

# Builder

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## GOOD AS **GOLD**

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**BY JENNY SULLIVAN AND KATHLEEN STANLEY**

**G**OOD ARCHITECTURE IS CONTEXTURAL. So with the balmy climates of most of the West a consistent factor in the Gold Nugget Awards, there were plenty of stunning outdoor living spaces inciting floor plan envy in this, the competitions's 43rd year. As usual, there was no shortage of Tuscan and Spanish colonial hideaways eliciting the notion that every day at home should be like a vacation. It's a promise that never gets old.

Appropriate though these perennial favorites may be for their sunny settings, there were some surprises to

boot. The eight judges opted to reward revivals in a few other flavors – including some mid-century modernism (one a production plan at that).

Kudos also went to more than a handful of ethically minded little-projects-that-could – developments that went the extra mile to build green, promote public transit use, render affordability, straddle schizophrenic city zones, preserve nature, and generally put the brakes on sprawl.

With 676 entries hailing from 12 states and a host of international locales, there was something for everyone in this year's bounty. Write to us and let us know which projects are your favorites. And which ones surprised you.



**PATIO DADDY-O:**  
Hard angles and sleek curves combine to create dynamic, open living spaces at ALTA, the 2006 Home of the Year, a nod to mid-modern in Palm Springs, CA

# RETRO FIT

ALTA – PALM SPRINGS, CA

**T**YPICALLY, THE PHRASE “VINTAGE architecture” sparks visions of gabled Victorians or quaint colonials with cramped interiors. Unless you’re in Palm Springs, CA, where it’s code for mid-century modern.

ALTA, an enclave of 67 luxury residences in this fabled playground of the rich and famous takes its historical context to heart. With their butterfly rooflines and low-lying pavilions, the desert contemporary domiciles pay homage to forms first introduced to the area by design icons William Cody, John Lautner,



Donald Wexler, and Richard Neutra. Except that in this case, the houses aren’t one-off experiments of the avant-gard. Rather, they are based on a series of semi-custom plans by architect Narendra Patel, a one time Wexler protégé.

Built for socializing, ALTA uses traditional post-and-beam construction to create expansive spaces that blur the boundaries from indoors to outdoors. Patel honored the community prescribed 18’ height limit (intended to preserve view corridors of the Santa Rosa Mountains), albeit just barely.



## PROJECT

**AWARDS:** Home of the Year; Grand Award for Best Single Family Detached Home; Merit Award for Outstanding Floor Plan; Merit Award for Community Development

**ARCHITECT:** Patel Architecture, Rancho Mirage, CA

**DEVELOPER:** Newport Coast Capital Management, Palm Springs, CA

**BUILDER:** ALTA Construction, Palm Springs, CA

A free-flowing entertainment and culinary realm features dramatic 17’ high expanses of glass and uplifted roof forms that project out to a covered pool terrace. All elements direct that eye toward the site’s rugged mountain views. An outdoor dining peninsula juts out into the pool creating the illusion that diners are floating on water. The front elevation is no less inspired. A thick stone-clad wall is offset

by smooth finished volumes and punctuated by deep openings – massing so clever you almost don’t notice the 3-car front-loaded garage (a necessary configuration to accommodate the backyard party zone).

As in many master planned communities, ALTA comes with options for extra bedrooms, home offices, media rooms, and guest houses. But the choices also include some less predictable fare, such as pocket sliders, clerestory windows, and photovoltaic roof panels – details that the original mod squad would no doubt approve of. – J. Sullivan