



# CASA DORINDA

**Architect:** Cearnal Collective

**Tile Contractor:** City Tile and City Stone, Guy Tzur, President

**Merkrete Technical Sales Manager:** Sergio Flores

**Merkrete Products Used:** Hydro Guard SP-1, 720 DUSTLESS LHT Mortar,  
735 DUSTLESS Premium Flex, Pro Epoxy Grout,  
Duracolor Grout



Casa Dorinda –Santa Barbara Retirement Community.

**Casa Dorinda in Montecito**

Casa Dorinda, a continuing care retirement community (CCRC), opened in 1975 for seniors and is operated as a non-profit organization by the Montecito Retirement Association. It is home to approximately 300 residents providing healthcare, housing and other services. The original mansion was designed by Carleton Winslow, a noted architect who designed the Santa Barbara Natural History Museum, The Valley Club and other historic estates in Montecito. When built in 1919, the 80-room Casa Dorinda was one of the largest homes in Santa Barbara. Aside from having servants’ quarters for staff, a two-story guesthouse and other outbuildings, the mansion itself consisted of a dining room and courtyard, a music room, library, a magnificent tower and acres of formal gardens.

**The History of Casa Dorinda**

Built as a home for Mr. and Mrs. William Bliss, the estate later served as a girls’ school, a military housing center and is now home to one of the country’s finest retirement communities. Anna Dorinda Blaksley Bliss was born in St. Louis, lived in Manhattan, and moved to Santa Barbara to retire. Her philanthropic efforts left a lasting mark on the Santa Barbara community, including support of both Cottage Hospital and the Santa Barbara Botanic Gardens. She and her husband purchased a 16-acre parcel in Santa Barbara and wanted to build a magnificent home in which to live out their remaining years. They hired renowned architect Carleton Winslow to design plans for their new home in Montecito. Construction was completed in the spring of 1919. Casa Dorinda’s 45 acres included three formal gardens, a vegetable garden, flower gardens, the great lawn and a variety of trees, many of them oak and other indigenous species. The 80+-room mansion was one of the largest homes in Montecito.



Bar & grill seating area installed with Merkrete Hydro Guard SP-1, 735 DUSTLESS Premium Flex and Pro Epoxy Grout.

Anna Dorinda Bliss remained at Casa Dorinda until her death in 1935 at the age of 84. The estate was left to her only child, Mildred, and her son-in-law, Robert Bliss. They offered Casa Dorinda to the Navy in 1942 for use as a recuperation and recreation center for returning military personnel. The cost of maintaining the property proved to be prohibitive for the Navy, and the estate eventually reverted to Mildred and Robert Bliss.

In 1946, the Blisses sold the property to Dr. Homer F. Barnes, who opened the boarding school The Montecito School for Girls. The school closed in 1956 and, after several more transitions, the estate became available for sale in 1970. Casa Dorinda was meticulously reno-vated and opened as a retirement community in 1975, beginning a whole new chapter for the grand estate.



*Exterior doorways with gorgeous, colorful accent tile.*

### **Casa Dorinda Retirement Community**

Casa Dorinda offers residents a variety of options to enhance their lives. Residents live in their own apartments, cottages or in the assisted care facility located in Montecito. Casa Dorinda serves the residential, social, artistic, emotional and medical needs of many of Santa Barbara's senior citizens. It is a traditional residential care community, but there is so much more offered to individuals residing at Casa Dorinda. Most live independently and are extremely active — taking classes, pursuing hobbies and participating in many cultural and social events. Casa Dorinda's well-appointed common areas include a library, music room and the oriental room, located in the main building on the first floor. In addition, there are jewelry, ceramic and photography studios, several meeting rooms and a computer lab on the grounds. The gallery outside the painting studio showcases some of the residents' work.

### **Casa Bliss Expansion Project**

Casa's Bliss expansion addresses campus and community needs by adding healthcare and housing through a combination of independent-living apartments and cottage-style homes. Residents will also have more recreation areas, an updated clinic and a new bar & grill. Three acres of oak woodlands will be added, increasing their preservation and providing more open space for the enjoyment of the residents and the outside community. Finally, the 1970s architecture in the main plaza will be updated to better suit the historic architecture of the Main Casa, originally built in 1918.

### **Grandeur and Expertise Come Together**

Van Nuys, Calif.-based flooring contractor, City Tile & Stone Tile, known for its tile and stone expertise in medium to large commercial and residential projects,

was responsible for the multifaceted installation. A staple in Southern California, City Tile & Stone Tile's skillset includes ceramic and stone tiles, exterior stone veneer, stone pavers, thin-panel porcelain walls and fabricated stone. They fabricate and install stone in many shapes and for several purposes, from curved bar countertops and stair treads and risers to mechanically anchored stone veneers — always exceeding customers' expectations of quality and service.

