

# The Detroit News

# HOMESTYLE

SECTION F

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 18, 2006

## A Contemporary Vibe

She's the architect, he's the contractor of their thoroughly modern home

Marge Colborn / Detroit News Design Editor

Roberto Leao says there are three responses to the ultra-contemporary home he and his architect wife, Rejane, designed and built in Franklin.

"The first is 'WOW,' the second is 'oh,' and the third is 'different,'" says Leao, who acted as general contractor on the 4,850-square-foot home.

"One person said, 'There's a place for a home like this,' implying that the place isn't in a Midwestern suburb," adds Leao, 49, a Ford Motor Company supplier.

But why not a contemporary home in Franklin, especially one designed by an international architect such as Rejane Leao, 44, who has designed hundreds of contemporary residences in Brazil? She's also designed retail establishments, even a fire station. The Metro Detroit area represents forward-looking technology in the automotive industry, so why shouldn't our housing stock reflect some cutting edge innovativeness, too?

For a look-see at the Leaos' striking bi-level dwelling with its bridge-over-a-moat entrance, as well as five other remarkable residences, plan to attend the 2006 Heart of the Home Tour on March 5 presented by the Groves High School (Birmingham) Parent Senior Committee. For details, see facing page.

Married for 14 years, the Reaos have two sons, Carlos, 11, and Ricardo, 9. Prior to building their current home, the family lived in a nearby traditional Colonial. When they opted to move, they found a 1950s ranch on a heavily wooded 1.8-acre parcel in Franklin. Rather than remodel the nondescript ranch, however, they choose to demolish it and build a new home.

"We felled only two healthy trees," says Roberto, who claims his wife was the brains and he was the hands of the project. (Michigan builders **Pierson-Gibbs Homes** assembled the shell of the house and did the carpentry.)

For her part, Rejane says it was a challenge working with her regular clients, in addition to her husband on their home.

"He wanted everything open -- the living room, dining room, kitchen -- with lots and lots of windows," says Rejane, who has a second-floor office, which is private from the rest of the house.

Happily for Roberto, he got everything he wanted, plus a lot more, including a marble foyer and marble floors in the bathrooms, a floating walnut staircase, onyx vanities and a bamboo floor in the combination living/dining areas. Incidentally, the staircase was constructed in South Carolina, weighs 800 pounds and took Roberto and six strong men to move it from the driveway into the house.

Although many people think a contemporary house is sterile and definitely not familyfriendly, this one proves them wrong. Thanks to a mix of warm and cold materials (mahogany, stainless steel, tinted glass) and the generous use of primary colors (cobalt, red, yellow, green), not to mention Rejane's powerful and colorful paintings, the house is welcoming and personal. And it is evenly warm throughout due to cost-efficient radiant heat in the floors.

It takes Rejane two to three months to develop a blueprint for

a house because she insists on visualizing the structure in its setting from a variety of angles and perspectives. The process for her family's home was no different. The result is a poured concrete, hard-panel white structure with a cobalt accent color on the outside that's repeated inside. Interior and exterior merge seamlessly, and one can practically see through the house, front to back, but thanks to sleek white Hunter Douglas shades at the windows, privacy is maintained. Curved glass panels echo the curve of the driveway for continuity.

The main floor of the house contains the living/dining areas, kitchen, a glass-walled library, four bedrooms and three baths. Its lower level contains a family/media room with a billiards table and plasma TV, kitchenette, spare room/office and four-car garage. There's a balcony/deck off the living room and a terrace off the family room.

"The house has a flat roof," says Rejane because we now have the technology to do it. "Builders don't need to construct pitched roofs anymore."

This is very much an international house, too. The furnishings range from Italian chandeliers and seating to Brazilian light fixtures to vintage German upholstered easy chairs. Bamboo for the floor came from China.

Considering a kitchen remodel? Check out the Leaos' Berloni (Italy) open kitchen with its blue lacquer cabinets, man-made Zodiac quartz countertops, walnut (from Ohio) bar area, clear acrylic backsplash and General Electric appliances.

"We love our GE Monogram range hood, our two GE Profile side-by-side refrigerators and our GE Advantium and Trivection cooking units," says Roberto, noting that he and Rejane recently cooked a salmon and side dish in seven minutes, although the side dish normally would have taken 50 minutes to cook. (The Trivection unit is essentially microwave heating added to a convection oven.)

The couple's master bedroom suite overlooks a fragrant sassafras forest. A window over the Jacuzzi tub never freezes thanks to a heated ceiling overhead. Semitransparent glass encloses the shower. Floating vanities are made of Brazilian mahogany. A room is devoted to his and her closets with a floor-to-ceiling, wall-to-wall mirror.

There are inexpensive but savvy materials in this house, too. The lower level's kitchenette counters are made of white Corian from Lowe's. It is the cheapest Corian, although the Leaos chose it not because of its low cost, but because it looks pure and complements the white barstools Rejane designed.

If you think you can't live cozily without chintz, flowing drapes and Oriental rugs, think again. "This is a joyful home, a house for kids and entertaining," Roberto says. "We use every inch of it."

You can reach Marge Colborn at (313) 222-2756 or mcolborn@detnews.com.



Charles V. Tines / The Detroit News

The sleek Italian Berloni kitchen has stainless steel GE appliances, a Bosch cooktop, bamboo floor and walnut-topped eating area.



Charles V. Tines / The Detroit News

The master bedroom bath features a marble floor, Brazilian mahogany and granite countertops and a heated ceiling over the tub area so the window never freezes.



Charles V. Tines / The Detroit News

Architect Rejane Leao designed her family's contemporary Franklin home. Roberto Leao acted as general contractor. "Roberto wanted all the spaces open to each other -- the kitchen, dining room and living room," Rejane says.



Charles V. Tines / The Detroit News

A pair of side-by-side GE Profile stainless steel refrigerators and a GE Monogram exhaust hood give the kitchen a clean, contemporary look.

### Tour details

**What:** 2006 Heart of the Home tour is presented by the Groves High School Parent Senior Committee and features six distinctive homes in West Bloomfield Township, Franklin, Bingham Farms and Birmingham, including a vintage Colonial with French flair and a newly constructed home in an established neighborhood. Proceeds benefit the graduation activities at the high school.

**When:** Noon-4 p.m. March 5.

**Extras:** Each home will include arrangements by area floral designers and music performed by members of the Groves Orchestra.

**Tickets:** \$25 for Friends of the Tour and \$50 for a Patron ticket, which includes a wine and appetizer reception following the tour at one of the residences. Purchase tickets at Groves, 13 Mile and Evergreen Road, Birmingham; The Apple Tree Rome in Franklin Village or by sending a stamped, self-addressed envelope, check payable to Groves PTA Graduation Committee to: Elana Weisberg, 6736 Woodside Trail, West Bloomfield Township, MI 48322. Maps will be distributed to ticket holders on tour day.

**Information:** (248) 737-2883 or elanarealtor@sbcglobal.net.



# A contemporary vibe

Brazilian couple imbue their Franklin home with bold touches.