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LIFESTYLES

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HEART DESIGN

LAKE COUNTY

An ornate back-plate of a wood-burning stove dating more than 100 years old anchors the doorbell.



Phil Mastrosimone Jr.
pauses in the stairwell of his home in Lake County.



Castle-like home

Exudes European Old World style

BY MARIAN RIZZO
PHOTOGRAPHY BY ERICA BROUGH

A slice of European ambiance has come to Central Florida. Rosemarie and Phil Mastrosimone Jr. designed their new home around an eclectic mix of old-world styles and modern conveniences.

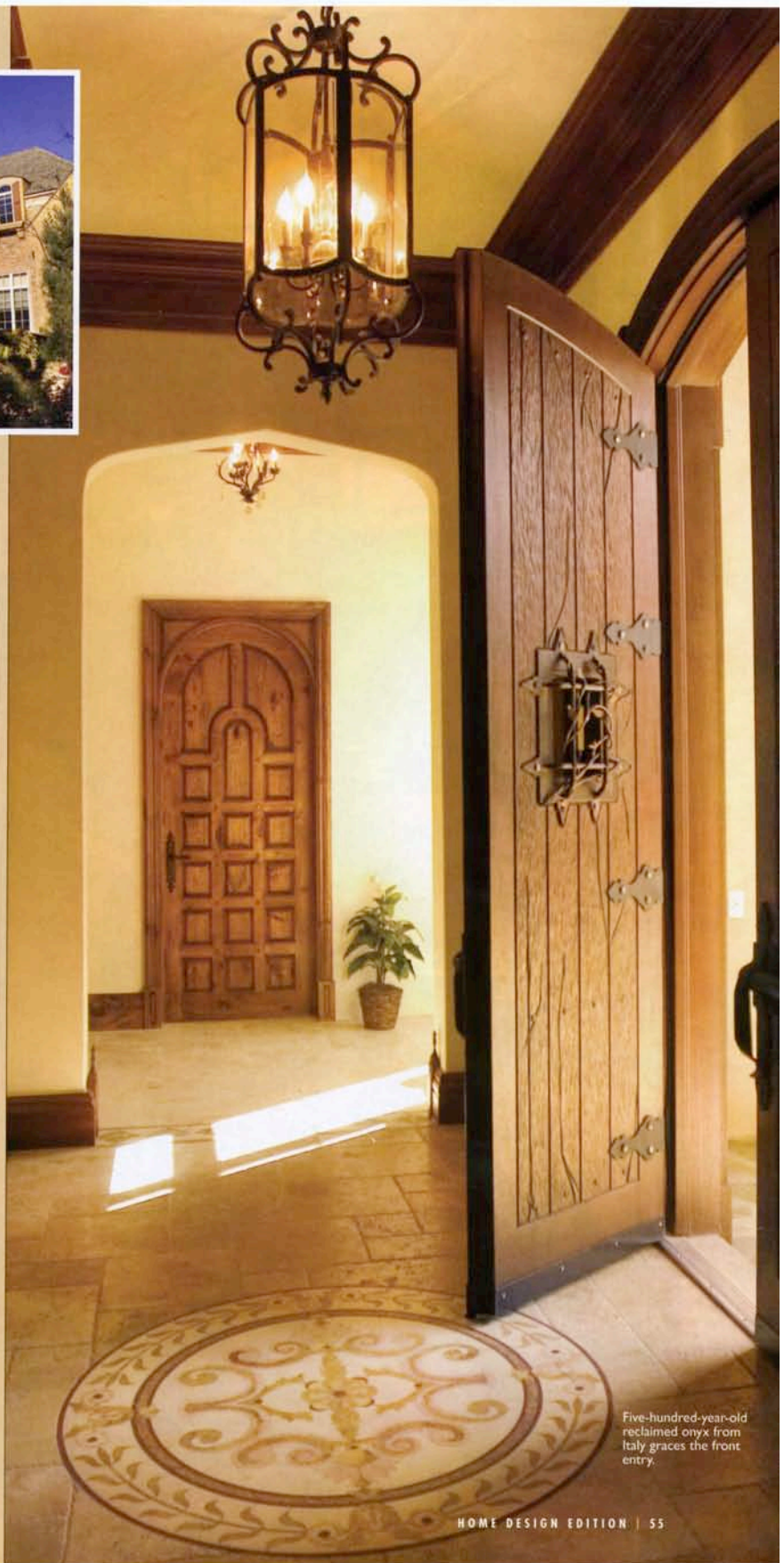
Their breathtaking two-story mansion with gold-hued, stuccoed walls, second-story parapets and stone tower sits on 3.5 wooded acres on a back road in Lady Lake. Though stately on the outside, on the inside the house is warm and cozy and intimate.

