



Helen Hunt
Mad about acting since age 8 when she saw 'Godspell.' **M9**

MANSION

\$75 Million
An 8-acre estate lists on Southampton's Meadow Lane. **M8**



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THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

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House of Funko

In Coronado, Calif., the CEO of the popular toy company has transformed the historic W.A. Gunn House into a fun-filled 'dream house'



DAMON CASAREZ FOR THE WALL STREET JOURNAL (4)

Brian Mariotti's favorite Funko toys tend toward the nostalgic, including **Tony the Tiger.**



\$5 to \$100
Price range of Funko toys



\$20 MILLION
Total cost including purchase of properties

26
Number of seats in the 'Star Wars'-theme theater room

7,000 SQ. FT.
Size of the added basement

\$6 MILLION
Cost to own the house next door*

*TO GET THIS HOUSE, THEY HAD TO BUY A SECOND HOME AND RENOVATE IT FOR THEIR FORMER NEIGHBORS



Brian Mariotti and his wife, Shannon Mariotti, spent four years renovating the W.A. Gunn House. They added a 7,000-square-foot basement, which includes a 'Star Wars'-theme theater room and glass cases filled with hundreds of Funko toys.

BY NANCY KEATES

It isn't unusual to lust after a house in your neighborhood.

But most people aren't able to buy that house—and the property next door—when neither are for sale, and spend four years, and what contractors estimate was well over \$20 million, including the purchase price, to re-create the home's past—turning it from an aged, Moorish castle into a still-authentic but more opulent, enhanced version, with hand-painted beams, forged iron chandeliers, and the addition of a 7,000 square foot basement, a putting green and a "Star Wars"-theme 26-seat home theater.

Most people aren't Brian Mariotti. "I'm obsessive," says the 53-year-old, who turned toy company Funko into the entity responsible for many of the large-headed, collectible pop vinyl characters sold around the world today.

Mr. Mariotti and his wife Shannon Mariotti, 53, first spotted the house on the tiny, jewel box island of Coronado, Calif., in 2016 during one of

the weekend bike rides they'd take around their vacation home. Known as the W.A. Gunn House, and just a block from the famed Coronado beach, it was built for a Michigan furniture-maker in 1925, designed by renowned San Diego architect Richard Requa and designated a historic residence in 2004.

"This was the dream house. The one that was never attainable," says Mr. Mariotti. Since it wasn't for sale, he asked his real-estate agent to knock on the door and negotiate. It took four months to get them to agree, but in February 2017, the couple paid \$12.2 million, which Mr. Mariotti calls a premium, for what was a 6,000-square-foot house on half an acre. Deciding they'd like more space around them, they then negotiated with the owners of the 2,500-square-foot house next door, securing that in 2018 by buying and renovating another house nearby for their former neighbors—a swap that cost them around \$6 million in total.

The Mariottis liked the Gunn House's Old Hollywood, Spanish vibe, but not the wall-to-wall carpet and popcorn ceilings inside. They *Please turn to page M4*

No Chlorine? No Problem.

Some homeowners are swapping their aqua-blue pools for a swim in green

BY KAREN BRUNO

THIS SUMMER, some homeowners will be swimming in their backyard pools au naturel. The iconic, aqua-blue vessels of chlorine-treated water are starting to see competition from the leafy, greenish waters of natural pools.

As the second summer of the pandemic approaches, waiting lists for in-ground pools and a chlorine short-



age are sparking interest in these so-called bio pools, which are chemical-free. Swimmers are invited to lounge, naiad-like, close to water mint and water lilies as dragonflies hover. "Prices are going through the roof on chlorine tabs—if you can even find them," says Christopher Paquette of Robin's Nest, a natural-pool company in Buxton, Maine.

Natural pools are a tiny *Please turn to page M6*



Mike and Heather Dooley installed a natural pool at their Napa, Calif., home for \$160,000.

