

THE MAGAZINE

LUXURY LIFESTYLES

**CULTURAL
ART
PILLARS**
LIFE IS ART

BEST 25
SIGNATURE
RESTAURANTS

**FALL
FASHION
DESIGNS**

COMPLIMENTARY

October 2007



PASADENA
FOOTHILLS
REGION

ARCHITECTURE

ARTISTIC PRECISION

By Justin Kibbe



In 1993, John Finton – a young and ambitious designer/builder – joined forces with a creative entrepreneur to replicate a 1920's Mediterranean villa in La Cañada Flintridge, adding all the modern luxuries and technologies available in the mid-1990s. That other young entrepreneur was Steve Tobia who left the corporate world in 1987 at the age of 32. He proceeded to build the largest West Coast marketing consulting company before he'd turned 40. Finton at the time was still shy of his 30th birthday, and together these two creative entrepreneurs embarked on the goal of building an architectural piece of art that would withstand time and remain for hundreds of years so that other families could enjoy and appreciate the craftsmanship. Tobia insisted on being involved in every minutia of the home's 8,000 square feet of design with Finton. If that wasn't a big enough undertaking for Finton, Tobia's busy schedule – flying up and down the west coast to meet with CEOs and plan national marketing

campaigns – would soon create additional challenges.

Over the ensuing 18 months, the two accumulated dozens of anecdotal memories and became life-long friends. But without their mutual agreement that construction isn't just about building a home – but also about creating lasting pieces of art – the two would never have partnered on what is still considered an extraordinary architectural achievement in La Cañada Flintridge.

Today, John Finton oversees roughly 15 design/build projects, personally visiting each of them every day. And while 8,000 square feet was large in 1992, Finton's current projects are closer to 50,000 square feet in size – making them more comparable to small European castles than the standard American home. For those people who say "They don't build homes like they used to," John Finton is the antidote, meticulously building structures that will last for centuries.

ART OF ARCHITECTURE:

International Builder & Entrepreneur Discusses the Art of Architecture

John Finton, like Steve Tobia, still retains his down-to-earth style and love for design. Finton lives in a modest home of 2,500 square feet with every inch flawlessly designed, and Tobia lives in Old Pasadena on a fifth floor apartment overlooking the Foothills and Pasadena. As the two reminisce and discuss their entrepreneurial and creative journeys, they never speak in terms of wealth or materialistic possessions. I spent an afternoon with both John and Steve in August at the almost completed 45,000 square foot estate in Beverly Hills to find out more about their success, their passion and their personal camaraderie.

THE MAGAZINE: John, Steve hired you in 1993 to design and build his home in La Cañada Flintridge while both you and Steve were very young businessmen. You also teamed together for several spec homes in the area. What did you learn from those experiences that you carry-on today?

JOHN FINTON: Be driven by your ambition and your creativity, and the money will follow. You learn to be skeptical of people when you first start working with them – especially in this industry. If you discover an associate is dishonest, distance yourself from

them as quick as you can, because you'll never change them. You can't manage someone else's dishonesty. Trust your own instincts. Gain as much experience as you can. If you love what you do, you'll also love the life you live.

STEVE TOBIA: Both John and I worked ourselves through high school and college and we understand the true value of money, which is to provide for our children and to enjoy the things in life that make us happy. Building an estate or a business is not about the financial value, but the love of creating something that makes a difference in the world.

THE MAGAZINE: John, every detail was directed by you and Steve. How did two creative businessmen collaborate to accomplish the job – especially with Steve's intensity and travel schedule back then?

JOHN FINTON: Most successful people are, to some degree, neurotic (laugh) – Steve and I included. Entrepreneurial people are successful because they are driven by passion, vision, and their commitment to excellence. They measure their success by what they leave behind, not their

checking account. When working with other entrepreneurs, you have to maintain a comprehensive view of everything that enters their life. You have to learn how to communicate and understand these types of clients because they're not just hiring a builder, but choosing someone who they will see every day for as long as it takes to complete their project – oftentimes three years.

Steve's home took us 18 months to complete. But in the process, Steve would fly down for an afternoon and spend the time walking around the slab, imagining how the floor plan would flow for his family living as well as for corporate and social entertaining at the house. One example is when he told me that we needed to bump-out a wall two-feet because the view would be obstructed. That's the level of intensity and creative eye that my clientele want and expect. It's not about cookie-cutter design, it's all about creating estates that will be marveled at 100 years from today, just as we marvel at the estates built one hundred years ago.





STEVE TOBIA: Building this estate was much more than building a home for my family at that time. With eight offices on the West Coast, I needed areas of the house for just the family and my sons. At the same time, I placed my personal corporate office, an art studio and multi-media room in one wing for client presentations and staff meetings. I wanted clients and social guests to feel comfortable and be able to make them feel as equally at home as I was without making them feel like they were intruding upon my family's privacy. This wing served as a major extension of the business so that I could be within the same location as my family. Being a creative person, the architecture and design was very personal.

