



Spaghetti Western

A HISTORIC COLORADO SPRINGS RANCH IS REIMAGINED AS A TUSCAN VILLAGE. by Kimberly Field

This home has its own ice rink, so, yeah, it's a big house. But the 19 acres of land on which it sits, nestled into the pines on the edge of the Black Forest north of Colorado Springs, feels even more grand. The home's view of Pikes Peak — long acknowledged as the best in the city — grabs your eye from every angle and never lets go. Trees, meadow, and the sweep of the Front Range are the focus, and that is what a visitor remembers.

The property is the kind of place most people drive by and only dream of owning, thinking it's never going on the market, and no one ever knows about it if it does. Denise and Rob Oldach had been shopping for land in the area, not finding exactly what they wanted and, on every scouting visit, wondering if the older homestead at the top of the meadow would ever become available. Colorado Springs realtor John Madden thought it unlikely, and then miraculously (remember that word), got a tip that it was about to be listed. The Oldachs did the deal immediately. Denise explains their luck simply: "That was God!"

The ranch house, completed by original owner Bob Norris (see page 51) in the 1960s, was large — having been remodeled over the years, it sprawled more than 7,500 square feet with soaring windows gazing out on Pikes Peak. Spectacular setting notwithstanding, the structure featured small rooms and a tight galley kitchen cut off from the flow of the home. "The circulation needed help," says architect Todd Brokaw of Brokaw Architectura in Colorado Springs. "It wasn't consistent with today's lifestyle, but the structure was good. We worked with it rather than around it."

Brokaw's design ultimately added 6,000 square feet of living space. He kept the existing structure in the center and added a master suite that rivaled anything Brokaw had designed for the nearby Broadmoor Resort Community. In another space, a family area and kitchen became the beating heart of the home.

The beauty and function of a classic Tuscan hill town — built in smaller units assembled by villagers over time using complementary materials such as bricks,

stones, cobbles, and stucco — guided the remodel. The couple had been specific about not wanting a ranch idiom, favoring classic style and Palladian details. "Todd showed me that we weren't building a house," Denise says. "We were assembling a village."

Not many Tuscan hill towns have hockey rinks, however. "A hockey rink has a big roof," Brokaw says, stating the obvious. "My 'aha' moment came when I realized we could build a tower, just like in a Tuscan town, to break up the roof line so that the ice arena didn't overpower the house." The tower room provides 180-degree views of the mountains and floods the arena's mezzanine with natural sunlight.

Rob Oldach blames his son, now 12, for the



rink. (He and Denise also have a daughter, 15.) "When he was a toddler, he wanted us to be [Colorado Avalanche players] Sakic and Forsberg, so I thought I'd put a little rink behind the garage." Now, the Oldach boys skate in an enclosed practice rink with a locker room that accommodates a dozen people, a skybox above the action, a lounging area, and a champagne-colored Zamboni.

Family Time

Opposite page: Lengthy loggias with travertine floors connect both ends of the home. Above: The sprawling, village-style home looks onto a vast back lawn.



Above: Denise Oldach's office houses an antique piano yet maintains an African theme. Left: The tower room offers 360-degree views. Opposite page: The kitchen features Habersham cabinets and granite tile.



For the Oldachs, television and computers take a back seat to books and board games. Instead of a media room, the home features a theater, complete with a stage and a curtain where the children put on performances. "We thought we'd never use it, but it is one of our favorite rooms," Rob says.

Tucked off the kitchen is a children's area. Biblical limestone from Ann Sacks — irregular slabs reclaimed from the streets of ancient Jerusalem — pave the floor. "I don't know if Jesus walked on this, but just in case, I had to have it," Denise says. She encourages visitors to slip off their shoes and walk barefoot on the stones.

Eat, Pray, Love

The ornate, old-world kitchen may be the result of a second miraculous moment in the

home's remodel. "Denise wanted two kitchens — one for caterers and one for her everyday use," says Bev Adams, kitchen designer and owner of Interior Intuitions in Cherry Creek. "The design came to me in the middle of the night. I started drawing and realized I was sketching the shape of a cross! We were all tremendously excited by that." Three-sided glass cabinets, Habersham kitchen furniture layered in deeply textured colors, and fanciful hand-painted lilies reminiscent of an ancient Tuscan castle ground the space.

Yet nowhere in the house does its monumental size overwhelm, even in the travertine loggias that connect one end of the house to another. The work of local artists shares wall space with important art — an image of nearby Garden of the Gods in sculpted silk by Colorado Springs artist





Above: The ice rink, sans ice in the summer months, is painted for floor hockey.

Right: The theater room does include a television screen, but the motorized curtains are often employed for stage plays, starring the Oldach children.