CHLOE ARTEL FOR THE WALL STREET JOURNAL (2)

MANSION

House of Funko

Continued from page M1

wanted the same heavy wood ceiling beams—but they wanted them all over the house and not as dark. The character of the house cried out to them for old stone fireplaces instead of ones made of plaster, multi-angled vaulted ceilings, hand-stenciled designs on the walls and reclaimed terra-cotta floor tiles from Italy. They also wanted a less claustrophobic floor plan.

The goal was to make everything new look as old as possible, says Paul Schatz, owner of Interior Design Imports. Working with San Diego architect Kim Grant, landscape architect Theresa Clark, and Papenhausen Construction, he replaced almost every single material in the house and designed furniture and lighting—or found antique pieces—for every room. The original Spanish red roof tiles were stripped and replaced by tiles in different shades of red, stacked to give a waved effect.

Mr. Schatz used wall tiles hand painted with designs that were in accordance with 1920s-1930s Spanish Colonial interior architecture. New wood beams were hand-distressed and finished to be indistinguishable from the original beams.

Of the overall look and feel, Ms. Grant, of Kim Grant Design Inc., says Mr. Mariotti had in his mind the image of the Eagles' "Hotel California" album cover, with the castle-like house with palm trees. She says the house is referred to locally as the Coronado Castle.

They turned the house next door, which was set back from the road, into a 4 ½ car garage. The extra land, where the neighboring house's front yard had been, allowed for a new family room wing on one side of the kitchen and a more expansive outdoor area. There now is a six-hole putting green and a covered patio with a large dining table and a living room area with a flat screen TV. A swimming pool with mosaic tiles, an outdoor kitchen (pizza oven, three beer taps) on a French stone patio and a garden, landscaped with sculptures amid century-old olive and magnolia trees, front a guest cottage and pool house sculpted from the former garage.

Under the grounds is Mr. Mariotti's favorite spot: the 7,000-square-foot basement. "This is where it gets a little over the top," he says. Reached by a wide, well-lit stairway, half of the first room is dedicated to an indoor golf room with a simulator where balls are hit from a mat at the projector screen. The other half is his tennis area, one of Mr. Mariotti's favorite sports to play, where he watches the Tennis Channel on a big screen set amid vintage tennis rackets and balls on shelves. At one point the basement was to contain a basketball court and a bowling alley, Ms. Grant says. The ceiling is made from recycled English roof tiles.

A stone archway at the top of a door leads to the theater room, where 18 chocolate leather recliners on three ascending raised platforms face a 20-foot screen powered by a professional level 4K Max laser projector. Sitting in recessed spaces built along the walls are larger than life-size statues of "Star Wars" characters and various "Star Wars" weapons and helmets. In back is a bar lined with jars of candy.

Jim Papenhausen of Papenhausen Construction says creating the 15-foot deep basement took six months and involved pumping 6 million gallons of water out of the ground, which meant installing eight wells and digging a line to transport the water to a sewer system. It required a 4-foot concrete foundation (twice the normal thickness) to hold back the hydrostatic pressure. Since the basement had to be "shoved underneath" the existing house, they got all the materials down through a hole in the swimming pool above. "It's the greatest thing I've ever worked on in my life," says Mr. Papenhausen. He says Mr. Mariotti "just doesn't let up."

Mr. Mariotti, who is toned, with product-infused hair, gets up every morning at 5 and works out in the 1,300-square-foot home gym in his basement, where custom-made surfboards adorned with Hanna-Barbera characters hang above a turf area long enough to



The couple liked the home's Spanish vibe and wanted heavy wood ceiling beams throughout.



Shannon Mariotti met Mr. Mariotti when he was running a jungle-theme nightclub in Bothell, Wash., and she was a representative for restaurant wholesaler Sysco. They spotted the W.A. Gunn House during a weekend bike ride and later had their agent approach the owners about selling.



The theater's ceiling is hand-screened fabric over an acoustic base. The goal was to create the energy burst of a 'Star Wars' spaceship at warp speed.



Toys are kept in glassed cases in the basement.



'This is where it gets a little over the top,' Mr. Mariotti says of the 7,000-square-foot basement. The 'Star Wars'-theme theater has jars of candy on a wall behind the bar in the back of the room. Star Wars weapons sit on either side.



