

Making AN ENTRANCE

Portals

*What lies behind these wondrous doors,
With columns firmly set on floors?*

*Supporting arches overhead
Inviting all within its stead.*

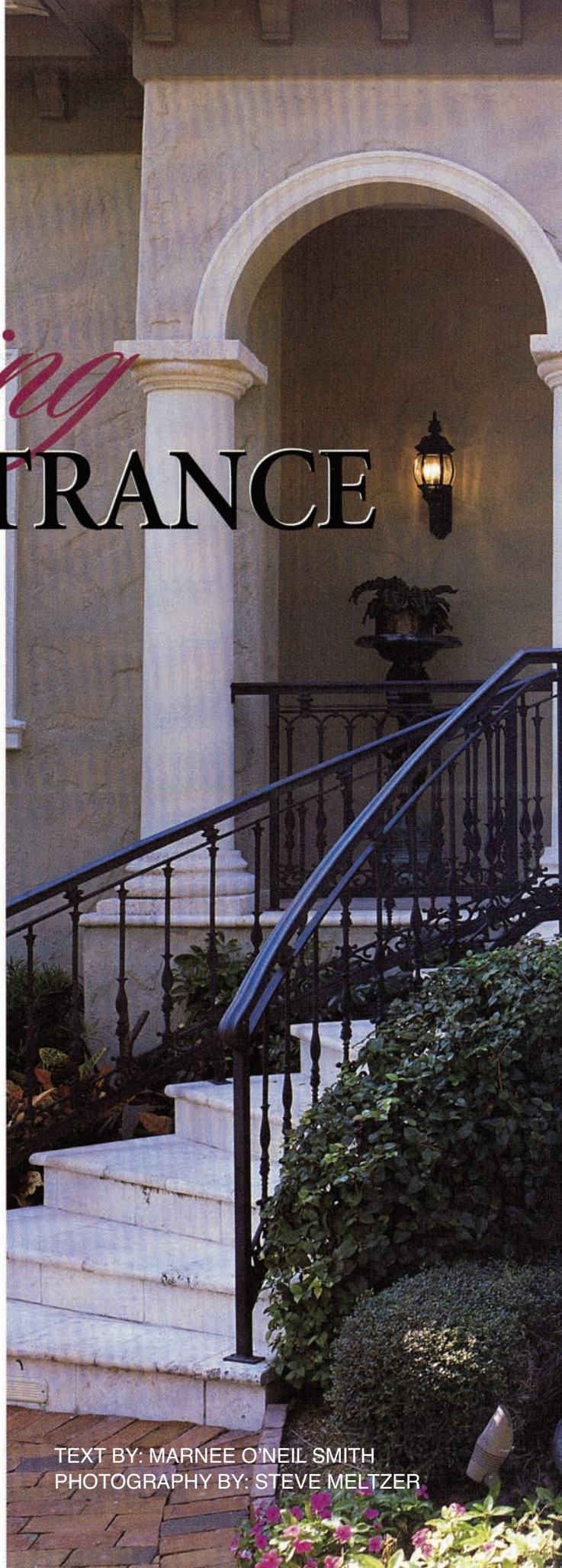
*Stirs emotions of surprise and delight,
Whether it be by day or night.*

*These portals to a person's home,
Calm the soul that wants to roam.*

Alberto Orsini
Sarasota resident, California architect

Elegant dual staircases with wrought iron rails set the tone for many a grand entrance, through stately front doors, a hallmark of Beechwood Builders' homes. Perfectly aligned curved ironwork gracefully frames the fountain and lush landscaping, achieving beauty, balance and harmony.

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This elegant courtyard and pool area uses indoor and outdoor elements to create an inviting oasis.

Have you ever considered the power of the front door? You can shut the whole world out just by closing it. You can extend your hospitality to friends by opening it. You can welcome family home standing beside it, keep them safe by locking it. You can flaunt newfound success by upgrading it, and show your holiday spirit by decorating it.