JOHN FINTON: Each client's perspective is my reality. It's my job to provide them with the quality of home they want, but I don't stop there. Because I love what I do and because I'm going to spend just as much time with them as they are with me, I'm going to make it memorable and fun. For top executives, like Steve Tobia, or famous actors and actresses like Eddie Murphy, Simon Cowell and Jennifer Lopez, it's not just about building a house; it's a life experience, a journey. After I met the Murphys' and

explained my philosophy on this, I overheard Mrs. Murphy say: "That's the one I want. Hire him right now."

THE MAGAZINE: Steve wanted his family in the new home on Christmas Eve of 1994, and I heard it was quite a task for you and your team to accomplish. I've heard some very funny stories. What was it like those last few days?

JOHN FINTON: Well, imagine a decorator placing lights and ornaments on 20 foot Christmas trees, as the carpet installers are carrying carpets up the stairs bumping into the ladder, and painters are applying the final coat of paint on the baseboards, and the electricians are double checking the switches and outlets. It was like the elves at the North Pole. But for Steve, it was about giving his sons a gift of something he never had as a child. So it was a gift from him, and not a gift for himself. I find that in almost everyone of my clients. But hectic deadlines are pretty standard. Sometimes it's a big birthday, a holiday – like Thanksgiving or Christmas. Sometimes it's a bet with a friend, and sometimes you don't know why the client insists on having it done by a certain day. It's the nature of the business.

STEVE TOBIA: For me, the Christmas Eve move-in had a special family meaning. My parents and my five other siblings and their spouses were flying in from New York to celebrate my 40th birthday. Having a magical family celebration was important to me.

THE MAGAZINE: From the 8,000 square foot home you built for Steve, you moved onto building other estates in Beverly Hills and other affluent

areas. Many of these estates are triple or quadruple the size. Is the desire for these affluent clients the size of the home or the overall architecture design?

JOHN FINTON: Size is a function of their lifestyle. High profile politicians, movie stars and top executives need a significantly large staff to run the details of their lives so that they are free to entertain international dignitaries and make billion dollar decisions. When they get home, they don't want to worry about cooking or laundry or electrical repairs, they want to spend whatever free time they have with their families. No matter what the size of the house is, all rooms have their purpose. A dining room might also function as a corporate management office – as in Steve's case. Others require a wing for security. Each client's needs are different.

STEVE TOBIA: Along with creating a home for my wife and two sons, Michael and Marc, and setting the stage where major national marketing campaigns were presented and signed, I also wanted to create a piece of art that reflected my personal love of Mediterranean architecture and would also set the tone for creative meetings. That's where John and I really hit it off, and I knew we would get along famously. We both understood that with me having been blessed with business success, I wanted to make an artistic statement – and celebrate my Italian heritage – and I did. I hope that 100 years from today, people will continue to appreciate and celebrate the great architecture that was built in the 19th, 20th and 21st century. ■

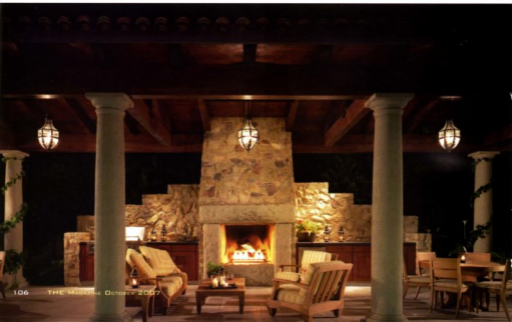
Finton Associates is one of Southern California's most prominent builders. Specializing in the ultimate of luxury construction, they are often referred to as "Builder to the Stars" counting Jennifer Lopez, Simon Cowell and Eddie Murphy as part of their loyal following. A trio of modern day Indiana Joneses, partners Michael Reeves, Dan Tontini and John Finton will literally go to the ends of the globe searching for extraordinary materials for their elite clients, designers and architects.

During their college years in the mid-1980s, Michael, Dan and John first discussed what they felt was a very real need for high quality, organized and efficient building contractors in Southern California. John had received his contractor's license, and Michael was developing his skills in business operations and finance. Together, they set out to found a construction company, and spent their first year doing demolition and framing work themselves.

The partners have developed a highly sophisticated project management system and have continually maintained an annual growth rate of 20% - 40%. ■



John Finton
Principal
Finton Associates





Finton Associates oversee
an ongoing 30+ projects.

Their offices are in
Arcadia, Newport Beach
with a satellite office
in Malibu.

For more
information
login to
FintonAssociates.com.

