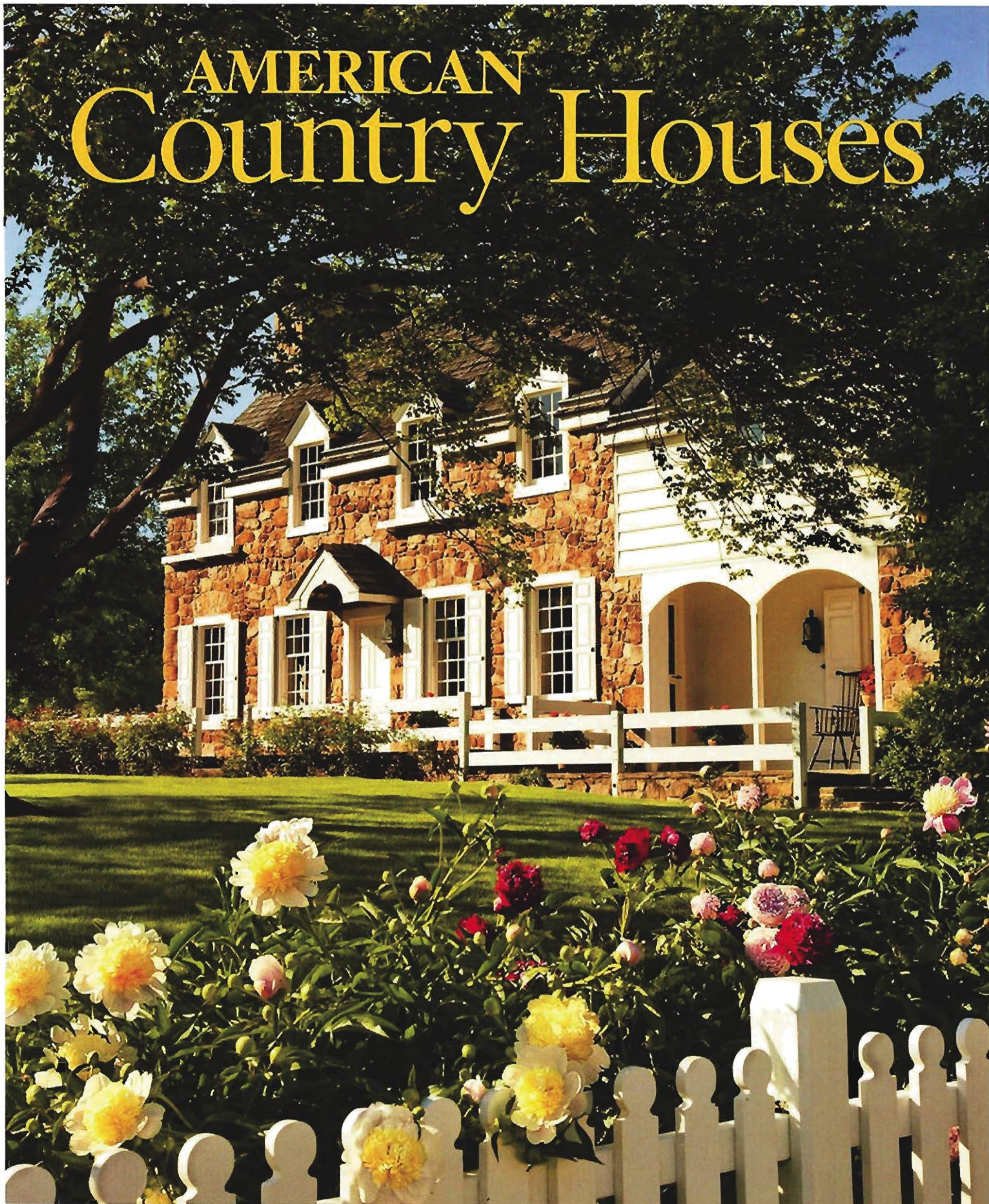


# ARCHITECTURAL DIGEST

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## AMERICAN Country Houses



# Wine Country, Italian Style

IN THE HEART OF NAPA VALLEY,  
A CONTEMPORARY FARMHOUSE SETTLES IN

Architecture by Hugh Huddleson, AIA, and Karen Jensen Roberts, AIA

Interior Design by Jacques Saint Dizier, ASID  
and Richard Westbrook of Saint Dizier Design

Landscape Architecture by Frederika Moller

Text by Patricia Leigh Brown/Photography by Mary E. Nichols

Constructing a residence from scratch that feels as if it has always been there is an exacting art. Its success depends on a seemingly endless array of details—the use of fieldstone that might have been dug from local earth, for instance, or the anchoring presence of gnarled trees with languorous branches that look as though they have survived a hundred summers.

