

# Blasts from the Past

text Michelle Gringeri-Brown  
photography Jim Brown, et al

In August 2003, Jim and I thought up the concept for Atomic Ranch, and by March 2004, the premiere issue was bound and on newsstands. Among our early featurees were relatives—Jim’s brother and his wife, who allowed us to shoot their ranch without knowing what we were up to—and all manner of contacts made through a network of enthusiasts and advertisers.

As we checked in recently, some of our past profiled homeowners had moved on, but many others are still tweaking and enjoying their houses. Here’s a second look at some of our favorites. ...



## BEACHY, FUNKY Ranch (No. 1)

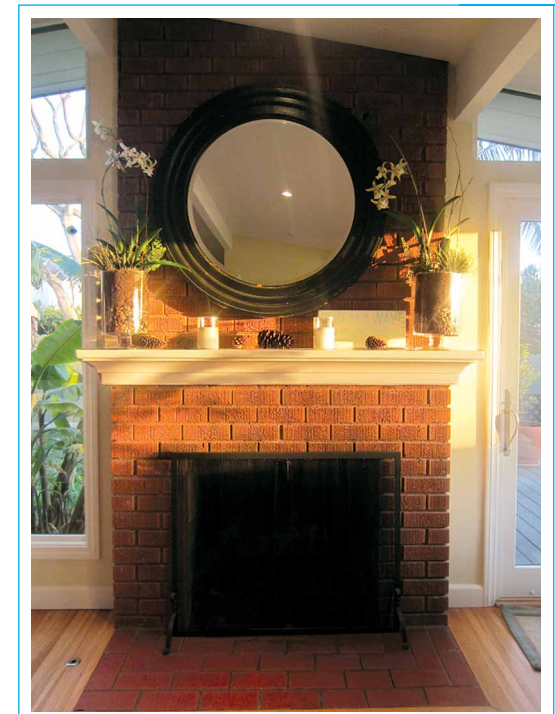
The Hermosa Beach locale and open floor plan were what drove Jeff Brown and Susan Savela Brown to buy their 1954 three-bedroom California ranch. In our Spring 2004 premiere issue, their article addressed some hoped-for changes to the brick fireplace surround and the down-at-the-heels kitchen. Today they’ve moved toward a more traditional contemporary look and made some major changes.

“We did a seven-month remodel that included all utilities, the roof, floors, windows, lighting and a new kitchen,” writes Savela Brown. “The old house had no insulation and it got very chilly in the winter and hot in the summer. We put insulation in the attic, the crawl space and most of the walls. The original windows were very drafty and those, too, were replaced. We converted a closet with a large water heater into storage and installed a tankless model in the garage.

“In the kitchen, we re-engineered a beam, which eliminated a post; this allowed more flexibility with the kitchen design and opened up the room. The original layout had a side access door that was removed to allow for more counter space, and we moved the island for better access from the hallway. The vinyl flooring was replaced with hardwood to match the rest of the house and not chop up the space.

“Over the years we discussed fireplace options with our designer but didn’t move on anything until after the remodel was completed. Painting the fireplace white or covering it with slate would have looked like what everyone else was doing. To honor the original design, we just dressed it up with a new mantel for about \$400. It was an inexpensive facelift and the brick still suited the style of the house after the remodel.

“We still greatly respect and appreciate the atomic ranch feel and look of our house. When we started the project, we were ready to go really retro in the kitchen but ended up with a style that was more classic beach bungalow.”



Susan Savela Brown (2)



Current views framed in blue.