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SATURDAY
MARCH 26, 1994

San Jose Mercury News

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INSIDE

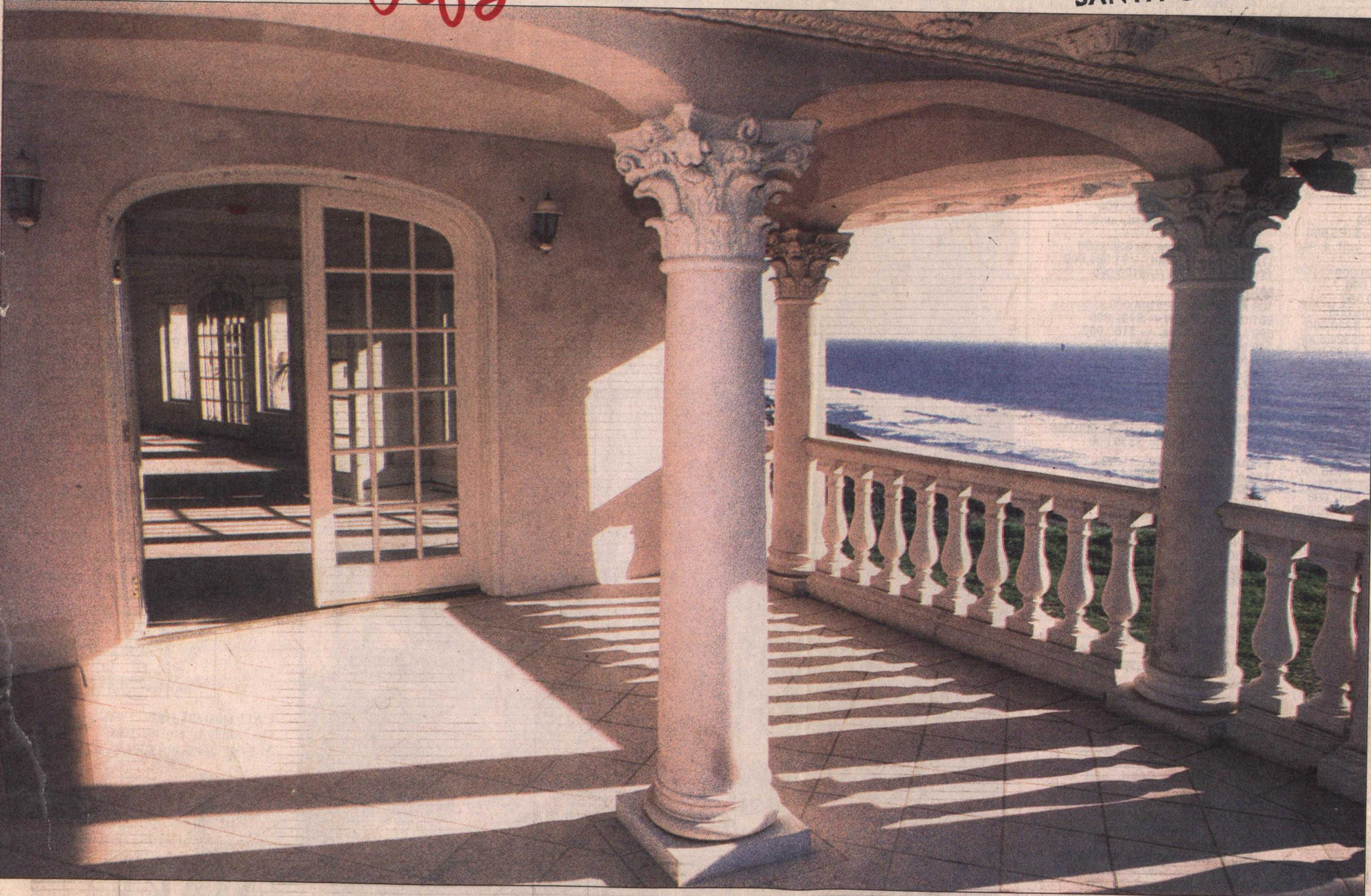
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Architecture

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The upper floor
of the house is
surrounded by
open decks and
a balustrade
containing 525
hand-cast spin-
dles.

LEN LAHMAN — MERCURY NEWS

Villa Vizcaya, a stunning neo-classic mansion

BUILT

3/26

*Villa Vizcaya, a stunning neo-classic mansion
in La Selva Beach, is finally finished — at a cost*

BUILT *on* CONTROVERSY

BY MARY GOTTSCHALK
Mercury News Style Writer

THE massive wrought-iron gates are the first hint that Villa Vizcaya is not your ordinary house.

