





He's known as a hands-on businessman. But Sacramento developer Buzz Oates—who builds 2 to 3 million square feet of warehouse space each year—left the planning to others when it came to his own 6,500-square-foot house.

“Buzz doesn't have a lot of time,” explains Elaine Sheffer, his longtime companion, who oversaw the design and construction of Oates' custom home in a gated cul-de-sac off Fair Oaks Boulevard. “So I was his eyes and ears on this project.”

Sheffer worked with interior designer Paulette Trainor on every aspect of the project, which took two and a half years from start to finish. They essentially functioned as a design review board, sorting through myriad choices and presenting Oates with the best options. In the process, the two women went from working partners to close friends.

A Developer's Dream

Oates had been living in Carmichael when he bought the property several years ago so that he could live closer to town and to work. With the land came a set of plans for a large, elaborate house. "There was so much going on," Trainor says of the original blueprints. "There were 30 materials on the exterior alone." She convinced Oates to modify the plans to create a home that would be grand yet inviting.

The result? A house that is a melange of architectural styles: primarily French chateau with a dash of English Tudor, Mission and Mediterranean. The exterior features formal balustrades and a wood shingle roof. Inside, the rooms are elegant and generously proportioned. Visitors enter through custom-made mahogany doors to a soaring lobby whose central feature is a pair of gracefully curving staircases to the second floor. (For those who don't want to walk up all those stairs, there is a small elevator.) Villa Iron of Sacramento

made the iron stair banisters and an enormous chandelier—7 feet high by 6 feet wide—to match. The entry leads to a living and dining room, a gourmet kitchen, and family room and a cherry-paneled library that Oates dubbed the "Africa Room" because of its African art and zebra print rug.

Upstairs, there are a master bedroom suite complete with sitting area and exercise room, two guest bedrooms and Oates' study. The study is the most personal room in the house: It features murals commemorating the key events in Oates' life, including his early days as a locksmith, his acquisition of the Senator Hotel and his experience as a bombardier in World War II. The murals were painted on canvas and attached to the walls, so that someday they can be removed if necessary.

The house, built by contractor Kevin Yttrup, is distinguished by its use of high-quality materials (including 11,000 square feet of limestone tile, both inside





and out on the patio) and architectural detail, such as the thick crown moldings built by Rick Garlick, plaster fireplaces by Tim Rudy and custom-designed armoires. (Here's a clever trick: One of the armoires was placed in the upstairs hallway and outfitted with a laundry chute to the ground-floor laundry room.) Painter Gemma Goodson faux-finished many of the walls, including a bathroom with walls that look like leather, and Sylvie Norman provided the hand-painted finishes on all the cabinetry. Stefan Leroy did the tilework.

Bottom-line oriented as always, Oates insisted that Sheffer and Trainor buy all the furniture in High Point, N.C., where the country's top furniture manufacturers

have showrooms and where they sell their wares at a huge discount. The pair made five trips to North Carolina, including one during a hurricane. "We worked hard," Sheffer recalls. "We'd get to the showrooms at 9 in the morning and leave at 6 at night. But it was worth it—we got huge savings."

All that work—and Sheffer doesn't even live there. But, she says, "it's like a second home to me." She and Oates entertain frequently in the house, which can accommodate as many as 300 guests. And when she visits (which is often), Sheffer takes satisfaction in knowing that she created a beautiful home for the most special person in her life. "He had faith in me," she says. ■