

One of a Kind:

Featuring unique homes & gardens...  
and the people who create them

Story and Photos By Chris Bertrand

## **Latino TV Brings Home Improvement To Monrovia Neighborhood**

Not long ago, Latino television producer, Juan Escano sat in his own home, wishing he knew more about new products and technology for upgrading and improving his own property. Combining his professional life with his personal interest resulted in the current production and home improvement work under way now in nearby Monrovia.

In this first home improvement series geared to the Latino audience, Escano comments that their target audience is the first time or first upgrade homeowner. This premiere season of "De Casa a Hogar" or "From House to Home," is scheduled to run at year end in Los Angeles, New York, Dallas, Houston and Miami.

Finding the right Los Angeles neighborhood presented the initial challenge. Monrovia was chosen for its ethnic diversity, style and range of homes available, plus the added bonus that, as Escano puts it, "Monrovia's upcoming Gold Line extension, for commuter train service to downtown LA, poises this city for a healthy property value increase in the next few years. "Location, location, location!" Similar, predictable property value increases occurred in Dublin, GA, for instance, after San Francisco's BART commuter train extended there several years ago.

Next, the show staff started knocking on doors in potential neighborhoods, finally finding a group of five agreeable homeowners on Violet Avenue in West Monrovia. Unique here is that the end product will not only significantly renovate the primary home. The entire block will undergo an exterior facelift, moving it toward green friendly exteriors using cutting edge, "Duration architectural coatings" donated by Sherwin-Williams, the largest paint manufacturer in the country. Offered to the homeowners in period authentic color palettes, these paints offer advanced resin technology, low VOC and odor, high washability, extremely low fade plus anti-bacteria and anti-mildew properties, according to manufacturer's rep, Jonathan Juarez. Some additional exterior treatments like fencing and period trim may also be incorporated.

The goal for the 1927 vintage, 785 square foot, primary home is to bring the infrastructure, technology and interior up to date on a middle income budget, reconfigure the landscape and fencing to improve usability on the small lot, and to restore the period exterior to qualify it for Mills Act status. According to the [www.Ca.Gov](http://www.Ca.Gov) website, 1972's Mills Act "Economic incentives foster the preservation of residential neighborhoods... Owners of historic buildings may qualify for property tax relief if they pledge to rehabilitate and maintain the historical and architectural character of their properties for at least a ten-year period."

Many major corporations are donating products for use in the project, such as Toyota's Hino truck division, Sherwin-Williams paint, GAF roofing, Quikrete concrete mixes, JT Wood

Windows and Mullican Hardwood Flooring, down to PODS onsite storage units, Bosch tools and Werner ladders. Since the products are usually donated in fixed lots, leftover donations will be allocated for charitable use within Monrovia. Hinds donated custom 26' truck will provide Escano's crew onsite production capability.

Familiar faces from Sierra Madre and Pasadena were chosen to tackle the flooring, tile and electrical challenges. Marla Fields Jakovljevic, owner of Pasadena Wood Floors, was instrumental in securing the extensive prefinished hardwood flooring from one of her primary suppliers, Mullican. Pasadena tile artist and this project's architect, Cha-Rie Tang of Direct Imagination, whose custom products are available locally at Tap 'n Tile, met Escano through her artistic tile designs for the planned Monrovia train station. She will create Batchelder-style tiles in that renowned Craftsman fashion. Using molds taken from her study of the original Batchelder home in Pasadena, the custom tiles will be used in the kitchen and an outdoor fountain for the reconfigured landscape space.

Yiannis Arvanitidis from Sierra Madre's Cornerstone Electric will upgrade the entire electrical system to code, making it significantly more efficient and safe. He'll also relocate the service modules into the garage to improve aesthetics, and install high efficiency heating and cooling. The planned installation of a fuel cell will provide opportunity to reduce electricity dependence on "the grid.: Escano speaks highly of Arvanitidis, "When we interviewed local contractors, he stood out from the beginning. He was steps ahead of me, offering suggestions and refinements to the process and products that weren't even on my horizon. He's been great to work with! In fact, so many of the products and contractors have shown exceptional quality. GAF singled out Arturo Ortiz and Modern Roofing as one of their top installers. They did an exceptional job, and their customer service was incredible!"

When choosing products, three priorities emerged; first, that it be highly energy efficient and/or green friendly. For instance GAF roofing's Timberline product, offers a wood shake look, but this high tech, asphalt shingle includes several layers of material, providing extra weather resistance, and "breathing" moisture release elements. Second, the products should be easy for the do-it yourselfer to use. Arvanitidis commented on using the Quikrete products, "Everything is there in the bag, instead of ordering a truck. With no special tools required, it's perfect for the smaller jobs, especially by the homeowner. They can read the directions, add water and use it without complicated professional knowledge." The third priority for product choices required that all products chosen provide Spanish language instructions. As Escano commented, "This is important not only for the Spanish speaking homeowner, but for Latino contractors, so prevalent in the LA area. The probability for success greatly increases when the directions, particularly for construction products, are in the native language!"

In the weeks to come, more hard work and construction will continue, with an unveiling later in the year, showing off the completed homes. Escano is particularly looking forward to the "wrap party" for the neighborhood, with a block celebration, ribbon cutting with the homeowners, neighbors and city officials.