At the top of a calla-lily-lined drive in La Selva Beach, a gentle curve brings you to an 18th-century, neo-classic villa transplanted from the hills above Florence or perhaps the shore of Lake Como.

Or is it?

Glazed Spanish tiles top the domed entry with its four stately Corinthian columns and a half-ton, hand-cast bronze entry door. To each side, identical wings fan out in a crescent moon shape with more Corinthian columns — 70 in all. The upper floor is surrounded by open decks and a balustrade containing 525 hand-cast spindles. Under the overhangs are more than 500 hand-cast bas-relief squares.

"Our goal was to have people not think 'new construction,'" says Caroline Cocciardi, who built the house with her husband, Jack Eitzen.

They have succeeded, but at great cost and controversy.

Construction of the 25-room house, which the Eitzens were building for her cousin Peter Viviano, was well under way when it was "red tagged" in 1986. At about 13,000 square feet, it had far surpassed its 6,000-square-foot building permit.

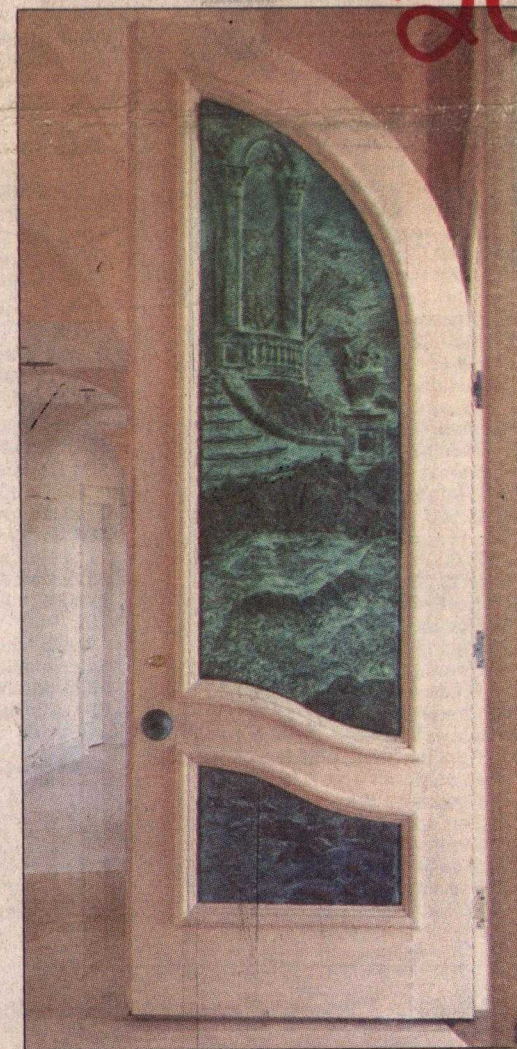
"We didn't realize it ran 13,000 square feet until they came out and measured it,"

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Cocciardi hand-cast a half-ton set of bronze entry doors that mirrors the view one gets when they are opened.

Villa Vizcaya measures 11,000 square feet and has 5,000 square feet of deck.

The entrance dome was inspired by Montecatini di Terme, a health spa near Florence, Italy.



“I’ve never seen two more beautiful sites. You can see the curvature of the earth, there’s all-day sun and no fire danger. Nothing like these two homes will ever be built again.”

— Vince Brown, listing agent

Vizcaya: home by the sea

■ VIZCAYA

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says Cocciardi, who always viewed the structure as an art work in progress. “We had verbal approval from the chief building inspector while we were working, and we had 13 inspections before we were red tagged.”

The home sat for six years as it became a political football in Santa Cruz County, the subject of several rancorous Santa Cruz County Board of Supervisors meetings regarding the home’s square footage and its proximity to the ocean.

Then-Supervisor Robley Levy, echoing the complaint of many county residents, argued that Viviano and the Eitzens “built what they pleased . . . and assumed that they could make it right after the fact, perhaps by paying major fines and penalties.”

But then-Supervisor Dan Forbus pointed out that others in Santa Cruz County had built homes and even a community center with no permits at all. He suggested if Viviano and the Eitzens were to be penalized, “maybe we should bring the whole county up to standard.”

The board voted 3-2 to require removal of the home’s top floor and entry dome to bring the overall size down to 9,500 square feet.

In November 1990, on the eve of a court date in the \$10 million lawsuit filed by Viviano and the Eitzens against the county, an out-of-court settlement was reached. The Eitzens paid a \$325,000 fine, the largest fine in state history for a violation of the California Coastal Act, and agreed to scale the house back to 11,000 square feet. The top floor

and the dome stayed. A year later they got the necessary building permit to start construction again.

