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HOT SEATS

LARS LERUP AND
SOHELA FAROKHI POKE
FUN AT THE CLASSICS

A DESIGNING PAIR
SHOE MOGULS SAM
AND LIBBY EDELMAN
FIND THE PERFECT FIT

STAGE FRIGHT
MICHAEL LEVINE'S
SINISTER SETS

PLUS:
DIM SUM AND
THEN SOME

CORNERS OF THE
RICH AND FAMOUS
DIOR GALORE



MANUEL PALOS
RECASTING
THE CLASSICS
IN STONE
AND PLASTER

Next time you're shopping at Neiman Marcus, or admiring the behemoth eagles atop the Pacific Telephone Building on New Montgomery, or watching the sun set over the Palace of the Legion of Honor, think about Manuel Palos.

For over 25 years Palos has left his indelible, anonymous mark on dozens of icons throughout the city, re-creating and restoring precious architectural and sculptural details that, without his unusual skills, would have long ago fallen into disrepair.

The first thing you notice upon entering Palos's Bayview studio are the Pacific Telephone eagles. The plaster-of-paris birds (models for the ones on the building) stand 16 feet high. Perched next to the models for the Legion of Honor Greek statues, they form a kind of guard unit watching over the studio. "I like to look at them," Palos says proudly, happily strolling around his huge work space.

The studio is jammed with various restorations in progress. Each follows strict processes and employs special materials that Palos has developed over the years. They range from small touch-ups of weathered public buildings to complete make-overs.

Five years ago, when the City of Paris building was being transformed into Neiman Marcus, they called Palos. The restoration was running behind schedule, and the company's executives, based in Chicago, had never been to the site. They phoned his studio and said, "You've got four months to do it all from scratch." This meant reconstructing all of the original ornamental details, including columns, ceilings, medallions, shells, bas reliefs, trims, drapery and moldings. Astonished, Palos retorted, "Do you guys know what this takes?" "No, and we don't care," they growled back.

So the artisan and his crew toiled night and day for four

months and finished the job. "The architect in charge at Neiman Marcus came over to the studio, took one look at what we were doing, and took off his tie and pitched in," Palos recalls. "My nephew Tony, who was 11 at the time, taught the architect how to cast." This is typical of the backbreaking jobs that have gained Palos the reputation of being a genius of restoration, of working quickly and accurately.

Each job, whether an original design or a restoration, starts with a scaled-down model of the figure. Palos then makes a fiberglass mold and uses an enlarging machine to dramatically increase the size (for example, the 16-foot eagles were originally created from three-foot models). Palos then fills the mold



with one of his custom-mixed materials, depending on the job. Most often he uses Decocast, a stone-and-resin mixture he developed for minor castings such as architectural details, fountains and planters.

Eight assistants help Palos restore floating cornices, pediments, brackets, balustrades, capitals and seals—the bread-and-butter touch-up jobs that make up the bulk of his commissions.

But Palos most enjoys assignments where he's creating original designs, such as the horse-motif fountain for Donald Trump's New York residence. "The most exciting thing is creating," he says. "When something starts to come out, it gets very exciting. I find it's emotionally intense, because it's a pleasure every minute."

Palos, 52, is from Mexico and studied art in Europe before becoming a pioneer in the restoration business. He still visits Italy annually to collect marble and inspiration. Palos's art training and experience in the technical side of restoration make him



Palos in his Bayview studio. Mammoth gargoyles (top) guard the entrance.

JEREMY (continued from page 28)

KOTAS This grand shingled, multitiered tower might be just as comfortably located in the hills of northern Italy, says Kotas. Yet, as in all of his Laidley projects, regional references prevail: "There are clear echoes of the Bay Area past here, something any observant native would recognize."

Movement through the house best illustrates the integration Kotas speaks of.

Enormous windows (perhaps the largest in the city) provide washes of unexpected light above the darkened entrance. The rising spiral staircase leads to a bright atrium lying beneath the grand parlor, kitchen and loft bedroom.

Architectural collaborator Paul Edward Shaffer III shares equal billing on the Gregory-Ingrahm house. "But the rest of Laidley is mine," Kotas shrugs. "If this is my legacy, so be it." ■

MANUEL one of the few people in the country with the eye and the skills to tackle such a wide variety of assignments. He personally handles each job from start to finish, including the initial design, casting and installation.

When asked if he's had any grand failures, Palos shakes his head vigorously. "Not yet," he crows. That's saying a lot, as he has no formal engineering background. Everything is in his head; he doesn't use a calculator to compute stress or tension. It's all done, Palos explains, "from experience." This is particularly astounding in the case of large, precariously perched objects such as the eagles.

A few years ago those very eagles caught the eye of George Lucas. When the Lucasfilm people were scouting locations and props for *Tucker*, they visited Palos's studio and froze at the sight of the towering figures. In typical filmland fashion they pronounced, "We gotta have one. We need it in two days, in fiberglass." Palos replied that this was out of the question, so Lucas sent in trucks and hordes of workmen to tote one of the existing 1,500-pound models to the film studio ("After they paid me good money for it," Palos remembers fondly).

Today Palos's designs are widely available, as he's recently opened a showroom in his studio where customers can purchase his original designs: columns, bas reliefs, fountains, furniture, capitals—or anything else they want to special order.

He's doing all of this on top of his regular commissions, which normally keep him more than busy. But Palos's passion is his work. "It's fun," he says enthusiastically. "You never know how a piece is going to look until it's finished. I wish I could work all day and night. Too bad I have to sleep." ■

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