"I wanted to build it like an old castle-like structure but didn't want to create a big, cold house," says Phil. "I wanted to create a home."

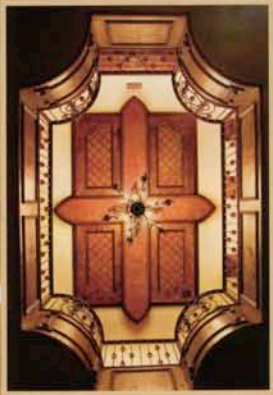
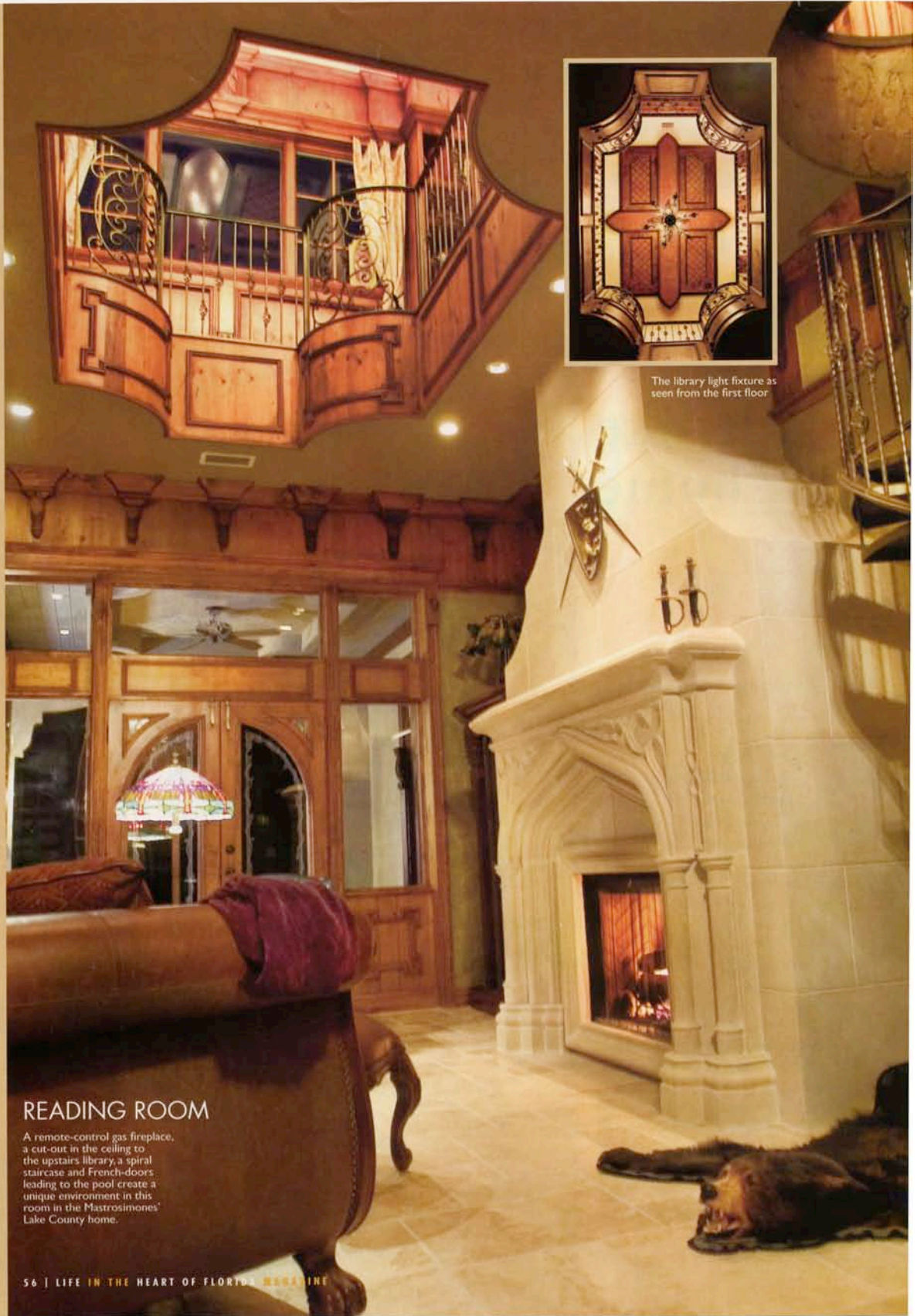
Phil says the house is the first of several homes that will go into Windsor Green, a 70-acre, high-end subdivision planned in partnership with Dr. Kim Etheredge of Leesburg.