Presented with a rare tabula rasa in coveted St. Helena in California's Napa Valley—the surrounding vineyards destined to become Duckhorn merlot—designers Jacques Saint Dizier and Richard Westbrook, of Saint Dizier Design, and architects Hugh Huddleson and Karen Jensen Roberts set about creating what Saint Dizier calls an “anti-villa,” a farmhouse-inspired hamlet at the end of a quiet road for a peripatetic couple and their visiting family.

“We thought of the residence as if it had an agricultural purpose,” says Saint Dizier, who is based on the other side of the mountains, in Healdsburg in Sonoma County. “We wanted to bring in the vines, make the house a believable part of the vineyards.”

Both Huddleson and Saint Dizier have

a long history with the couple, whose primary residences are in Arizona and Hawaii (see *Architectural Digest*, August 2004). The husband had discovered the land “by providence” four years ago; he says it was “the last piece of land contiguous to the city” and enveloped by 200 acres of grapes, with views to Spring Mountain, a fabled cabernet *terroir*.

The setting yearned for elegant rusticity, “a balance between dress-up and relaxed, a hodgepodge very carefully orchestrated,” the designer says. In conceptualizing the compound—a main residence, guest and caretaker's cottages, a pool, a bocce court and an outdoor dining pergola—Huddleson sought “a sincere architecture.” He looked to both the local vernacular—stone buildings like the Victorian Beringer residence—and the stone-walled wineries of Europe.

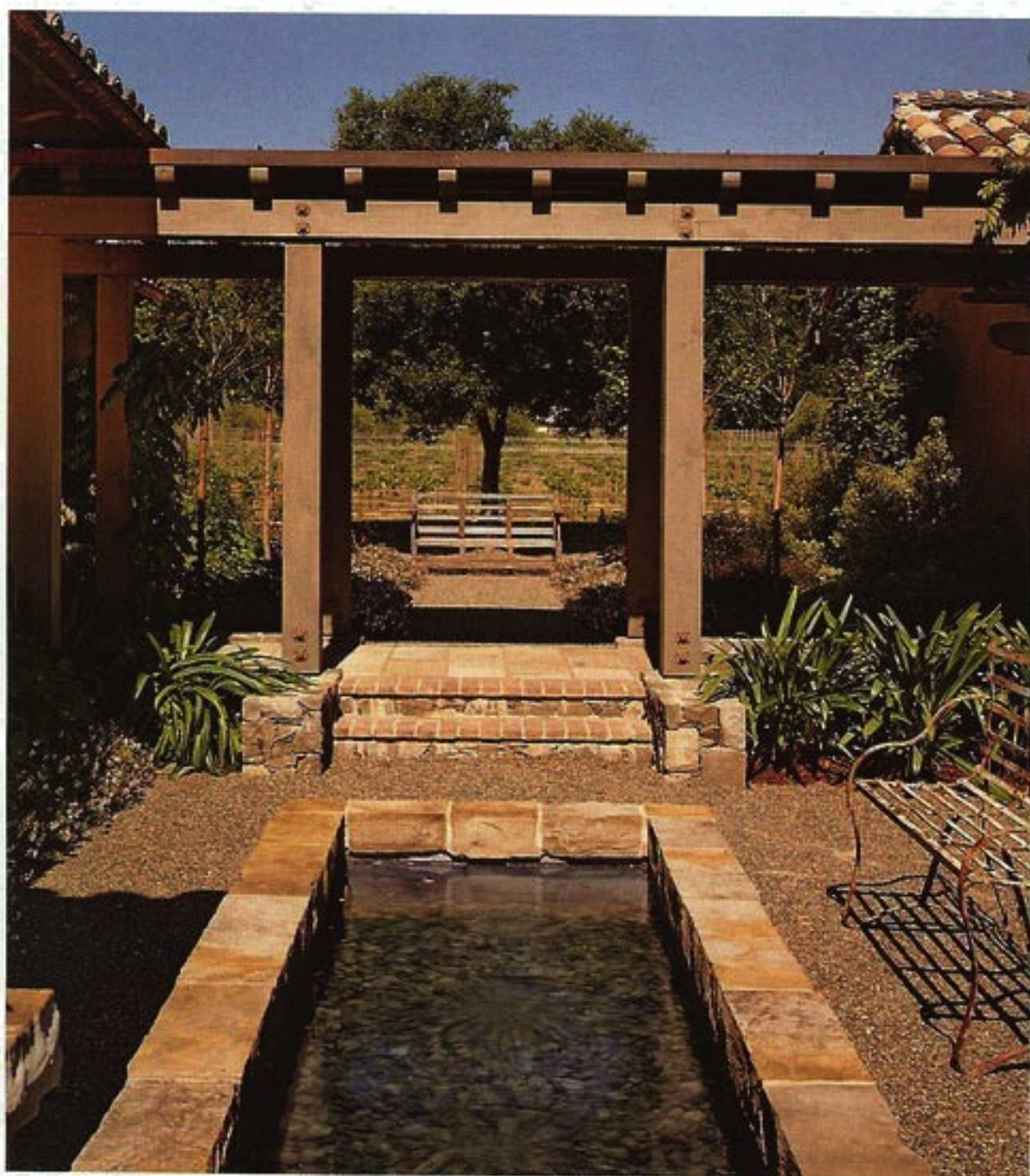
To capture vineyard panoramas, he raised the residence three feet to allow for stone terracing. “I’ve always felt that terracing merges architecture with the landscape,” he remarks, “so that you’re not sure where the stone walls become house.”

