

San Ysidro Ranch

Charting the Remarkable Renovation of a Storied Southern California Landmark

Restoration Architecture by Appleton & Associates/Text by Peter Haldeman/Photography by Mary E. Nichols



Purchased by Ty Warner in 2000, San Ysidro Ranch in Santa Barbara, California, has undergone a three-year renovation by architect Marc Appleton. "My vision was to make the needed improvements without changing its innate character," says Warner. ABOVE: Appleton opened up the reception cottage, called the Hacienda, to the surrounding garden. RIGHT: Olive trees and lavender line the new entrance drive.

IT'S THE KIND OF PLACE WHERE people check in with their pugs—registering the little darlings as Jack and Jackie in the guest book—and where fellow guests will recognize both the dogs' famous namesakes and the fact that the 35th American president and his wife honeymooned here. Such is the lore surrounding the San Ysidro Ranch, a fairy-tale-picturesque resort in Santa Barbara, California, that was once owned by film star Ronald Colman, hosted the nuptials of Vivien Leigh and Laurence Olivier and has inspired writers from Somerset Maugham to Sinclair Lewis. San Ysidro's 19th-century history as a citrus ranch only adds to the nostalgia and romance that hover over the place like the scent of navel orange blossoms.

If, by the end of the 20th century, its historic stone build-

ings, storybook cottages and rambling gardens were beginning to look a little shabby, the ranch was beloved enough that visitors were willing to overlook its flaws. San Ysidro was sort of like everyone's favorite maiden aunt, the one with the good bones and the slightly ratty sweaters. In 2000 the property was purchased by Ty Warner, the so-called Beanie Baby billionaire, whose plans to renovate the place sparked concern among the faithful that any "improvements" would compromise its understated charms. They can breathe again. Auntie has emerged from a three-year, \$150 million face-lift—and, frankly, she looks amazing.

Warner interviewed a number of architects for the job, but it's hard to imagine a more likely candidate than Marc

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with is this marvelous setting with the gardens and trees.”

At the same time, the architect harbored no illusions regarding the scope of the job: “There isn’t a single building that wasn’t totally restored or, in some cases, rebuilt entirely.” He is quick to credit Warner’s commitment to the project. “It’s rare that a client as busy as he is gives the time to champion such high quality or becomes as personally involved in the details as he did.”

The cottages scattered around the property (two were added, for a total of 41) were taken down to the studs and “brought into the same mode” of the classic Califor-

nia ranch house, with board-and-batten siding and pitched shingle roofs. To make them more private and intimate, Appleton designed entrance courtyards and enlarged patios. Amenities like spas and indoor-outdoor showers were

installed, but not at the expense of character. The footprints of the bungalows were maintained, and their homey hallmarks (exposed beams, stone fireplaces) still enchant.

The ranch’s two restaurants were given a new kitchen, and

the sandstone structure that houses them was refreshed. Appleton replaced its old wood deck with a stone terrace that matches the building’s exterior and takes full advantage of the ranch’s ocean and mountain

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“We preserved the architectural features of the cottages,” Appleton remarks. **ABOVE:** Lilac, a one-bedroom cottage. “The garden was a constant element of almost everything,” says the architect, who collaborated with landscape consultants Laurie Lewis, Sally Paul and James Hyatt on the renovation. **RIGHT:** A fireplace warms Willow Cottage.





ABOVE LEFT: A bedroom of the restored Kennedy Cottage, where Jacqueline and John Kennedy honeymooned in 1953. **ABOVE RIGHT:** A clawfoot tub in Eucalyptus Cottage. All of the cottages were outfitted with new bath fixtures and tile. Some also offer indoor-outdoor showers. **LEFT:** The new Laurel Cottage has a creekside terrace with a spa. "We redesigned the roadway and the landscaping, so there's an increased sense of privacy," says Appleton.

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views. Under the terrace he put in a private dining room styled after a wine cave, and under the dining room he installed a 5,000-bottle wine cellar. The historic ranch houses that function, respectively, as the reception area and a second private dining room were invisibly restored.

As Appleton intended, it's the improvements to the grounds that you notice first and last. Now you make the turn off San Ysidro Lane onto a gravel drive that winds below a dreamy canopy of gnarled olive trees underplanted with drifts of lavender. "It was part of our concept that we were reminding you of the agricultural beginnings of the ranch,"

he explains. With the assistance of landscape consultants Laurie Lewis, Sally Paul and James Hyatt, he expanded the property's citrus groves and herb and vegetable gardens and enhanced the central garden with a new lily pond and rose arbor. Warner selected oaks and peppers to supplement existing specimens, and the premises have been replanted with highly fragrant perennials. Surely California's agrarian past was never this pretty—but then, mythologizing the state's history is as old as the state itself. □

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