

VILHAUER: Sturdy as a Corralitos oak



Polished oak floors and antique furnishings add to rustic style of Gary and Jan Vilhauer's home.

Photos by Dan Coyro



Vaulting outside supports river rock fireplace.

THANK GOODNESS for pockets of civilization that manage to escape the insidious shine of chrome, plexiglass, polyester modernity. Like Corralitos.

With its reputation as one of the places to settle, raise a family, cultivate a garden or, even, have a horse or two, this community to the north and east of Watsonville nuzzles right into the definition, "country."

Its colors are rich golds and brown this time of year; its scent, the smoking sausages at the market and fermentation-ripe apples in the orchards. This is a place where housewives decorate with muslin and ruffles, homey prints and ceramic ducks that wear straw hats with ribbons.

Settlers here worked hard for a living — logging and later, farming. The soil is rich, the roots grow deep.

Gary Vilhauer's life is rooted in Corralitos. When he was a kid, romping on the hillocks and exploring the gullies, he vowed that someday he'd build a home of his own in this beautiful countryside.

In May, that vow materialized for Gary, his wife Jan and their children Jaime, 10, and Kyle, 9. After two years in the design and 11 months in the building, their 3,100-square-foot home on six acres at the top of Pheasant Run was com-

pleted. "We're still feeling new," admitted Jan, leading the way on a jade-tone slate entry. Leaving tour-guiding to his parents, Kyle chose a ruby-red Delicious apple as his after-school snack.

The Vilhauers' is a sturdy home for wholesome living; it brings the outdoors in. Architect Michael Helm worked with several mandates. "We wanted to face south, since we are going to have neighbors, and we wanted to use trusses," said Jan, indicating the two, massive built-on-site frameworks. The huge beaming frame allows the soaring roof, and the home, to extend in wings. Late afternoon sun was setting beyond La Selva Beach, beyond White Road and behind the darkening hills faced by massive living room windows.

A feeling of nature carries through the home, from three river rock fireplaces to glass etchings of local flora, the California poppy, grasses, the wild iris.

The home was built by Terry Byers of Corralitos. Jan did daily inspections, with Gary busy as a Pajaro Valley produce broker.

But the decorating, they did together. It would be old-fashioned with a country theme, based on their extensive collection of antique furniture, most of it oak.

The Corralitos home of Gary and Jan Vilhauer will be part of the annual Holiday Tour of Homes from noon to 4 p.m. Saturday, sponsored by Watsonville YWCA. The self-guided tour will include five homes in Watsonville, residences of the Dawson, Isidro, Manfre, Obertello and Vilhauer families, and a reception and holiday boutique at the YWCA Community House, 340 E. Beach St. Tickets are available for \$10 at the YWCA. For more information, call 724-6078.

Double, brass-fitted, swinging oak doors they'd picked up years ago found a perfect home at the entry to the master bedroom. A number of Morris chairs serve for comfort; no Lazy-Boys here because the theme is wood. Most of the floors are simple, polished hardwood. Very few area rugs, even.

"We tried to use as little carpet as possible — just in select areas," explained Jan.

The Vilhauer home opens in a number of directions from the centrally placed front door.

This is a home of subtle decorating themes. The sensual, rounded river rock of the fireplaces repeats on a much smaller scale in the "pebbles" tile surrounding a Jacuzzi tub in the master bathroom. Halophane glass in the kitchen's industrial-size light fixtures is picked up again in bathroom fixtures, and the traditional forest-green framing of the kitchen lights carries over to the window framing.

"We built the house as a dream, to live in forever," said Jan.

A welcome plaque at the front door reveals the family's start: "Vilhauer, est. 1976."

"We have a long way to go," she added, "but for us, this will always be home."

— Marybeth Varcados