



Successful MEETINGS

START HERE

SuccessfulMeetings.com

10.10



LAKE TAHOE/RENO
CONNECTICUT
NEW ORLEANS
KOREA
MEXICO

Pulling Together

Unilever's top
managers set sail
and **discover** the
power of **team-building** | pg 26





Special Events



GIVING BACK MEXICAN STYLE

Meeting Industry Vets Open Their Private Home-Museum for Special Events

By Andrea Doyle

Golf...tennis...yoga...these are traditional pursuits of those who have recently retired. But not for John Venator, who, for 22 years, was president and CEO of CompTIA, the leading trade association for the world's information technology industry, and his wife, Dorianne, a former association and corporate meeting planner. They have meticulously restored a 400-year-old hacienda-style house, which they call Casa de los Venados, in Valladolid, Mexico, as a showplace for their-more-than-3,000-piece collection of Mexican folk and contemporary art.

It may seem ironic that two Americans who are still perfecting their Spanish—Dorianne was born and bred in Chicago, and John was born in Portland, OR, and raised in Chicago—are two of Mexican folk art's biggest ambassadors, but they have had a lifelong love affair with Mexico.

John's passion was ignited during his first year at Lewis and Clark College in Portland, OR, where he took advantage of a pilot program that allowed freshmen to study abroad. He spent the year in a "home stay" with a family in Puebla, Mexico, and now affectionately calls the family's son, Manuel, a pediatric surgeon and recently retired director general of the Puebla Children's Hospital, his "Mexican brother."

Years later, after a hectic conference in Miami in the late 1970s, John walked into an Eastern Airlines office to inquire about specials for a long-weekend getaway. "The agent told me about a \$102 roundtrip ticket to Cancun," he recalls. "Funny thing was I had lived in Mexico but had never heard of Cancun, a destination that had just been developed. I stayed at one of the six hotels that existed then, and that trip rekindled my love of Mexico and the

Yucatan specifically."

Later, John and Dorianne bought a time share, then a two-story penthouse unit in a condo hotel, and eventually an oceanfront townhouse in Cancun that they still own. They talked about living in Mexico full time, but both agreed they wanted to live in a hacienda-style house with "history," rather than their modern three-story townhouse.

House Hunting While On Vacation

The couple explored different areas of Mexico during vacations over seven years. Puebla was appealing but too far from Cancun. They couldn't find a

READER ROI

- Retirement hasn't stopped duo from event planning
- Mexican folk art impresses

property in their price range in Oaxaca and moved their search to Merida, the seat of the Yucatan, but with more than one million residents it seemed too urban for their tastes.

While Dorianne was off planning a meeting, John visited Valladolid, a tranquil city of approximately 70,000 halfway between Merida and Cancun, near Chichen Itza. "I found a time capsule of

wonderful old buildings just waiting for someone to come along and nurse them back to full glory and historical identity," he proclaims. (Today, Valladolid, the third largest city in Mexico's Yucatan state, surprises with provincial charm and chic hotels and restaurants.)

A large, run-down, high-walled house on Calle 40 caught John's eye. Someone had roughly painted on the

"I found a time capsule of wonderful old buildings just waiting for someone to come and nurse them back to full glory."

—John Venator

IF YOU WANT ELEVATED THINKING, TRY 7,000 FEET.

Deer Valley Resort is known the world over for our superior service and unbeatable amenities. Featuring The Lodges at Deer Valley and our three elegant day lodges, we offer over 45,000 square feet of full-service conference facilities and can accommodate virtually any size group or gathering. Having your head in the clouds can be a good thing – plan your next event with Deer Valley. Call us at 800-424-3337 or visit deervalleymeetings.com.



DEER VALLEY
RESORT



facade, "Se Vende Esta Casa" ("This House for Sale"), and a phone number. He called the number and was allowed in by the caretaker. No one had lived there since 1964. John was smitten by the 55-square-foot central courtyard with a magnificent sour orange tree, an indigenous jicara tree, and overgrown shrubs, and by the house's 25-foot-tall ceilings and meter-thick stone walls. He saw potential. The asking price for the 18,000-square-foot house seemed surprisingly within reason and extremely affordable by Chicago standards.

That evening, he called Dorianne and described what he saw. She was taken by his excitement and told him to make an offer. After a month of negotiations, the two owned the house.

"It was 10 years ago, October 10, that we bought this ruin. Some people say we are visionaries. Others say we were just damn lucky and fortunate in who we selected as our construction contractor, project manager, and architect that everything went so smoothly," he explains. The two wanted a name for the house, not just an address, and agreed on Casa de los Venados, which means "House of the Deer." The idea came from a painting they bought about 10 years ago from an artist from Merida, of a priest holding open a cape with a golden deer embroidered on it.

The international architectural community has honored the Venators'

home with four first-prize awards in three major regional, national, and international architectural competitions.

Today their home features five duplex guest suites and an additional self-contained, two-story duplex suite for themselves. There is a large, landscaped garden in the back of the house, complete with a 32-by-50-foot pool, fitness center, bar, and pergolas. The landscaped central courtyard remains.

As soon as the sale of their Chicago condo is finalized, (set for the end of 2010), the Venadors plan to make Casa de los Venados their permanent residence and open it up for all to tour. Eventually, the house, with an endowment and entire art collection, will go into a foundation with a mission "that it be used for the public good."

