

# Coronado

Winter 2011

L I F E S T Y L E



## Flying high!

*Naval aviators, past and present, agree:  
There's no place like home in Coronado*

**CORONADO CELEBRATES 100 YEARS AS BIRTHPLACE OF NAVAL AVIATION**

# Sites and Insights

Architect Christian Rice's designs for difficult spaces often yield unexpected pleasures



By Ann Jarmusch

Awash in golden sunlight and cool sea breezes, Coronado sang a siren song to architect Christian S. Rice. Just 30 years old, he already had a distinguished resume when he founded his firm here.



photo by Brandon James

Now 36 and working in Northern and Southern California from his Coronado base, Rice began his career with some of the nation's hottest architects: Jonathan Segal in San Diego, Michael Rotondi in Los Angeles, Will Bruder in Phoenix and the firm of Mack Scogin Merrill Elam in Atlanta.



photo by Brent Haywood Photography



“It truly was an incredible experience working with such an amazing and experienced group of architects,” he said. “All (the) offices were constantly working toward unique and highly creative designs.”

Friends and the Southern California climate and cultural mix drew him to Coronado, and Rice not only set up shop, he married Allison Koop-Rice, a Coronado native and real estate agent. The couple live with their baby daughter, Zoe, in a mid-century modern house, which they are restoring.

“There are only a handful” of houses

from this era in Coronado, Rice said, as he gave a quick tour through the sunny, single-story home. It has lots of glass facing a wide ribbon of backyard, where he’s already hung a swing from an old tree branch for tiny Zoe. He’s pleased the house still has most of its mid-century details, including a vintage chandelier in the dining area.

Rice works a few steps away from his kitchen, in a former studio apartment that’s attached to the house, thereby separate but very close to home. Architectural models for recent housing projects and design books and



Spindrift residence



photo by Brandon James

Christian Rice, Allison Koop-Rice and daughter Zoe enjoy a moment on the backyard swing.

magazines — from *Architectural Record* to *Coastal Living* — stand in orderly rows in this immaculate office. An oversize atlas conveys his love of travel and curiosity about people and the world.

Rice has designed projects ranging in size and scope from kitchen remodels to houses to multifamily housing measuring more than 10,000 square feet in Northern and Southern California. While working for Mack Scogin Merrill Elam he worked on a soaring, 50,000-square-foot student center at Wellesley College in Wellesley, Mass., almost to completion. That's

when California called.

Now settled and in tune with Coronado's cottages and condos, Rice has found that, in addition to Arts and Crafts bungalows, people seeking new, permanent or vacation homes in Coronado tend to like two strains of architecture: something he calls "Nantucket style," with gray shingles, white trim and a front porch; or "contemporary," with floor-to-ceiling glass and flat roofs that beg for roof decks he's happy to provide and equip with fireplaces and sound systems. When

working with developers on speculative housing projects, "I try to mesh the two styles," said Rice, whose approach has proven commercially successful.

The result may be a cozy but spacious Nantucket-style beach house with lots of casement windows, open-beam ceilings and simplified detailing. Or he's also created elegantly spare contemporary homes where glass doors fold away, erasing the boundary between indoors and out. In both, he showcases natural materials, such as wood and stone in neutral colors, to ensure a warm, inviting environment.

Rice likes a challenge, and he's devised a solution that works on Coronado's many narrow and deep lots, which measure only 25 feet wide by 140 feet deep. He designs two-story homes with full basements finished with a family room and extra bedrooms, where bunk beds are popular. He brings natural light

into these lower levels through light wells so they don't seem dark. He also supplements first- and second-floor living spaces with balconies and outdoor "rooms," a device that also breaks up the mass of the long, boxy shape dictated by the lot size.

"I make use of every inch," Rice said of his interior architecture.

Summer Bettencourt, a guest in one such Nantucketesque home, which was built on speculation, said it suits the owners so well that friends assume it was a custom design for the married couple. She marveled at how many relatives were accommodated comfortably for a long holiday weekend. Working on a laptop at the dining table in the middle of the first-floor great room, she said the house feels wider than its modest 18 feet.

