

pasadena

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GETTING ON THE HEALTHY
FAST TRACK IS EASIER
THAN YOU THINK

REFRESH
YOUR SKIN
WITH THESE
ECO-SMART
BARGAINS

PAGE 50

LOTIONS & POTIONS!
TURN BACK
TIME WITH
THESE
3 AGE
BUSTERS

PASADENA CALI
CHANGING
THE WORLD
ONE CANCER
PATIENT AT A TIME

PAGE 24

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Grand Entrances

Pasadena door company specializing in vintage Spanish entryways provides premier products that forge unforgettable first impressions.

// STORY BY **JENNY JEDEIKIN**

// PHOTOGRAPHY BY **SARAH BREWER**

▶ **ASK AGOSTINHO ALVES ABOUT HIS VISION OF PORTERA**, THE ANTIQUE SPANISH DOOR COMPANY HE HELPED TO FOUND WITH AMERICAN COUNTERPARTS JOHN SIMPSON AND SORAYA DANSECS IN THE HEART OF PASADENA'S HISTORIC THEATER DISTRICT, AND HE IS QUICK TO GIVE YOU A POETIC ANSWER. "WE ARE NOT HERE TO SELL DOORS, WE ARE HERE TO OPEN THEM," SAID THE ELOQUENTLY SPOKEN GERMAN-PORTUGUESE ALVES. HE IS IN PASADENA FROM SPAIN TO VISIT THE AMERICAN-BASED COMPANY, WHICH HAS A SHOWROOM ON EL MOLINO AVENUE. WITH MORE THAN 15,000 ANTIQUE SPANISH DOORS IN A COLLECTION

that has been curated over the past 30 years, with doors dating back as far as the 15th century up to the 19th century, Portera—which literally translates as "keeper of the doors" in Spanish—is much more than an upscale door store. It's a portal to a highly original and authentic world that today's homeowners are hot to cultivate.

On the Open Market

As the story goes, when San Marino resident John Simpson traveled to Europe with his wife in search of architectural finishes to restore his Spanish-Colonial home, he stumbled upon Alves' collection and a business alliance was born. Soon after, they decided to offer the doors to the public in Pasadena, where Spanish architecture is so prevalent. "The highest appreciation I see for these doors anywhere in the world is in Southern Cali-

fornia," said Alves, who originally considered selling his wares in Barcelona but changed his mind because Europeans do not have the same level of admiration for original antiquities. "People here in California have the most enormous respect and sensitivity for beautiful, individual things which are not mass-produced."

Salvaged from a variety of structures all over Spain, including former castles, churches, farm houses and rustic buildings—and from a wide assortment of architectural styles, from Arab-influenced ornately carved structures in the South, to French-influenced elaborately painted buildings in the North—these majestic doors are saturated with historic character and originality. "You have to understand, in the 1960s and 1970s in Spain, antique Spanish doors were considered a relic of the past, and they were just tossed aside with no sensitivity at all, because everyone wanted modern styles."

CONTINUED ON PAGE 78 »

OPENING NEW DOORS

Intricate restoration process gives fresh face to timeworn portals.

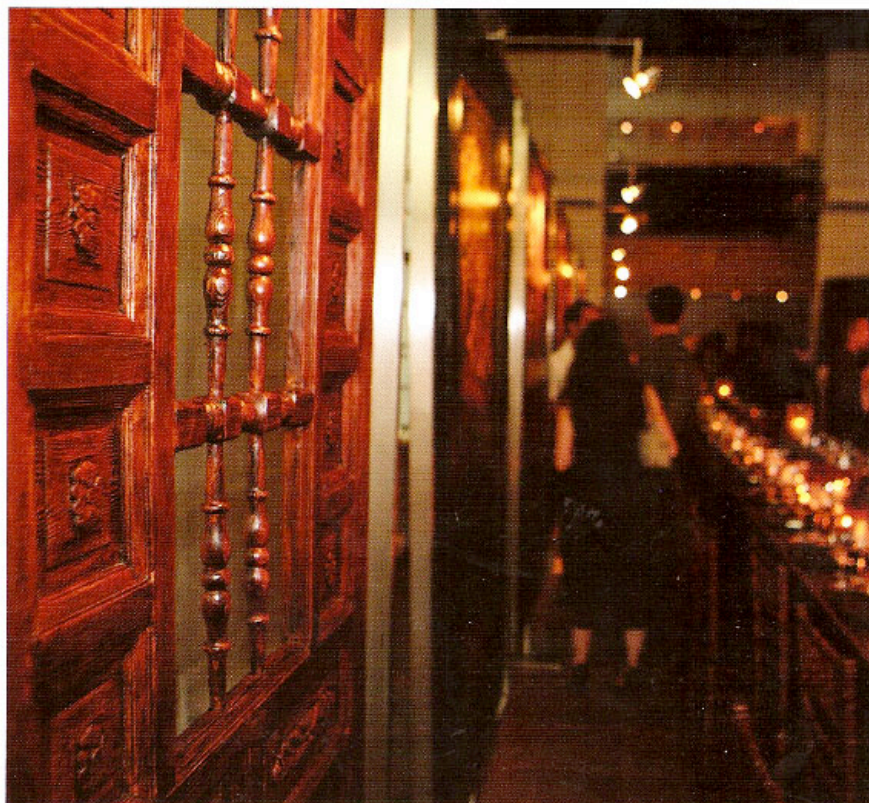
Each of the antique doors in Portera's collection has been restored using the same methods employed by artisans in Spain more than 300 years ago. Soraya Danseccs, one of the co-founders of Potera, who has witnessed the process firsthand, assures customers, "Nothing is manufactured and no machines are used; it's all done by hand using elementary tools, door by door."

