

ART JURY CORNER

Grading

One of the defining characteristics of Rancho Santa Fe is the beauty of its landforms. Different areas of the Ranch each have their own unique characteristics such as rolling hills, valleys, level pasture, canyons, steep cliffs and ravines. These topographic features give a unique feeling to different areas within the Covenant and act as natural boundaries to define properties and provide beautiful vistas. These landforms are part of what the Covenant describes as Rancho Santa Fe's "*rare landscape features*".

Since the inception of the Covenant, the community has grown in a way that has preserved these "*rare landscape features*" by integrating development with the Ranch's landforms. Contrast the appearance of the Ranch with developments where the natural landforms have been obliterated and turned into artificial-looking landscapes of man-made, flat pads stair-stepping up the hillsides.

The integration of a home with the landscape results from thoughtfully prepared architectural and grading designs. The Art Jury requires grading designs that reflect the unique characteristics of the property for which the home is proposed. Because of the unique nature of each site, a grading proposal that works for one property will not work for another, just as a home proposed for a level lot would not be appropriate for the side of a hill. A successful design will retain the overall form of a lot's topography while creating enough level area to accommodate a home. Siting a home on a sloping lot requires careful planning to take advantage of the opportunities presented by a sloped topography.

It is inappropriate to propose massive grading of a large, flat pad to accommodate a house that was designed for a flat lot rather than a sloping lot. Builders and designers will often try to impose the features of a "valley floor" home on a hillside lot by proposing single-level floor plans surrounded by large, flat lawns and a wide, circular driveway at the front door. Accommodating those types of features on a hillside requires grading a large, flat pad with the associated artificial cut and fill slopes that not only destroy the form of the hill but also eliminate the unique design possibilities afforded by a sloping lot. Homes can be successfully constructed on a hillside lot by using design solutions that take advantage of the form of the hill itself. Hillside designs can include interesting, multi-level floor plans and yard spaces at different levels that create a variety of living areas and views. A good designer can create a home design on a sloping lot that is as functional and livable as one at the bottom of the valley, but the design of the hillside home will be different from a "flat-land" house.

By reviewing hillside development with the goal of maintaining the natural form of the land, the Art Jury reduces the amount of required grading. Eliminating needless grading not only helps preserve the "*rare landscape features*" described in the Covenant but lessens the prominence of structures and increases the diversity of design, thus reinforcing the signature community character of Rancho Santa Fe.

For additional guidance on hillside development, property owners should consult the Protective Covenant as well as the "Rancho Santa Fe Residential Design Guidelines" and the "Slope Protection Regulation for Grading and Building Permit Applications" contained within Chapter 41 of the "Rancho Santa Fe Regulatory Code." These documents are available at the Rancho Santa Fe Association Office.