Mr. Mariotti's office is at the top of a tower on the third floor



The basement's first room is divided in half. One section is devoted to tennis ▲, the other has a golf simulator. ▼



MANSION



The swimming pool has mosaic tiles.

The 6,000-square-foot house sits on half an acre. Deciding they'd like more space around them, the couple bought the property next door. Below, almost every single material inside the house was replaced. They added wood beams to the ceilings, multi-angled vaulted ceilings and reclaimed terra-cotta floor tiles from Italy.



DAMON CASAREZ FOR THE WALL STREET JOURNAL (4); ALAMY

accommodate hitting tennis balls shot by a ball machine at one end.

Sometimes he proceeds next to the adjacent cream-colored spa room, where he gets acupuncture, and cupping and scraping therapy, on a professional massage table. That's followed by an infrared sauna and an ice bath in a tub with a glass-tiled surround.

He then ascends to his office, which is on the third floor in the turret room at the top of the tower. It has views of the ocean, Mexico, and downtown San Diego from its outdoor patio with a gas fireplace and bar. It also has a lot of toys. His favorites tend toward the nostalgic, including Scooby-Doo characters, Tony the Tiger and the mascot for Bob's Big Boy Restaurant.

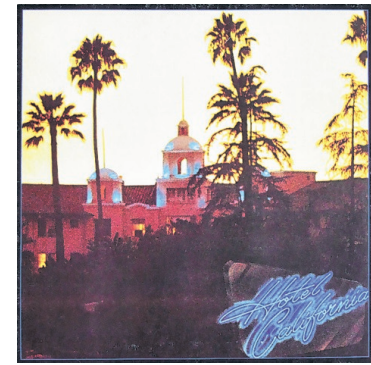
"If I had my choice I'd have toys in every room," he says.

Ms. Mariotti, who is tall, slim and blonde, is the person curbing that urge. She let her husband handle most aspects of the renovation, as she has with their previous homes—four in the Seattle area and one on Coronado. "I trust him," she says.

The couple, who have one daughter, met when Mr. Mariotti was running a jungle-theme nightclub in Bothell, Wash., when he was 23, having dropped out of college. (He had moved to Washington from San Diego, where he was born, when he was in sixth grade.) She was a representative for restaurant wholesaler Sysco at the time.

An avid collector of Funko toys, in 2001 he called the company's founder Mike Becker, who operated from his home in nearby Snohomish, to ask how the toys

were made. When Mr. Becker sent him a few free samples, Mr. Mariotti took Mr. Becker golfing as a thank you.



For inspiration, Mr. Mariotti had in his mind the image of the Eagles' 'Hotel California' album cover.

They were friends for three years before Mr. Becker decided to retire and Mr. Mariotti offered to buy the company for what Mr. Mariotti says was "not a lot of money," in 2005. Sales revenue grew to \$653 million in 2020 from \$516 million in 2017, the year the company went public. The share price closed at \$22.35 on June

23, up from the close of \$7 on its first day of trading Nov. 3, 2017.

Funko has franchised characters from popular movies, TV, comic books, videogames, sports—everything from Dilbert to Pinocchio to Jerry Seinfeld. In 2019, the company opened a 40,000-square-foot store in Hollywood, Calif.

Mr. Mariotti says he oversees the design of every Funko store and individual product. His attention to such details started at a young age. "When I was five, my mom says I wouldn't go outside if my shorts did not match the stripes of my socks," he says. Nowadays he creates his own tennis shirts, to be certain they go with the rest of his outfit. They hang in one of his two walk-in closets, along with rows of different colored golf shoes he designed and ordered online. Ms. Mariotti says when they first met, her husband would even pick out what she wore.

Such meticulousness can be painful at times, says Mr. Mariotti. Mr. Schatz, the designer, says it made for an exciting process that led to a one-of-a-kind house. "He pushed us with his imagination," he says.

dog·ged

/ˈdɒɡəd/

adjective

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