Subtly speaking, your front door has the power to purvey your feelings, your personality, taste and style. And more than most of us even realize, our doorways can offer up a surprisingly accurate first impression of the real person who lives on the other side.

Our Doors to the Past

History shows us that doorways, in fact, once held great significance for our homeowner ancestors. In the architecture of

ancient Pompeian villas, for example, the front entry was specifically designed to symbolize the political and social position of the family who called it home. As most business activity was conducted from home, the front of the villa included a small covered area where customers and vendors were invited to sit and wait to do business with the man of the house.

Benches and chairs were placed accordingly and often, on the wall next to the door was a large, imposing portrait of the owner. As much a statement of wealth as a strategically placed intimidation factor, the image likely conjured up curiosity and conversation of exactly who it was living behind that door — and just how he might treat his guests.

Today, we don't decorate our doorways with frescos of ourselves to tell the world who we are (at least the vast majority of us don't). We do, however, reveal some of ourselves by the very doors and entries we choose for our home. From their style, open or private; to their color, bright or muted; to the accents



highlighting them and the landscape surrounding them — all are factors which reflect upon the very homeowners who selected them.

Master architect Thorning Little, who has designed some of Sarasota's most prominent residences, summarizes it this way, "To accomplish beautiful architecture, you must think of each facade as a the face of a beautiful woman, the front door being her lipstick."

Monty, I'll Take Door Number Three

Like lipstick, the choices in front doors are immense, so much so, it's almost a shame that each house has only one. Now as much about form as function, there are doors available in every imaginable material, color, style, and size. Metal doors promise longevity and toughness, yet over time, wood continues to

The entrance (above) provides more than just security and privacy. The boating motif coupled with dancing dolphins pays tribute to the residents' love of water.

remain the more popular choice. As for what kind of wood and how it is finished, there is a virtual forest of choices.

Most home improvement centers, such as Lowes and Home Depot, offer an extensive array of both metal and wood pre-hung (already in the casing) doors, from those with a solid facade to a variety of versions that incorporate some glass design, even doors that are made almost entirely of glass. If a single door doesn't fit the bill, there are dozens of double doors from which to choose, and don't forget the scores of side panels and dormer selections for those who desire added detail.

For those with still more refined tastes, there are the custom doors, those hand-crafted by specialty companies or by individual artisans who create each one as a unique piece of sculpture. Throughout the numerous upscale neighborhoods of the Sarasota and Manatee area, you don't have to venture far to find doors of grandeur in fine mahogany or pecky cypress, of richly colored stained glass or clear glass with finely etched designs — a rare orchid or, perhaps, a graceful heron.

Custom homebuilder Jeff Gates, president of Beechwood Builders, Inc., of Venice, FL, stresses the importance of involving his clients in the selection process. "The front door means a great

deal to them," he says. it's the entrance to the biggest investment of their lives."

Beechwood builds some of the Suncoast's most exclusive custom estate homes, each one with it's own original wooden doors, which is somewhat of a company signature. He utilizes Marvin Woodworking, Inc. of Sarasota, he references, "because they do a fine job achieving that special first impression that my clients are looking for in their front door."

Knock-Knock, Who's There?

So, what do the physical characteristics of these front doors have to say about their owners? Take the etched heron design, which may reveal that a nature lover lives there. Full plate glass doors maximize natural lighting and emulate a feeling of openness. They invite the outside world in and, in doing so, treat residents to the best of both worlds — the scenic beauty of the nature world and the sheer comfort of a climate controlled one.

A plain wooden door may suggest that the owner lives a simplified, reserved lifestyle. That same wooden door brightly painted, let's say, in purple passion with green apple trim can give us a remarkably different perception of the personality inside. We might presume these residents to be a little more creative, slightly avant-garde, and certainly more colorful.

Stand before a stunning set of ten-foot custom-made double doors and you can feel how they emulate affluence and prestige. Right away, they impress us, provided, of course, that they are well-suited to the scale and style of the home. When stained in dark tones, they promote a classic, refined finish to the architecture; when clear-coated they add a more natural feel to the facade.

