



# SOMETHING'S A-BUZZ



## Developer's spacious home will wow even a president

Even his longtime companion likes to kid Buzz Oates that if the wealthy developer had his way, he'd take that nine-tenths of an acre he bought a few years ago, slap down a 12,000-square-foot tilt-up box and call it home.

Thank God he didn't have his way.

Instead, because of the influence of Elaine Sheffer, who he has been dating about four years, a few good friends and interior designer Paulette Trainor, Oates has built a house fit for a president.

Or, in the case of this weekend's house guest, a would-be president: Missouri Senator and presidential aspirant John Ashcroft was scheduled to spend Saturday at Oates' new house, talking conservative Republican politics and trying to generate interest in a year 2000 bid for the presidency.

It's a big and beautiful house, a little confused architecturally — there are Mission, French chateau, English Tudor and Mediterranean touches — but an elegant and comfortable place. Even if it does seem rather empty much of the time with 74-year-old Oates, a man who admits he's more interested in making and saving mon-



**BY DESIGN**  
By Gary Delsohn

ey than in fine architecture or aesthetics, as the only resident.

"I wanted to do something nice," he said the other day while taking a few people on a tour of the house off Fair Oaks Boulevard. "This is the last house I'm going to build and I have to admit it, maybe my ego wanted a house of recognition."

That he undoubtedly got. You can't miss this house.

It's more than 40 feet high and its roof of dark-blond shingle is sculpted into a dozen different shapes, making the house look bigger than it actually is. It stands out behind its concrete sound wall as cars whiz down noisy Fair Oaks.

Filled with glass and French doors, the Pella windows alone cost \$115,000. Point to the 10-foot cut glass and cherry front door, and Oates will tell you with a wink and a shrug: "\$9,500." He knows what he paid for every fixture and table.

Oates has never been shy about telling you what he's worth — his partnerships control more than \$1 billion in assets — or how much something costs. Most millionaires build houses



Developer Buzz Oates' new home sits on a gated cul-de-sac off Fair Oaks Boulevard, top. Oates and companion Elaine Sheffer are shown in front of twin winding staircases ringed with iron bannisters made in Sacramento by Villa Iron. The master bedroom, above, looks out over the swimming pool.





The pool in the backyard of Buzz Oates' home is programmed with fiber optics to change colors in the night air — even though Oates never uses it.

## Delsohn: Oates' home ringed by porches and balconies

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away from the madding crowd; Oates wants the crowd to know he's here, as last weekend's housewarming parties for 150 people each on Friday and Saturday nights attest.

Yet this self-made millionaire, who started out selling keys door to door, is remarkably down to earth for a guy hosting U.S. senators and showing off a house that cost a couple million bucks.

The only thing he seems to enjoy talking about more is the money he saved by sending Sheffer and Trainor to North Carolina four different times to furniture outlets for bargains. Or having a designer give him a \$24,000 quote on a favored chandelier and then getting a local metal artist to build it for \$6,500.

That's not to say he cut corners. Sheffer admits she had to sometimes use her "Board of Directors" to prod Buzz into spending a little more than he might have liked, but the friends she lobbied to convince him of, say, adding a second bathroom outside the two upstairs guest bedrooms were right.

"I didn't want him to sell himself short," Sheffer said. "I didn't want him to settle for second best."

But he did improvise and watch every penny. A giant butcher block table came from Carolina all shattered and beat up just days before the parties, so Oates did

what an old fashioned can-do guy would do: he got one of his men to glue the legs back on. After the parties, Sheffer made sure the table was sent back and replaced with one all in one piece.

In another incident, custom-made armoires from San Francisco were delivered but Oates refused to pay the guy when he failed to get them up the stairs. So he called a couple friends, rented a lift and got them up. He said he'll pay the mover, but only after deducting what it cost to finish the job.

The house sits on a gated little cul-de-sac off Fair Oaks Boulevard and is ringed by balconies and porches. The balustrades resemble those found at the Capitol building in Washington, D.C., an interesting irony given Oates' customary railing about Congress and its onerous tax policies.

Ring the bell and a baby grand piano in the front living room will play classic melodies or country tunes — Oates' favorites — like "I'll Still Be Loving You" or "All My Ex's Live in Texas."

You can walk up to the second level on his twin winding staircases ringed with iron bannisters made in Sacramento by Villa Iron, the same shop that did the chandelier — or you can ride up in the cherry paneled elevator.

Before ascending, you might want to stop off at the tidy little "African Room,"

a library decorated with a Zebra-skin rug and striking African paintings by African artist Dennis Murphy.

On the second floor is another study that his five children adorned with a mural that looks much better than it sounds. It traces Oates' life from his key shop to the renovation of the Senator Hotel, one of his best projects, and a hunting expedition to Africa, where he bagged an elephant.

A B-29 fighter plane, the kind Oates flew in World War II, is painted onto the ceiling. A glass case holds his many Air Corps medals, including two distinguished flying crosses. It's a man's room in a man's house.

"I wanted the house to be masculine without being just that," Trainor said. "I wanted it to reflect Buzz."

The master bedroom looks out over the pool and is large but not overpowering. It's a beautiful room but Oates isn't sleeping in it yet. The custom bed was built six inches too short and six inches too wide. Someone got the measurements mixed up.

Part of Oates' charm is that he doesn't take himself all that seriously. He is an odd mix of bravado and modesty. He didn't want the mural because he felt self-conscious. Sheffer said he even felt at times that he didn't deserve or need a house this big.

And he has a sentimental side. Fred Anderson, his old friend and high school classmate, died earlier this year and Oates is delighted to have beautiful terra cotta planters in his yard made by one of Anderson's companies. They make him feel as if his old pal is part of the place.

At 74, with a busy schedule, Oates doesn't do much more here than sleep and entertain. He and Elaine eat out all the time and Oates admits he can barely boil water. The TV and stereo have enough equipment to run a small disco and he is waiting for someone to show him how to use it all.

But the house still feels warm and lived in. Earth-colored leather couches, 9,000 feet of limestone tile, a pool Oates never uses but is programmed with fiber optics to change colors in the night air make this one of the more interesting houses to be built in Sacramento in quite a long time.

"It will always be known as the Oates house," the white-haired developer explained with a smile. "People will always know it that way."

He is right about that.