"This was supposed to be my dream home, but it

CONTINUED ON PAGE 57



Five-hundred-year-old reclaimed onyx from Italy graces the front entry.

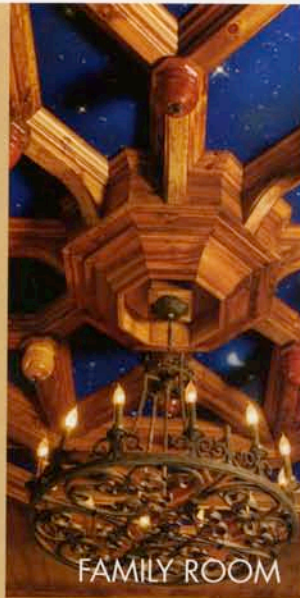


The library light fixture as seen from the first floor

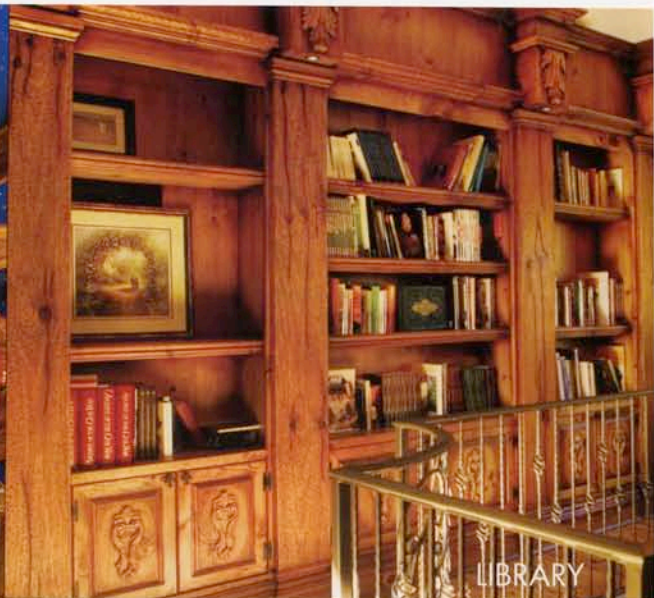
READING ROOM

A remote-control gas fireplace, a cut-out in the ceiling to the upstairs library, a spiral staircase and French-doors leading to the pool create a unique environment in this room in the Mastrosimone's Lake County home.

Design elements incorporate customized woodwork



FAMILY ROOM



LIBRARY

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 53 turned into a major investment for me," says Phil. "I'm a custom home builder, but I've never been able to show clients what I can do, so I built my first model as a live-in model."

Phil and Rose moved into the house with their extended family of four sons, **Philip III**, 16; **Mason**, 14; **Chris**, 15; and **Ryan**, who is 2. They moved from a 1,600-square-foot ranch home in Fruitland Park to this 7,000-square-foot showplace. To Rose, it's a little overwhelming.

"Phil's hoping that it doesn't sell, I'm sort of hoping that it does. It's too big," says Rose. "In the other one, we were tripping over each other. Ryan likes to explore. I think I need a little tracking device on Ryan so I can keep track of him during the day."