Their art collection is more than 50 years in the making. Most pieces were purchased directly from the artists. "We

don't buy things from galleries. We go into rural villages in various parts of Mexico, where artists are working in rudimentary houses with cement floors and a bare lightbulb. We'll watch them carve masks or fire ceramics in an outdoor pit," says John. "We buy things we have a passion for and to support the artists. Folk art is something many Mexican people create during the off-season when they are not planting or harvesting their corn. They sell their pieces for anywhere from a few dollars to a few hundred dollars to help augment their sustenance living."

New Pro Bono Job

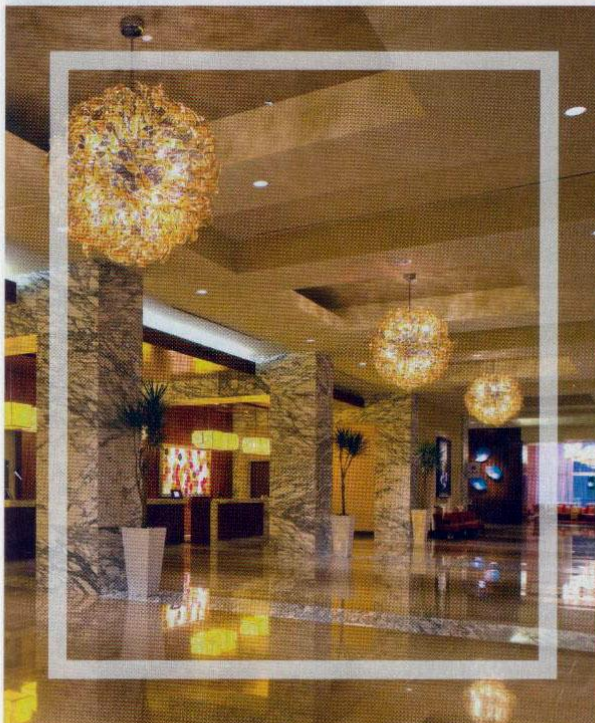
John laughs as he explains that his new home has turned into a pro bono job. Having an event at Casa de los Venados and need a mariachi band? No problem. Cooking demonstration? A cocktail buffet or a sit-down meal?



View of the 55-foot-square courtyard in the center of the house, with a stone fountain from Guadalajara

He has made supplier contacts for all of these things and more. The home can accommodate up to 300 for special events encompassing its sala grande, central courtyard patio, and rooftop terrace and bar. Valladolid is very close to Chichen Itza, and an event here can be a great way to top off a tour of the Mayan ruins. "The truth is I'm having so much fun doing this," he declares.

If interest in tours of the house and



A MARVEL OF MODERN DESIGN. AN EQUALLY STUNNING LOCATION.

GRAND HYATT SAN ANTONIO: AN ENTIRELY NEW LEVEL OF *service, convenience* AND *luxury*.

Grand Hyatt San Antonio offers everything you would expect from a four-star hotel. And then some. Like 115,000 sq. ft. of flexible meeting and function space that includes 5,200 sq. ft. of exceptional balcony space. Meeting rooms with natural light. A state-of-the-art business center and our 24-hour Stay Fit gym with a heated outdoor pool. WiFi everywhere. And rooms with flat panel TVs, plus our ultra-comfortable Hyatt Grand Bed™. It's everything you would have expected. And quite a few things you never knew to expect. For more information, contact your Hyatt Sales Representative at 210.451.6400 or visit grandhyattsanantonio.com. Hyatt. You're More Than Welcome.



210.224.1234
600 E. MARKET STREET AT BOWIE
GRANDSANANTONIO.HYATT.COM

HYATT, Grand Hyatt, and names, designs and related marks are trademarks of Hyatt Corporation. ©2010 Hyatt Corporation. All rights reserved.



Above: A barbed-wire wreath with red paint to symbolize blood that represents the pain and suffering of Frida Kahlo, the famous Mexican painter; Right, top: Ceramic sculpture of Frida Kahlo's Day of the Dead-inspired skull created by famous ceramist Alfonso Castillo; Right, bottom: Since their Mexican home is named "Casa de los Venados," which means "House of the Deer," the Venators have collected many pieces of folk art with the reindeer as the subject

its art collection continues to grow—as he expects after positive reviews of his tours, and support from Valladolid hotels and the Mexico Tourism Board—he will assemble a staff to help out. Given his background, expansion seems a sure thing.

As president and CEO of CompTIA, he is credited with building the organization's staff from seven to 160, with 16 offices around the world, and its budget from under \$1 million to more than \$50 million. His travel schedule was grueling; he was away from home two-thirds of the time. Asia, Africa, Europe, and South America were parts of the world he frequented. "It may sound glamorous, but it was not. They pay us money because it's work; if it was a va-

cation we'd pay them," he chuckles.

Dorianne started her career in ground passenger services with American Airlines. After a stint in hotel sales, she became an association meeting planner and earned her CMP certification. During her meeting planning career, which included working for the American Association of Individual Investors, the Tribune Co., Quaker Oats, and PepsiCo, one of her proudest accomplishments was persuading the U.S. Department of Labor to recognize meeting planning as a legitimate job classification. It took more than two years of persistence to make this happen, and Meeting Professionals International recognized her with its President's Award, on behalf of the