For some doors that have been worn down, it is necessary for craftsmen to apply additional pieces of wood. "There are many doors from rural villages," explained Soraya Danseccs, "which are heavily worn on the bottom. The bottom is where humidity and water start eating up the wood." In this case the rotten, deteriorated wood is cut off and are replaced by pieces of antique wood. "No new wood is used," said Alves, "because it wouldn't have the same patina." Instead, rustic pieces of wood from other doors or antique beams are introduced to the door, using a rudimentary method without nails. It's during this phase that, if the application necessitates it, a door can be made taller.

The next step is to add a liquid beeswax that is either clear or has a darker color mixed in. "This is the same beeswax used for centuries" said Alves, "and without being a varnish, it enhances the expression of the door to give it the finish it needs, and then the newly added parts will then have the same shine."

The criteria for a door painted by hand can be very different. "For a hand-painted door, often very little is done," said Danseccs, "other than the application of beeswax, because we do not want to alter the painting, other than to touch up paint."

Then there are also those doors that were not intended to be painted at all. "What happens often," said Alves, "is an 18th century door that was in a house was painted blue in 1920, and in 1970 someone painted it pink. Then when you go to restore it, there are like seven layers of paint,



Back to the Future

Not so today. In a community like Pasadena, which is experiencing a Renaissance-like revival of Spanish architecture—with the restorations of the Vista Del Arroyo bungalows in the historical Grand Avenue neighborhood and the return of a plethora of individual residences to their original Spanish architecture—Portera can offer its collection of antique doors at dizzying heights averaging between \$6,000–\$24,000 per door (with some as high as \$300,000)—and succeed in spades.

"These doors give your home an automatic soul," said interior designer Carolyn E. Oliver, purveyor of Oliver's in Pasadena and a frequent buyer of Portera doors for her customers. "What could be a more beautiful way to enter someone's home than to enter it through someone else's past that you're acknowledging by carrying that past forward?"

In today's mass-produced, disposable culture, even the most humble door from more than 200 years ago is a door worth salvaging and restoring. "We need to remember that until 1850, there was no middle class like we

WINDOWS TO THE WORLD: Portera's one-of-a-kind door designs give an unmatched glimpse into the heart and soul of the home.

have today, so people really didn't have a lot of furniture," Oliver said. "People couldn't afford furnishings, but they would live in a cottage with a beautiful wood-carved door."

Oliver doesn't limit her use of Portera doors to Spanish-style residences. "They're called Spanish doors, but this is really a European collection, and that's what's so exciting about it," she said. "These doors go very well with a wide range of styles: Storybook houses, 1920s English cottages, Hollywood regency or just about any contemporary home with clean lines."

Interior Motives

With a huge collection of interior doors, Portera's products are not only for the entrance of the home. One of the most popular placements, in fact, is as the door to a powder room. "Powder room doors are often the

CONTINUED ON PAGE 80 »



first thing you see when you enter someone's home," Agostinho said, "and it's like having a fantastic piece of art in the entryway which you can touch and experience."

Used as headboards, front pieces for bookcases, dining-room wall panels and as gates on properties, they are also a model for sustainable living. Soraya Dansees—a former head of development at Kevin Costner's production company and one of the co-founders of Portera—has had a

lot of interest from the environmentally conscious brigade. "A lot of our clients are green builders," said Dansees, a Pasadena resident. "Their response has been great, because when you use our doors, instead of cutting down a tree, you're using something that already exists; you're recycling."

Retooled Relics

Dansees and her partner John Simpson are getting ready to accompany Alves back to Spain

PERFECTLY IMPERFECT: Ironically, it's the nicks and cracks that make a Portera creation so incredibly flawless.

to learn more about the elaborate restoration process that each door goes through before it is offered to prospective clients in Pasadena in the company's state-of-the-art, by-appointment-only slide screening room. "Each of our doors has been fully restored using the same techniques and waxes from hundreds of years ago," explained Dansees. "Most likely if you were to find a Spanish door in an antique shop today, it would not be restored, adapted for modern use and ready to hang in your home. That is what distinguishes us, in addition to our large inventory."

Aging Gracefully

Although So Cal homeowners appreciate the historical aspects of the doors, Alves explained, some American customers are also seeking perfection, which is something these time-traveled relics are not. "We restore a door with a very high criteria to return it to its natural beauty and make sure it is not warped or uneven," he said. "But as often as we can, we are also leaving the door the way it used to be. Sometimes people will find a crack, and we have to say: Look, we're not going to restore it anymore, because that's a characteristic of owning something that is 200 or 300 or 400 years old, and that's what gives life to that door."

Onward and Upward

Alves has been so busy with the business, which opened less than a year ago, that he hasn't had an opportunity to utilize the Portera collection himself inside the small castle he owns in Northern Spain. How many Portera doors will he need to replace in order to keep up with the Joneses in Pasadena? "I don't even know how many doors I have," he said, laughing. "I'm going to start counting tomorrow." ❧