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Hang 'em High

Michael Bradbury was a hard-as-nails district attorney—the steely architect of Ventura County’s nationwide reputation for safety. These days, the former D.A. and his artist wife, Heidi, are more concerned with kids than crime, and their sprawling ranch in
By Mark Storer—Photos by Gary and Pierre Silva

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Coastal Eclectic

What do you get when you combine a natural sense of aesthetics and an entrepreneurial spirit? For Keith and Samantha Repult, the possibilities were limitless

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Big Ideas for a Small Space

For Michelle and Jeremy Walker, a 600-square-foot bungalow in Midtown Ventura was big enough to house a world of fresh design ideas

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Mike and Heidi Bradbury in the aptly-named family room, with kids Mike Jr., 15, Heather, 8, and Sean, 13.

Michael Bradbury has the hands of a farmer: large and knotted with muscle, cracked and worn from hard work. Standing with him on his rustic Hang 'em High Ranch in the Ojai Valley, you'd be hard-pressed to think of him as the former District Attorney for Ventura County, a politician and heavy operator. "I was raised in Susanville," said Bradbury. "I had cows and horses, and when I came to Ventura County, I brought horses with me."

The Art of Giving

National Charity League
Juniors of Ventura County

SHOPPING

Chair Up

The rain has stopped and soon the kabobs will be sizzling, the margaritas chilling. Which means it's about time for you to take a seat—outdoors

ABOUT TOWN

Homegrown Jazz: a Couple's Composition

From the garden teahouse to the art-filled interior, the Ojai home of musical legend Roger Kellaway and his wife, Jorjana, is in perfect tune for a spring fete

SHORT LIST



The family-oriented ranch home was a shared vision.

But Bradbury, then and now, is more than a cowboy. He had Pete Wilson's ear and called Ronald Reagan a friend. His hallway is dotted with photographs: Bradbury with the "Governator"; Bradbury and his wife, Heidi, with Margaret Thatcher; Bradbury with Reagan. Though he made his living prosecuting criminals and representing clients, he still laments the loss of a time when a handshake sealed a business deal.

In spite of his storied past, here at the ranch he is first and foremost a husband and father. Hang 'em High is Michael and Heidi's combined vision, a 10-acre wonderland with a menagerie of animals, a zoo where dogs, horses, a llama, a pig, birds, sheep, and many others gather in a sort of happy commingling.



In the sunroom, an antique fortune-telling scale stands tall amongst cowboy collectibles.

The Bradbury's ranch is part retreat, part entertainment, and all home. "It's all about the kids, really," said Bradbury. He's talking about the couple's three children: Michael Jr., 15, Sean, 13, and Heather, 8. "We wanted a place where they could grow and be," he said.

But this isn't Neverland. Michael's career as a prosecutor and his political connections tell a very real story. This is a study in contrasts. The Bradburys, married now for some 20 years, bring together the varied interests of a creative and serious artist and a take-no-prisoners D.A., combining them in a Western retreat. "We wanted to instill certain values in the kids and preserve the Western way of life," said Michael.



The living room showcases a Schimmel piano and Mehl Lawson bronze.

Purchased in 1992, the ragged old ranch house was daunting. "When we found the place, our Realtor told us we shouldn't even take a closer look," said Heidi. "It was a disaster. There were 20 or 30 people living in the main house, and there's a guest house out back where there were another dozen living."

Michael, however, saw incredible potential. "It was powerful," he said. "It looked like a Roman bath. There were columns throughout the main hallway and the dining and living rooms. There were marble floors and chandeliers. We spent a lot of time just cleaning it up, getting rid of those columns, redoing everything."



Interior adornments range from this saddle by Juan Beltran to Heidi's greenhouse orchids.

Clean they did. And with an eye for the Old West and an eye for Ojai, Heidi, an artist and painter, began to style the decrepit old ranch into a family home. She and Michael, both horse lovers, bred and raised a few quarter horses. Though three of the females were preparing to foal at the time of this writing, this is by no means a breeding business. For lack of a better term, the Bradburys are simply animal lovers. Their dogs enjoy a high place of esteem, right alongside the llama and the ducks. As we walk the property, two Labrador retrievers flank us, acting as a kind of security detail, but with tongues lolling and happy expressions instead of earpieces and dark glasses.



Old saddles and a collection of branding irons hang in the path to the training arena.

The whole family rides, and the tack room is riddled with favorite saddles and bridles. Only the couple's eldest son, Michael Jr., has split from the family's Western roots: there is one black English saddle among the myriad brown Western ones.

The house itself is 4000 square feet with mostly wood floors and tile. Heidi's office, a true artist's studio, is strewn with her work, complete and incomplete, as well as an amalgam of dog toys and even a couple of dogs. Sunlight pours through windows into the living and dining areas, dappling a giant wooden archway in the entry hall and dancing across the undulating wood floor.



The fireplace was hand-built using rocks from the ranch. Dugan Essick crafted the bar and wraparound bookshelves from Russian walnut burl.

Michael's office is the office of a country lawyer. There are bookshelves and more pictures, badges from his work as Ventura County's District Attorney. There is a notable gun collection, from which he removes a beautiful, old Colt revolver for me to hold. Picture windows look out to the backyard deck, shaded by one of more than 50 redwood trees the couple planted. "We planted every tree you see out here," said Heidi. "We just created what we wanted."

And what the Bradburys wanted was a family home. The place is lived in, not unnecessarily bedecked with trinkets. There are obvious and valuable keepsakes, and certainly Michael and Heidi's careers are noted with her paintings of Yosemite and his photos of political connections. But pictures of the children are more prominent, and none of the rooms have age restrictions. Heather, the eight-year-old, follows us into Michael's office without a thought of being shooed away.



The pool is a fantasy for "kids of all ages."

Directly behind the house, a multi-layered deck descends to a large pool with beach entry and a built-in waterslide—for "kids of all ages," as Michael said. There's even a hidden picnic area in a hollow created by the redwood trees.

Down the path from the tack room and workout arena is the kids' tree house. "I worked pretty hard on it," said Michael. "I woke up one morning at 2:00 a.m. because it suddenly occurred to me how I wanted it to be. The next day I told Heidi I was going to get the proper tools to frame the walls. When I got back, she'd already done it."



Animals like Pork and Beans, a.k.a. Rosie, are treated like family.

Beyond the tree house, a stroll up the backbone of the ranch leads to a commanding view of the Topa Topa Mountains. "We have our own view of the Pink Moment," said Michael, referring to Ojai's evening phenomenon when the sunset turns the stony faces of the Topa Topas pink. As he talks, the horses and the llama come running to the fence to get a quick pet and all three children are playing together near the pasture.

Family vacations are something of a tense discussion for Michael and Heidi. Most kids can't wait to get out and see the world, but the Bradbury kids are content in Ojai. After all, everything they want is here. "That's what makes me love it all the more," said

Heidi. "When we go on vacation, the kids are the ones who can't wait to come home. They don't want to leave." ●

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