A music major in college, Phil became a general contractor nearly 10 years ago, after moving here from Jamestown, N.Y. His business, Mastro Simone Construction, specializes in woodwork. Every room has rich, hand-crafted wood embellishments.

A highlight is the two-story wood-shrouded library that has

a concrete fireplace and French doors that open out to the pool area. Upstairs, wrap-around bookshelves have an aged look due to hours of chiseling by Phil and his 73-year-old father.

The 10,000-square-foot layout also includes garages, lanais, terraces and a separate game room that maintains the old-time décor with a wall of faux broken bricks and a concrete 3-dimensional tree concealing air conditioning lines.

Outside, the landscaping follows the curve of the front wall. A simulated cobblestone drive meets up with real flagstone. A waterfall cascades down the risers of the front stairs. Gardens sprawl out on either side, with a mix of topiaries sculpted in spiral shapes, towering Italian cypress, yellow holly bushes and nearly 200 Knock Out rose bushes with red and pink blossoms.

The landscaping went in under the direction of **Vince Sims** of Sims Landscaping. Known as the "Garden Rebel" on Orlando radio and TV stations, he selected low-maintenance plants that need little pruning, are bug resistant and grow slowly. "When" CONTINUED ON PAGE 59



DINING ROOM



BREAKFAST NOOK



KITCHEN

Old Country style and modern touches
meld beautifully in these rooms.

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 57 you stand back and you look at this house, the arch overwhelms you so much, I thought it was important that down the road the landscaping didn't overtake the house," he says. "Everything is designed to preserve the heartbeat of the house."

The castle ambiance is felt everywhere. Three-inch-thick mahogany doors greet visitors with huge deadbolt locks that slide open with a thud and a clank. The doorbell is creatively set inside an ornate back plate from a 100-year-old wood-burning stove.

Throughout the house are little touches that invoke a Renaissance feel. Pieces of crystal are imbedded in some of the wood, fleur d' lis are used as accent pieces, there are carved brass fixtures, fake stone niches with flickering lights that resemble candles, and furnishings done in gold, brown, burgundy and moss green.

In the living room, a ceiling of stars, framed by a wooden hexagon, reflects one of young Ryan's first words. "Moon."

"And he loves the stars," says Phil.

Helping with the unique décor was **Dale Henry**, a local artist and friend. In addition to much of the structural faux painting, Dale created an Italian country scene on the wall in the guest bath. He also used a technique

CONTINUED ON PAGE 60



GUEST BATHROOM

This home was designed with family, friends and heart in mind.



POOL AREA

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 59 called trompe l'oeil (Fr. "trick the eye"), to create a three-dimensional castle door appearance on the garage doors.

An outside fire pit and small pavilion have become a fun place for the boys to entertain their friends.

"When your kids get older, you like to have a close eye on them," says Phil. "I'd like to have their friends come here. I like being outside with my boys."

Phil sees this home as just the beginning.

Although no official appraisal has come in yet, Phil estimates the house's value at about \$4.5 million.

The adjacent 70 acres is being divided into 29 more lots for additional multi-million-dollar homes like this one.

According to the Lake County Property Appraiser's records, there are 39 homes valued at more than \$1 million in the county, with the highest valued at \$6.5 million. The average value of a home in Lake County

is currently \$156,000, said **Robbie Ross**, a director at the property appraiser's office.

Jeana Burt, an architect in Lake County, worked with Phil on the design of his house and is working on renderings of luxury homes for the development. She has designed several high-end homes in the area.

"I haven't seen anything of this caliber," Jeana says of Phil's house. "Everything was extremely custom that you wouldn't find in most homes. It was a labor of love on his part to put all that wood in there. Development is definitely coming to Lake County. It's not the sleepy little town anymore."

Phil will have an open house from 1 to 4 p.m. on **April 22** and will have on hand drawings of homes planned for the development. The open house is by invitation only. To register, visit www.mastrohome.com or call 352. 259.6551. ■

Marian Rizzo is a freelance writer and was a full-time Star-Banner writer for 11 years.