

Riviera

WRITTEN BY DAWN MOORE
PHOTOGRAPHS BY TREVOR TONDRO

Vivid color and authentic Mexican decor give this *Spanish Colonial* a treasured tone



Rustica

The ocean-facing **LIVING ROOM** houses a prized \$35 painting, draperies from designer **CHRISTY MARTIN**, and **CABANA HOME** lampshades.





Top to bottom: A **LIME-WASHED WALL** in an intense rose; the Russes designed the **ZINC-TOPPED TABLE** using an 1860s German book-binding machine as the base.

► As Sally Russ traverses the entry hall's custom-made Mexican pavers, her kinetic energy is sparking merrily. "Did I tell you that my friend who's an artist made those?" Before the item—or the friend—is actually identified, she is already in the adjoining room pointing out another piece made by another friend. And yet another. It's clear this home's soulful cache of gifted bibelots, textiles, and artworks are a warm reflection of Russ herself.

The 1926 Spanish Colonial house perched high up on the Riviera looks as if Diego Rivera just stepped out for tapas. Room to room, lime-washed walls boast rich, deep colors from one end of the rainbow to the other. Mexican serapes and Guatemalan *huipils*—some specially woven, others found treasures—are layered over worn leather chairs, hung on walls, and illuminated by vintage wrought iron chandeliers in every shape and size.

Although Sally and her husband Bill live full-time in a Houston high-rise she describes as "very modern and very white," they both have been drawn to California since their teenage years. So when their son Will (owner of the Santa Barbara Rock Gym) started attending Brooks Institute 13 years ago, they started renting houses in different neighborhoods—near the El Encanto Hotel, in Montecito, in Summerland, and another near the mission. "But we decided on the Riviera," says Sally. "So we told our realtor to search for an old house, George Washington Smith-esque, original—and we wanted ocean views."

Sally's work with Brazos Abiertos—an organization devoted to improving healthcare and providing education in the prevention of sexually transmitted



Uncovered during construction, the original niche fitted with **PECAN WOOD SHELVES** now holds an ever-growing collection of **MEXICAN CATRINAS**.

The tour de force kitchen's **BOVEDA CEILING** and tile work designed by architect **ROBERT FOLEY**. And in an homage to the beauty of imperfection, a lone tile is set upside down.



diseases in the Yucatán—meant she used to travel to Mexico every other month. Being amid the country's vivid colors and the crafts and textures influenced how she decorated her home.

Although the aesthetic is pure Russ, she credits their architect Robert Foley with designing intricate details such as the custom iron trusses that suspend across the bedrooms with the serpentine lines of a fertility goddess, offering both extra bracing support and a decorative focal point. The master bedroom's unfortunate lack of an ocean view was handled with equal dispatch. "I found this ocean painting by an artist in Mexico who had never seen the ocean," says Sally.

Artworks—and their stories attached—include a boldly primitive 40-by-40-inch work *El Montecito de Braga* procured for \$35 that survived a cleaning with Pledge by a well-meaning local, followed by a short taxi cab ride from the mercado to the hotel, then a first-class airplane upgrade before landing in the front room; a textile bunny sporting a sign announcing it will not tell you that you have spinach in your teeth (also made by a friend); and a circa 1940s *The Orange Seller* by local artist Charles P. Austin wrangled at an auction with her husband. "I love that one. I keep oranges in front of it," Russ muses.

But the tour de force—the kitchen and its domed boveda ceiling—is home to the Russ's beloved Talavera collections of Gorky, Uriarte, and Fiestaware, some gifted and some gathered with the help of local designer Christy Martin of Studio Encanto. The brick-lined ceiling coupled with intricately carved cabinetry creates the effect of having wandered into the cozy cellar of a Mexican potentate.

Russ credits her mother—who, at 96, still plays a wicked game of bridge—with her inherited love of entertaining. "Growing up in Houston, every night our dinners were amazing. She'd garnish the platters, use kerosene lanterns, and



beautiful cloth napkins. She was the Martha Stewart of her time!" Now, three generations of friends and family gather for weeks at a time soaking up that same creatively colorful feasting—Santa Barbara style. And then inevitably offer up another trinket to the Russ collection of gifted treasures. ●



Top to bottom: Russ relaxes in a **VINTAGE BELGIAN WICKER CHAIR**; bejeweled **GOULD LANTERNS** designed by Russ's son illuminate the garden created by **VALLEN LANDSCAPE**. Tablescape includes **VINTAGE GORKY POTTERY**; a guest bath's intense blue and white pattern with ceramics from **TILECO** and tin-framed mirror from **LILY** in Montecito.



Top to bottom: **GILDED MIRRORS** from **WILLIAM LAMAN** add an elegant high note to the restored Guatemalan leather and wood chair and sofa from **ROOMS & GARDENS**; the master bedroom's custom wrought iron details and brick-paved ceiling by **HALL CONTRACTING**. Coverlet from **LES INDIENNES**.