“The integrity of the house is intact,” Cocciardi says. If pressed, she says that she and her husband sold two homes and her beloved MG TD to finance the construction and the fine. They also moved in with her parents.

Six weeks ago Villa Vizcaya was signed off by county building inspectors, something Cocciardi admits took a little time to absorb.

“It was like this imaginary finish line,” she says. “There’s an inner satisfaction with starting and no matter what — and there were a lot of no-matter-whats — to cross the finish line.”

Now that the finish line is crossed, Viviano has decided not to live in the house, and the Eitzens have put Villa Vizcaya up for sale for \$4.5 million.

Prospective buyers who pass screening soon learn that only the exterior of the house is finished. It is not until you enter the front door, take time to catch your breath at the sight of the Pacific Ocean through the arched windows and look around that you realize this is a house not quite done. Wall colorings, floor coverings and kitchen counter tops are details left to complete.

When Cocciardi ticks off the exact number of the Corinthian columns, balustrade spindles and ceiling squares, her knowledge doesn’t come from counting. She made the molds for the columns, spindles, squares and many other architectural details of the house and hand-cast them herself.

She knows the half-ton weight of the front doors because she

designed their scene of a colonnaded home with steps leading down to the sea to mirror “what you see when you open the door.” While many might turn their design over to someone else, Cocciardi sculpted it, made a mold and then hand-cast the doors in bronze.

“I could write a book titled ‘The Anatomy of the Column,’” she jokes. She could also write tomes on locating hinges to support such massive doors — the curator of the Capitol Building in Sacramento helped there; on locating appropriate door knobs — finding the “perfect” knobs on a downtown Saratoga antique store (she persuaded the owner to lend her one to make a mold); and how to design and make your own spouting-dolphins fountain from scratch — “I didn’t want to compromise with one of those awful tiered fountains.”

Cocciardi, who graduated from San Jose State University in 1976 with a major in design, and her contractor-builder husband spent three months after their 1985 marriage studying architecture and design in Italy. As a result, Villa Vizcaya is a structure of the ages for the ages. The dome, for instance, was inspired by Montecatini di Terme, a famous health spa near Florence featured in the Borghese cosmetics ads.

“Even though the house is large, we wanted to make it feel intimate,” Cocciardi says of the home, which includes 5,000 square feet of deck.

In spite of the large square footage, the home has essentially been designed as a two-bedroom residence. The top floor has two master bedroom suites with a

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LEN LAHMAN — MERCURY NEWS

Villa Vizcaya in La Selva Beach offers 25 rooms, many custom touches and a beautiful view of the ocean

Years of political battles over, palatial Villa Vizcaya is complete

■ VIZCAYA

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study, bedroom overlooking the ocean, two fireplaces, walk-in wardrobe room with built-in cupboards and Sybaritic bath with a sunken tub, separate glass-block walled shower, toilets and a bidet in each one.

The first floor includes an entrance hall with a formal living room and dining room as well as a library, kitchen, family room, bathrooms, informal dining area and a guest bedroom suite. The bottom floor, which opens to the ocean side of the home only, can be used for additional bedrooms or a game room. The garage easily holds four cars.

That the home is on the market and the Eitzens will never live in it does not bother them.

"When I create things I have

no problem letting go," Cocciardi says. "I have had such a long relationship with each item. I had to fight to get it from thinking it to manifesting it to installing it. I'm done now; I want to move on to something new."

Thus far, most people looking at the home want it as a primary residence, says Vince Brown of International Estates, the listing agent.

"Robert Goulet looked at it, but the day after he looked he went to Los Angeles and the earthquake hit. I later heard he wanted a more rustic house," Brown says.

Villa Vizcaya is surrounded by 12 acres of flowering heather and strawberry fields, which are part of the property. The driveway is shared by a second home, built by Cocciardi's parents, which is also for sale for \$4.9 million.

"I've looked from Beverly Hills to Oregon, and I've never seen two more beautiful sites," Brown says. "You can see the curvature of the earth, there's all-day sun and no fire danger. Nothing like these two homes will ever be built again."

Shortly after the Eitzens settled with the county, an ordinance restricting new homes to 4,000 square feet without special permits was passed.

Cocciardi says her husband is anxious to start another home, but "I'm more cautious about it. I would love to try something else I've never tried before. I love to design, but I don't want to deal with governments anymore. You have to compromise."

"There's a lot of love and a lot of blood, sweat and tears that went into producing this."