Prior to finishing a new door or refinishing an existing one, be sure to consult with a licensed painting professional who can guide you in the often daunting process of matching the right product to the right surface, and in applying it correctly.

Stain it or paint it? Spray, brush or roller? Sand first or prime? "The ultimate goal is two-fold," summarizes Bill O'Neil, president of Painting Plus, Inc., of Sarasota. "When done correctly, you get the finished look you want for your door now, while properly protecting it from the elements over the long term." Those who neglect part two of the formula, warns O'Neil, especially in our extreme Florida climate, can count on replacing their doors much sooner than they might expect.

Gateways to Paradise; Courting the Courtyard

In close association with the significance of our front doors, are the gated entries and courtyards that sometimes lead us to them. As a pre-entry feature, gates sanction a more formal introduction to the homeowner. Most are designed to allow a teasing glimpse of the architecture, and often prohibit getting up close and personal without an invitation.

They can be just as protective as pretty to look at, complete with elaborate security systems or, they may simply be left open, per the owner's wishes. Either way, gates provide a delightful, yet temporary sanctuary between public and private life.



Entrances to condominiums and apartments can be just as fun and still serve several purposes. In historic downtown Sarasota, through a beautifully crafted wrought iron gate (above), Spanish Oaks Apartments (below) displays a brightly colored facade playfully calling all that come near to enter its courtyard.



Gateways and their supporting mechanisms, may be created from a vast variety of materials. Wrought iron and stuccoed block obviously create a more formidable boundary, while picket and lattice structures are more about charm and romance than anything. You can even nurture a hearty hedge to establish that pre-entry statement you are looking for, whether it's "Keep Out," "Welcome, Friends," or something in-between.

If you are considering constructing a front gate or courtyard on your property, you should always consult your city and/or county building offices first, as you may be required to have a permit in hand before doing any work. Check your neighborhood associations as well, for any ordinances or restrictions that you must comply with. Once all is approved, you may want to contract the services of a landscape architect, who can help you draw up a plan that best suits your needs, including the selection of building materials, fountains, plants, irrigation and lighting options.

Should you be the "do-it-yourself" type, there are more than a variety of books on the subject, as well as cable television shows and websites that can walk you through the entire process.

To Complete "the Look," You Must Accessorize

What's the difference between black stick-on house numbers and hand-painted ceramic ones; a bare front porch versus one sporting a wicker bench and hanging baskets? Hmmm.

Yes, it's another one of those dreaded Motherisms that turned out to be true. When you "accessorize, accessorize" you can transform that little black dress into a "dressed to kill" look — and, indeed, turn your plain 'ole front entry into your

personal statement of style and good taste.

Start small with a few neatly potted plants and a porch swing or get serious with topiaries and porch furniture. Add a cheerful welcome mat or an antique umbrella stand for warmth, a single ceiling fan to cool it off. Nameplates add a personal touch, brass door knockers, and kickplates add a touch of tradition.

But maybe the most traditional (and the most popular) accessories of all are wreaths. They can be seasonal or permanent, flowery or earthy, country, suburban, or urban. A wreath is easy to make, easier to buy, and the probably one of the easiest ways to decorate your door. To make one, begin by making a visit to your local craft store, where you'll find the basics (wreath and backing, door hook, etc.) as well as the accouterments (silk flowers, seasonal decorations, ribbon, etc.). To buy one, just do what comes natural. Practice the art of shopping in one of many delightful local stores like Persnickity Cat or Dockside Imports.

So, if you haven't already done so, it's time to take a short walk outside to the edge of your yard or walkway. Turn around and take a good look. What does your door say about you - the subtle hints it reveals about your personality. You can probably find at least one or two characteristics in the color, the design, and in how you've accessorized it that you can relate with and that others can relate to the person you are.

And if you find yourself startled to find that your door doesn't really say what you want it to — perhaps it's dirty or faded, or it suddenly seems too plain — don't despair. Do get to work! Grab the Windex and a broom, plant some daisies, pick out a wreath... c'mon, give us hint - who's there?
