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Building The Dream House

John Finton Is The Builder Of Choice
For Many Outstanding Architects
And He Goes To Great Lengths
To Achieve Perfection

BY LYNN MORGAN

A contemporary design is the greatest challenge for a builder: minimalism leaves no margin for error. Here, John Finton realizes Richard Landry's Modernist vision in Beverly Park.





John Finton built this breezeway as an introduction to a contemporary Mediterranean house overlooking the Pacific in Palos Verdes Estates.

For twenty years, John Finton has been working with extraordinary architects and building extraordinary houses. He has collaborated with Marc Appleton, Wallace Cunningham, Steve Giannetti, Brian Biglin, Richard Landry, Grant Kirkpatrick and William Hablinski building homes in every architectural style and vernacular. They and their clientele trust his eye and skills to turn their artistry into practical reality.

It's been a long and unpredictable journey for the Pasadena native whose interest in construction was sparked in high school: "Growing up, I had a neighbor who was in the remodeling business," Finton says. "I worked for him during summer vacations."

After graduating from Cal Poly Pomona with degrees in finance and real estate development he established Finton Associates, Inc. with Mike Reeves and Dan Tonini who are his partners today. "I had an idea about running a construction business as a business, not out of the back of a pick-up truck," he says. "I was convinced that a polished level of professionalism would appeal to an affluent clientele." The partners realize that, practiced at its highest level, building is both an intellectual challenge as well as an art form.

The art is in his selection of building materials, and John Finton travels great distances to acquire the best raw goods he can find, and to then seek out the ideal artisans to craft them. He frequently travels to Europe for antique architectural details, to Ireland and France for recycled wood, and to the Middle East or Asia for just the right stone, fine marble, hand painted tiles, reclaimed wooden beams and antique fireplaces.

"I once purchased some stone in southern France for a project in Beverly Hills with the understanding that it would

be carved in Israel. When I got to Tel Aviv, I was told that due to the work, the actual carving would be done in Jordan, somewhere outside of Amman."

With that, Finton hastily rented a car in Tel Aviv and began a desert trek to the West Bank, all the way to the Jordanian border, where he had to complete the journey on a rickety bus to meet with the master stone cutter in a remote village to view the work in progress. On another occasion, he and architect William Hefner journeyed to Nicaragua in search of the perfect clay tiles.

"Architects are usually not willing to partake in these adventures, but Bill was game," says Finton. "We were looking for handmade tiles for a 1920s Spanish style house in the Palisades that our client was restoring. We couldn't use new, mass produced tiles, it's unreasonable to try to artificially age new tiles. I had heard about a clay tile factory in Nicaragua, the oldest tile factory in Latin America, where they still use all the old techniques—bringing the clay in on donkeys and firing the tiles in an oven dug into the ground."

