



## TOM OCHSNER

Thomas Ochsner Architects

Tom Ochsner, AIA, is an artist. Not just in the way all architects are artists. But rather like Michelangelo was an artist: he first began creating with a mallet and a chisel.

Tom apprenticed as a wood sculptor during his childhood before turning his eye to something he thought he could make a living at. In the years since, he has become one of the Santa Barbara's finest architects, designing dream homes for the most discerning clientele.

After 20 years in business, he has his own dream project in mind: A rural site in Santa Barbara County, populated with mature oak trees and surrounded by rolling hills. A client who says, "Give me something wonderful," and allows Tom free reign. He would create for them a house that is a natural response to the site, he says, with a vernacular that is appropriate to the region. The house would have gentle curves to mirror the



### ABOVE:

A central 3-foot-thick adobe wall forms an S-shaped spine through the house, allowing internal spaces to step down on both sides.

*Photograph by Lone Pine Pictures*

### FACING PAGE:

This Santa Ynez Valley residence wraps around the existing hilltop site and uses materials indigenous to the area.

*Photograph by Lone Pine Pictures*



rolling hills; it would comprise natural materials like adobe and stone and wood; and it would be low slung, with a profile and silhouette compatible with the site. The form would work in concert with the setting without relying too much on preconceived ideas. The materials would give the impression that they truly belonged to the region. The house would strongly reference both environment and owner.

That is not to say that the award-winning architect does not get a rush out of giving his clients what they want. He absolutely does, as most of his clients have a very specific vision. Maybe they do want to do something sympathetic to the surroundings or maybe they've only just returned from Europe and they have a concept of authenticity. Either way, the real thrill comes from exceeding their expectations: "What I want is to take what they want and make it extraordinary. I put an emphasis on realizing their dreams, all the while devising solutions for incompatibilities, be it within the house or with house and environment. In the end, I want them to look at what I create and say, 'It's even better than what we envisioned.'"



His is a small practice — just five people — and in a year's time he will complete between 10 and 15 projects, both large and small, sometimes having spent at least that amount of time producing the drawings for a single home. "You can't rush it," he says. "My clients go into this dreaming of their ultimate home. Often they are not willing to compromise on materials or budget. So I approach the design process with a very cautious, careful, long-term, let's-do-it-once type of thinking."

And the results are nothing short of spectacular.



**ABOVE LEFT:**

The layering of beams in the kitchen provides both drama and intimacy.  
*Photograph by Lone Pine Pictures*

**ABOVE RIGHT:**

The structural system for this residence was inspired by regional agricultural structures and is repeated in various ways throughout the residence.  
*Photograph by Lone Pine Pictures*

**FACING PAGE LEFT:**

The screened porch off the dining room is a pleasant place for relaxing after dinner and enjoying the vibrant sunsets of California.  
*Photograph by Lone Pine Pictures*

**FACING PAGE RIGHT:**

This exterior space was designed around an existing oak, which provides a wonderful sense of connection with the natural site.  
*Photograph by Lone Pine Pictures*