That's partly because Rice emphasizes the uninterrupted length of his open-plan great rooms. In front of Bettencourt's

**Greek Al Fresco Dining**

Voted Best Greek Food 2002-2010

**SPIRO'S GYROS**

Catering & Takeout  
**619.435.1225**  
11 am - 8 pm daily - at the Ferry Landing

**Baklava**

**Mousaka**

**Chicken Souvlakia**

GREEK SALADS • GYROS (BEEF & LAMB OR CHICKEN) • FRESH FISH DAILY





photo by Brandon James

Rice lets the sun shine in through skylights at a remodel of this bayside residence.

table was a conversational seating group around a fireplace and three glass doors opening onto a front terrace. Behind her, the kitchen unfolded, with a long island in the center and glass doors filling the

back wall. With little effort, these doors fold to one side, uniting the kitchen with a comfortably furnished, roofed outdoor “room,” seemingly equipped for all possible scenarios with a ceiling fan; an upright gas heater; long, striped draperies and a tabletop for a portable TV.

Rice has also found a niche in designing four- or six-unit condominium projects that add more, compact housing to the city’s residential offerings, which in the center of town are dominated by single-family homes. This is groundbreaking work he takes on with confidence and urban style.

Being at the right place at the right time helped Rice secure two big commissions from two owners of adjacent lots. One wanted a large Spanish Revival-style home, the other a three-unit contemporary condo complex, which Rice trimmed in copper and ipe wood. He designed these projects simultaneously, ever mindful that the placement of windows, patios, driveways and the like not



photo by Brent Haywood Photography

Olive residence

disturb the next-door neighbors. He also worked with the same contractor on both and landscaped both properties.

"I have a green thumb" he said. "While many people see (yard work) as a chore, I enjoy tinkering in my own yard" and selecting and placing plants for his clients.

Walking around the three condo units, which face three streets, Rice said, "We could have sold that middle unit six times over." It lies behind a high wall, an introverted domestic design

he created after visiting the courtyard houses of the Mexican colonial city of San Miguel de Allende. The rooms of the house embrace a courtyard, which is not visible from the street. It offers a private, protected place for year-round outdoor living.

From the architects who employed him in the past, "I learned to always question a site and rethink what might seem mundane," Rice said.

The upbeat, well-spoken architect has a secret weapon in his career



***Coronado Academy of Dance***  
***is excited about 2011!***

- **Dance FUNdamental (2 year olds)**
- **Pre-School Combo (pre-tap and ballet ages 3-5)**
- **Ballet, Tap, Jazz, Hip-Hop, Modern/Contemporary**
- **Annual School Performance**
- **Non-Competitive Family Environment**

Registration available at your convenience.  
(upon space availability)

Family and Military  
Discounts Available

CAD Dancer is  
*Miss Sarah McCort*

*Where Fun  
Meets Excellence  
Since 1998*

**619.435.6436 WWW.CORONADODANCE.COM**  
**952 Orange Avenue (entrance behind Starbucks)**



photo by Brent Haywood Photography

Davies residence

toolbox: He majored in economics and studied marketing at the University of California, Berkeley, where he earned a Bachelor of Arts degree. (His Master of Architecture degree is from Arizona

State University.) The undergraduate degree has helped him speak the same language as developers who hire him and to emphasize good service.

“He’s very accessible,” said Bette

**The law offices of  
Robert T. Plumb II**

- DIVORCE • CLS FAMILY LAW
- TRUST & WILLS • DUI/DMV
- BANKRUPTCY • PERSONAL INJURY

*State Bar  
Association  
of California*

*Board of Legal  
Specialization  
in Family Law*

*Since 1979 with over 30 years of experience*

**(619) 437-4261**  
**Coronado Plaza**  
**1330 Orange Avenue — 3rd floor**



Sherman, who has renovated several houses with The Jackman Group and recently hired Rice to design a major remodel of her newest home. “He’s knowledgeable and listens very carefully to what you say.”

“Being accessible is really important,” Rice noted. “That was one of my priorities when I set up my business.”

His business is good on and off the island. While Coronado challenges Rice to make the most of small lots, he’s also working for a client with a six-acre ranch in Sonoma County. There he stretches

his creative muscle with new construction (“I call it contemporary barn style”) that complements old barns, which are being preserved.

In a Coronado condo, Rice opened a door to a breezeway on the second floor and invited his guest to climb a white spiral staircase to a roof deck. “I make use of every inch,” he said again, “and in doing so I like to add some surprises. ★”

*Ann Jarmusch is a San Diego writer on art, architecture and historic preservation.*

A guy with five kids knows what it means to be a

family dentist.



COSMETIC  
DENTISTRY

IMPLANT  
RESTORATION

TEETH  
WHITENING

EMERGENCY  
CARE AVAILABLE

Michael B. Copp, D.D.S.

435-3185

1125 Tenth Street, Coronado  
Corner of 10th & C