

FLAVORS OF ITALY

Using food, wine, and culture to inspire home design.

THE PARALLELS BETWEEN Southern California and Mediterranean regions are many, and it's important to take those influences—food, lifestyle, and culture—into account when it comes to home design, according to Carol Hilton and Ann Mulligan, the owners of Great Rooms Home Furnishings and Design Services in Camarillo (greatroomsdesign.com) and authors of the newly released *Great Rooms ... Sapori d'Italia, Décor of Toscana & Campania* (\$40; Brio Press, 2010).

“What we tried to really translate was our passion for design and the culture that is the seed of the design—really getting absorbed into it and understanding it and finding the parallels here in the States that we overlook or get watered down,” Hilton says.

Hilton and Mulligan “absorbed” the culture of Italy during a five-week trip last year, focusing on Toscana (primarily Florence) and Campania (Naples and the Amalfi Coast). There were some locations—houses and vineyards—that they pre-arranged to visit and photograph. Others popped up from chance meetings with locals or peeks through an open window or unlocked door. “I’m Italian-American, I speak the language,” Hilton says. “We wound up gaining entry into 16th-century villas and penthouse apartments in Florence overlooking the Arno River.” And they captured exactly what they saw, warts and all. “People opened up their homes on a moment’s notice, so nothing was staged. If there were things that didn’t make it a clean, perfect shot, we kept it, [to be] authentic.”

Armed with mountains of photographs and inspiration from the food they ate, the people they met, and the culture they experienced, the business partners returned stateside to organize the photographs into a book, and to build on their Italian inspiration with their clients’ homes here (also pictured in the book). “We [wrote the book] in the perspective that we were the audience. It’s not ‘take this vase here and put it here,’” Hilton says, but allows readers to take inspiration from the rooms pictured and find a design solution that works for them.



Ann Mulligan (in the car) and Carol Hilton of Great Rooms Design in Camarillo found design inspiration all over Italy when researching their new book. But how to get it home in such a small car?

The differences between Italian and California design? “[The Italians] spent a lot of money on things that were permanent design elements: flooring, mosaic tile inlaid rugs ... using elements of the earth, not synthetic materials,” Hilton says. She also notes that doors (“the doorway to the heart of the home”) and windows (“the window to the souls”) played strong design roles, as well as lighting. “It’s the jewelry of the home—either very grand or very utilitarian with a beautiful line.”

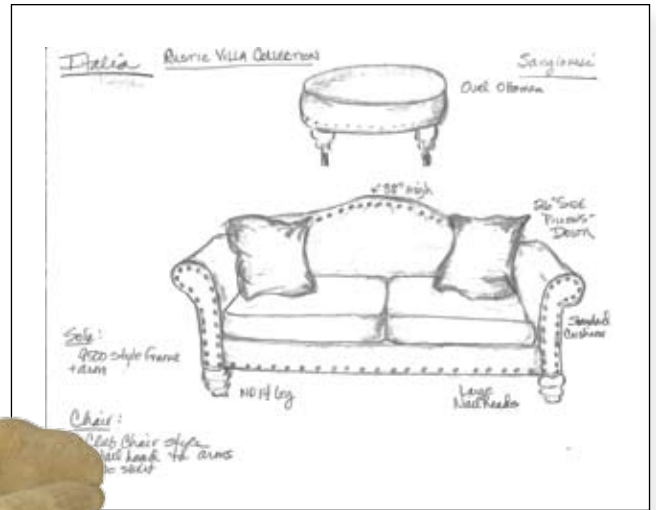
But it’s not just a new book that has the pair busy these days—they’ve also launched two new furniture lines with New Dimensions furniture company. According to Hilton, the Mediterranean look is still the number-one design choice of local consumers, and French Country is a strong second (the duo’s next book will focus on France), so one collection is called Italia Rustic Villa (“elegant-casual furniture embellished with nailhead trim”) and



>>Upgrades

the other French Laundry (“more organic and rustic”). “They’re new silhouettes that Ann and I have created ... our take on clean lines and rich fabrics and upholstery that [are] going to be at ease in California.” Style names are culled from grape varietals—Chianti, Viognier—another nod to the importance of the mix of culture and design that the pair espouses. “It offers high-end appeal at a low-end mark-up,” Hilton adds. “Furniture is a big ticket item you want to be able to keep.”

Great Rooms ... Sapori d'Italia, Décor of Toscana & Campania is sold at Great Rooms as well as at other home design stores; Barnes & Noble will carry the book in early spring 2011. ■



A sketch (above) and the finished product (left) from Carol Hilton and Ann Mulligan’s new Sapori (which means “flavors”) upholstered furniture line from New Dimensions. Italia Rustic Villa Collection **SANGIOVESE SOFA** (\$1,849 as shown), **NEBBIOLO CLUB CHAIR** (\$1,089 as shown), and **DOLCETTO OTTOMAN** (\$975 as shown) with nailhead trim in a choice of fabrics; Great Rooms, Camarillo, greatroomsdesign.com.



Hilton and Mulligan were working with a client who already had this wine room, but didn’t know what to do with it. They showed the client pictures of wineries—one small, one grand—from their trip to Italy, where stone played a prominent role. “The stone wall was the afterthought idea that made it sing,” Hilton says. “It gave it that more authentic cantina look.” Since the wine room connects to the dining room, Hilton and Mulligan chose stone for both sides of the wall so it could be seen from both rooms.

Wine barrels are repurposed into the **WINE2NIGHT NAPA BISTRO TABLE** (\$479) and **STAVE STOOL WITH LEATHER TOP** (\$239); Great Rooms, Camarillo, greatroomsdesign.com.



The **AUGUSTINE WINE CABINET** (\$1,062) from Classic Home Furnishings holds 20 bottles of wine; Great Rooms, Camarillo, greatroomsdesign.com.