in 1981. Mr. Senn completed his formal education at the University of Washington in Seattle, earning a Master of Architecture, which is the only degree accredited by the National Architectural Accrediting Board (NAAB).

Yearning to return to his native Santa Barbara, Mr. Senn came home



in 1987 and began working with Mr. Thomas Bollay, a local architect. Under Mr. Bollay's tutelage, Mr. Senn designed his first estate for none other than his parents, Agnes and Peter Senn. The Tuscany-style Montecito home pays tribute to his mother's Italian heritage and depicts the many travels to Italy that he experienced with his family over the years. These travels also introduced him to the work of the great Italian Renaissance architect Andrea Palladio, whose influence has found its way into many of Mr. Senn's designs.

Over the next several years, Robert Senn honed his skills and began making a name for himself as an authoritative expert who, as a Santa Barbara native, understands the history, lifestyle, and architectural nuances that make this little piece of the south coast so special. Mr. Senn's influence on Southern California architecture soon became apparent when he designed a bachelor pad in Ventura County's Hidden Valley that is nothing like what you might expect. No shag carpets here. Mr. Senn created a breathtaking, 12,000 square foot Tuscan estate in a distinct Roman style to reflect the masculinity befitting a bachelor. To be fair, there is 8,000 square feet of living space and an expansive 4,000 square foot garage. This is a bachelor's home after all and he does have his toys. The crème de la crème is the home's location atop a hill which gave Mr. Senn the idea to design the concept of an Italian hill town.

Guests arrive through a porte-cochere which opens to a beautiful courtyard. This grand estate has been featured in magazines and on television and was the "home" of James Caan's character, Ed Deline, on the hit show *Vegas*.

Back in Santa Barbara, as Mr. Senn takes in the ocean breeze, he comments about the importance of building relationships.

"I develop very close relationships with my clients. It takes a while, often three years or more, to turn someone's dream into a reality." He notes that this Cape Cod residence is the homeowner's dream home and that he has designed several projects for them both in Montecito and Colorado over the last 10 years. He has learned their likes and dislikes and is proud to call them not just clients but friends.

Building solid relationships is important as a business owner. Mr. Senn notes that architecture is a very unique business with projects taking years to complete and a lot of paperwork to juggle between plans, permits, sub-contractor agreements, and invoices. He claims that as a fairly new business owner, he is still learning and appreciates the importance of surrounding himself with the right people, including his banker. Mr. Senn likes the fact that Dawn Luu, manager of Community West Bank's downtown Santa Barbara branch, calls to keep him abreast of his accounts and transactions. Banking with a local community bank

gets him the high level of service and attention to his particular needs that a bigger bank typically cannot provide.

"There's never a line and I especially like that I can sit down and handle my banking like a professional versus standing at a teller window," states Mr. Senn, *"Dawn truly cares about me and my business."*

What is on the horizon for Robert Senn and Santa Barbara Architecture? One would think he might relax and enjoy the surroundings, having just completed a renovation of his own home, which is denoted as a "level-three greenhouse" by the Santa Barbara Contractor's Association due to its use of recycled materials, energy efficiencies, and stringent site management during construction. Not the case. Mr. Senn states, *"I've got several large estates in Montecito that I'm designing right now. It's never a dull moment."*

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Making History
One Dream at a Time

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Photo upper left: Brent Winebrenner; upper right courtesy Santa Barbara Architecture, Inc.



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