Rafa Nolasco, City Tile & Stone Tile's superintendent, worked directly with the designers of the property in choosing and supplying all the natural stone, porcelain tile, mosaic, and accessories. Foreman Willie Cortez and his crew installed approximately 20,000 square feet of various tile and stone over several phases.

### **Merkrete Provides a Flexible Solution**

Retirement communities and healthcare installations can present interesting challenges for the designer and installer to overcome. In some cases, these applications place remarkable stress on the tile and stone applications creating a challenging environment not only for the finished tile or stone, but also for the installation system materials. City Tile & Stone Tile, aided by Merkrete Technical Sales Manager Sergio Flores, assessed the job



*En suite bathroom installed with Merkrete Hydro Guard SP-1, 735 DUSTLESS Premium Flex and Pro Epoxy Grout.*

requirements and provided recommendations for the proper installation system for each specific application throughout the build. This combined with the safeguards put in place to protect everyone from the coronavirus presented some additional challenges.

The specifications called for crack isolation and waterproofing in most parts of installation. Because of the aggressive project schedule due to the pandemic, work began using Merkrete Hydro Guard SP-1. Using a liquid applied, fast-drying product, Hydro Guard SP-1 combines crack isolation up to 1/8" and a waterproof system to enable crews to prepare the substrate for setting tile at a faster pace. Hydro Guard SP-1 features excellent elongation, adhesion and high strength properties to provide a 100-percent-waterproof membrane that also prevents the transfer of substrate cracks to the finished ceramic



Care center -LHT porcelain plank tile installed with Merkrete 720 DUSTLESS LHT Mortar and Duracolor Grout.

or stone tile surface. “Merkrete’s liquid membranes have been a mainstay of the industry for about 50 years, and we rely on their performance,” said Nolasco.

With a properly prepared, crack isolated and waterproofed substrate to work on, the installers began setting various sizes of large porcelain tile and planks throughout the private units and villas. There is no doubt that large tile and planks present their fair share of installation challenges. Planks in particular demand tighter tolerances to maintain the beauty of the tile and overall aesthetic of the installation. Therefore, selection of the setting material is critical. City Tile & Stone Tile’s preferred mortar is Merkrete’s 735 DUSTLESS Premium Flex and 720 DUSTLESS LHT Mortars for these types of applications. “The smooth and creamy material makes for easy spreading, and the DUSTLESS technology keeps the mixing areas a lot cleaner” says Cortez. “735 DUSTLESS Premium Flex is easy to use and has a tenacious bond offering high strength and flexibility.” Both products feature Merkrete’s patented DLT® DUSTLESS Technology providing less dust and a cleaner working environment.

The project consisted of several villas, cottages and apartment buildings that encompassed all aspects of retired living. They included over 4,000 square feet of personal care units containing bathrooms and full showers completely waterproofed with Hydro Guard SP-1 with

Reinforcing Fabric for heated floors. The gorgeous tile was 12” x 24” through-body porcelain set with Merkrete 735 DUSTLESS Premium Flex and finished with Pro Epoxy Grout. Additionally, over 3,400 square feet of distinctive and inspiring porcelain tile was installed on both floors and walls in a separate dining and kitchen facility. Also found were Malibu Ceramics decorative feature wall, detailed pattern entryways, and wainscoting throughout the common areas.

Also included in the project was a new residential bar and grill restaurant for dining and entertainment for the residents. Over 4,500 square feet of Hydro Guard SP-1 for crack isolation and waterproofing was used underneath the gorgeous porcelain tile flooring.

### **Merkrete and City Tile Defeat Pandemic Issues**

The obvious challenge was the ongoing coronavirus pandemic combined with the fact that the project was taking place at a retirement community. City Tile & Stone Tile and their chief safety officer, Ed Klapholz, took extra care with all safety protocols necessary for appropriate distancing, masks and prevention of any potential person-to-person transmission of the virus. The strict timeline due to the coronavirus pandemic also presented some challenges so it was critical that the products get delivered and the job completed on time. “Fortunately for this project’s requirements, we have plants and distribution right here in southern California, so our turnaround time and ability to get our products to the jobsite quickly were no problem,” says Flores. “We have been using Merkrete products for several years,” said Guy Tzur, president of City Tile & Stone Tile. “As a matter of fact, we now use Merkrete on most our tiling projects both large and small, because we have the trust in the performance and delivery of their products and service.”

The stunning architecture and surrounding tile and stone elements were completed in April 2021. “The decorative feature wall and other custom tilework brought a timeless and classic elegance to this truly inspiring installation,” said Merkrete National Sales Manager Todd Boos, “and partnering with a great tile contractor and project designers led to a satisfying and successful finished project.”