Marilyn Kirkman and pastels of cheetahs and leopards by South African artist Paul B. Dixon. "I walk these halls, and I want to see beauty at each end," says Denise. "We feel called to Africa," she adds, explaining that the couple provides financial support to Christian missionaries there.

During construction, friends wrote Bible verses on the studs of the house to bless the home. Now, carefully chosen quotations grace the walls, painted in place by artist Daniel Amstutz, such as Ecclesiastes 3:1: "To everything, there is a season and a time to every purpose under heaven."

The couple's offices, positioned so they can see each other across a small courtyard, reveal their unique personalities. Denise is the author



of *Here Lies Colorado Springs*, a history of the city's historic cemeteries, and she works amid books and artwork bronze sculptures of Thomas Jefferson and America's founders. Rob's office is all structure and order. He is a partner in Colorado Springs general contractor Colorado Structures.

Will the Oldachs ever turn over the house to new owners? "Face it, this is a specialized home," Denise says. "When someone wants this house, it will be because they were led here to serve and love and give. I don't think we will have a choice." □

Colorado-based Kimberly Field writes about history, design, and the Western lifestyle. Her third book will be in stores this fall.

The Cowboy, the Elephant, the Corporate Raider, and the Cold War



If a Hollywood casting agent sent over the quintessential rancher, you'd get Bob Norris, the original owner of the Oldachs' home. He's possibly better known as the Marlboro Man — but that is the least interesting role Norris has played in his 81 years.

Take the story of Amy, for starters. Amy is an orphaned elephant who he raised and taught to waltz and play a piano. She stole his heart when an elephant trainer showed up at Bob's T-Cross Ranch in 1988 looking to rent stalls for six baby African elephants. "Amy was the runt. She only came up to my belt buckle. She was lonely and depressed because she missed her mother," he says. "I fed her by hand. I couldn't let her go."

Norris bought Amy, and the ranch became her pachyderm playground. Norris and his wife found oversized toys, including giant rubber balls and enormous harmonicas that they wrapped and presented to Amy, who delighted in tearing at the paper and bows.

Amy eventually outgrew the trailer Norris built to haul her with them to their winter place in Arizona, so Norris placed Amy with elephant trainer William "Buckles" Woodcock, who found her a home in a sanctuary in Arkansas. Amy, who now has a baby of her own, is thrilled when Norris visits. "I say, 'Amy, Daddy's here,' and she runs over," he says. "I bring her angel food cake, and we have a picnic."

Norris and Amy's relationship is chronicled in the 2001 book *The Cowboy and His Elephant: The Story of a Remarkable Friendship* — although author Malcolm MacPherson ends with the suggestion that Amy will someday return to Botswana. Norris offers a quick correction: "Amy is never going back to the wild. It wouldn't be safe for her. If she ever needs a home, she'll have one with me or my family."

While kindhearted, Norris also has a head for business. As a descendent of a Texaco founder, he headed the stockholders' committee in one of the largest and most complex bankruptcy cases in U.S. history. Corporate raider Carl Icahn, notorious for breaking up distressed companies and selling off assets, had a nearly 15 percent stake in Texaco and attempted to garner enough votes to do the same to it in the mid '80s as the company underwent Chapter 11 proceedings. Norris prevailed and was offered two seats on the board yet turned them down, preferring life on his T-Cross Ranch, raising prized quarter horses.

Norris has been real estate-savvy for decades. "Back in the 1950s, I knew California would fill up, and everyone would come [to Colorado], so I bought land," he says. He soon became the

largest landowner in El Paso County; the T-Cross Ranches, more than 63,000 acres made up of several noncontiguous parcels, are named for the T+ brand he purchased for \$50 from its previous owner. Turns out it was the first brand ever registered in Colorado back in the 1800s.

In 1959, he started building his home where the Oldachs now enjoy the spectacular view. "I set the main beam in the living room so it aligned with Pikes Peak," Norris says. He also built a bomb shelter, which is still there. "We were sitting next to NORAD during the Cold War," Norris says. The shelter was fully stocked for survival during a nuclear disaster. "We used it once, during a flood," he says.

And yes, Norris also did a stint as the Marlboro Man. In the mid-'60s, a Chicago ad agency used the T-Cross for a photo shoot. As the city-slicker models were getting ready, the ad men noticed Bob — the authentic cowboy they were trying so hard to create. He became their model. Yet when the first ad starring Norris appeared on the back cover of *Life* magazine, it was an illustration of him as the Western icon — apparently the abundant wildflowers didn't comprise an appropriately tough background image. He appeared in many print and TV ads but quit the gig after 12 years when his children pointed out the irony of the Marlboro Man telling them not to smoke. — KF