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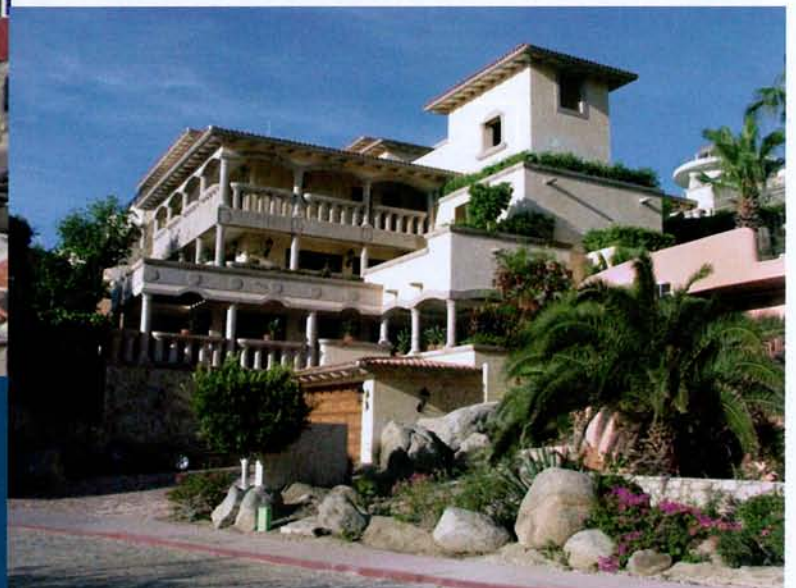
LESSONS IN ARCHITECTURE FROM CABO SAN LUCAS

By James M. Williams

THE ANCIENT ASIAN PRACTICE OF FENG SHUI (pronounced fung schway) combines the principles of design, environment, nature, emotion, energy, health and well-being. Feng Shui recognizes and embraces a balance of opposition and contrast. (This is also true in describing the practice of architecture.) One of the five elements of Feng Shui is fire. The direction associated with fire is south, the emblem is the sun or rays of light, the associated season is summer, and the life aspiration of fire is fame and recognition. All of the above are indicative of Cabo San Lucas, Mexico, where I recently enjoyed a week basking in all it has to offer.

Cabo is a port city that survives on tourism, including its many restaurants, shopping and various activities. My wife went to the marketplace and discovered handcrafted silver and glass. I discovered lessons in architecture and design that could only be experienced there.

Located on the southern tip of the Baja California peninsula and bordered by the Sea of Cortez and the Pacific Ocean, Cabo is prime real estate. The area is classified as a tropical thorn forest (referring to the plethora of cactus). Temperatures are similar to most desert regions ranging from a low of 60°F to a high of 95°F. The humidity can cause it to feel much hotter and shade seems scarce.



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Upon our arrival, we learned there hadn't been rain for 10 months, yet the next day a fierce tropical storm struck causing minor flooding. After only a few days, any signs of rain and flooding had dissipated. Landscaping is sparse yet well-planned, requires little water and some newer subdivisions have even perfected the use of dryscape. Dryscape incorporates strategically placed vegetation that requires very little water. Many of the plants are actually in pots or planters with sculpture, rockscapes, stone fencing, and other decorative surfacing.

Hurricanes occur every two or three years in Cabo and wood is scarce; therefore, homes are constructed of reinforced concrete. All homes have cisterns to store water. Windows and doors are strategically placed to take advantage of not only the view, but of the natural ocean breeze used to economically cool the house. Covered patios provide much needed shade and help reduce cooling costs. Here, sustainable construction occurs almost naturally.

Architectural styles in Cabo San Lucas vary and include; Mediterranean, Spanish Eclectic, Greek Isle with white plaster and brick-domed ceilings, and an array of Contemporary. No two homes appear the same as they cling to the steep hillsides, fighting for an ocean view (and if lucky, a view of the actual beach as well).

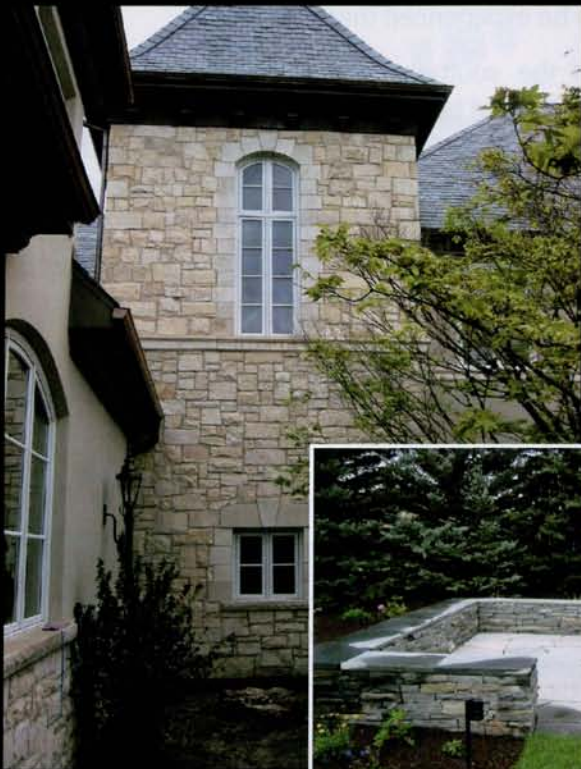
Each subdivision has a quaint village ambience. Atop the higher elevations, the narrow cobblestone streets resemble coiled snakes, twisting and winding their way through the surrounding hills, and most one-way roads eliminate any traffic issues.

A CITY OF CONTRASTS

Cabo is full of contrasts which add to its beauty and interest: desert and ocean, new high-end estates and old village homes, traditional taco carts and nontraditional resort dining, a quiet peaceful afternoon for a siesta and a busy event-filled evening are just a few.

All of this combines to provide a rich human experience. What is better than great food, friends and architecture?

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