The clients had grown weary of overstatement, seeking a welcoming retreat in which grandchildren could drink lemon-

In St. Helena, California, designers Jacques Saint Dizier and Richard Westbrook teamed with architects Hugh Huddleson and Karen Jensen Roberts on a farmhouse-style residence, imagined as “an old soul, firmly anchored,” in Huddleson's words. Landscape architect Frederika Moller contributed a tapestry of creeping thyme, yarrow, chamomile and lavender.







ade by the pool and the husband could set up his laptop at the kitchen table. In the master bedroom, “scale was important to us,” says the husband. “We were looking for warm, cozy and comfortable, not overpowering.” The room is a jewel box, with a fireplace facing a big four-poster bed. It opens onto a private terrace with a hot tub; the adjoining stone colonnade and dining pergola visually melt into the vineyards.

Saint Dizier’s approach to the interiors was based on the idea of “a collection over the years”—objects, many of them whimsical, that a fortunate treasure hunter might have found on the property. In the living room, an overscale chandelier in rusted metal with burnished gold leaf is suspended from a vaulted beam ceiling that itself could have been lifted from an old winery.

The sense of being immersed in the vines is furthered in the dining room, where stone walls are given warmth by a classic walnut breakfront that doubles as a see-through refrigerated wine cabinet. At night the bottles gleam, providing, as Saint Dizier observes, “a nice glow for dinner guests.” Among the clients’ friends are many associated with the wine industry. The husband admits, however, that the couple’s own relationship to the storied agriculture in their midst is, simply, “drinking it.”

The kitchen is open to the living room, a request from the clients, who are keen to whip up food for 50 guests. “It’s a farm kitchen gone St. Helena,” Saint Dizier says. “We enjoyed making this house feel very much at home in the wine country,” adds Huddleson. In a powder room, mo-

**ABOVE:** Terraced gardens and a reflecting pool buffer the house from the motor court. **RIGHT:** In the living room, Saint Dizier installed “a pastiche of furnishings invoking the wine countries of Italy, Portugal, Spain and France.” Barry Masteller’s *Earth and Sky* hangs above the fieldstone fireplace. Holly Hunt sofas, with Stark seat fabric.







“We wanted to bring in the vines, make the house a believable part of the vineyards,” says Saint Dizier.



saic leaves are scattered on the floor. It is an enchanted space, designed to elicit “a feeling of getting lost in the forest.”

Outside, the landscape has many moods, the result of horticultural sorcery by landscape architect Frederika Moller (there was nary a tree when she started). To the rear, a series of outdoor rooms are formally defined by the rectilinear pool, pergola and bocce court (the latter a nod to the region’s Italian heritage). Mediterranean plantings spill, climb and drape, blurring distinctions between the

natural and the cultivated. A rose garden and a vegetable garden are enclosed by laurel hedges, bisected à la France by rose-lined pathways.

At the front drive, a pair of 80-year-old olive trees provide an instant sense of history. The surrounding landscape is meant to appear “intentionally wild, as if someone scattered seeds,” explains the architect. “As in Italy, it’s overgrown with mystery and romance and life as it happens.”

Saint Dizier’s favorite ritual upon completion of a project is greeting clients—

who, in this case, would have ambled through vineyards and fragrant cascades of ornamental thyme, rosemary and lavender—at sunset, with music playing and a bottle of champagne in hand. “It’s the interaction of all the pieces that’s surprising to people, and sometimes to us,” he notes.

And so it was in St. Helena. “No matter how much we believed we had a vision of what it was going to look like,” says the husband, “it turned out to be better and more exciting than we had dreamed.” □

**OPPOSITE:** Outside the caretaker’s cottage, a pair of 80-year-old olive trees, surrounded by masses of *Teucrium* and other herbs, confirm the house’s wine-country setting and, says Huddleson, conjure “a dimension of time.”

**ABOVE:** Saint Dizier chose a crisp, neutral palette for a guest room that opens onto a terrace and a rose garden. Chair, Ralph Lauren Home; Tufenkian rug.





Explains Huddleson: "The assignment was to create a gathering place for three generations of a family," who use it primarily in summer. The swimming pool, at the rear of the house, practically abuts the vineyards beyond; the hills in the distance divide Napa and Sonoma counties. Paralleling the pool, a stone-and-wood trellis covers an outdoor dining area.

