

# Championing the merits of Modern

Architect Joyce Owens builds stylish simplicity into all her designs

**T**hree years ago, award-winning Modern architect Joyce Owens relocated from London to Fort Myers, to be near family. She left behind the renowned architectural firm she co-owned and a home she designed and built that had garnered national press.

“The house was in the garden of a vicarage,” she says about the unusual lot she secured between a former church and school. “It was in spectacular context; there was a stone wall that ran around the house, a wall that was old, like the church,” she says. “And there we were, in a beautiful, historic setting, in a very Modern house. It was fabulous, absolutely beautiful.”

The man who purchased the vicarage from the Church of England sold Owens her lot, and the local authority “wanted to see something contemporary against the historic church,” she says.

The American approach is going that way too, now, she adds. “Instead of mimicking the old, the new is more often contrasting, so that the public can differentiate what was built when.”

No one could be happier about that than Owens.

“I love the simplicity of Modern,” she says. “You use architectural elements like planes and openings and large windows to create space that isn’t divided.”

Modern architecture “blurs the line

between the inside and the outside” — and that’s a very good thing in Southwest Florida, she adds.

On this side of the pond, Owens’ present employer, BSSW Architects, asked her to assist with the renovation of and addition to their circa 1920 office on the corner of First and Jackson streets downtown. Her previous experience with modern renovations of old buildings influenced the design of both.

She took the reins when BSSW was retained to design an addition to Canterbury School on its 15-acre campus in south Fort Myers. The contemporary design won a pre-construction award from the American Institute of Architects, and the \$12 million project should be completed for the start of the

2007-08 school year.


Owens, whose career began with a degree from Notre Dame and study abroad, owned her highly touted architectural firm in London for 10 years. She and her partner’s Modern projects were featured in *House and Garden*, *Architecture D’Interni*, *Monument*, *Elle*, *Maison Francaise*, the *New York Times* and *The Daily Telegraph*, and in books and on television.

She and her young son now live in another Modern house, this one sleek and low-slung, from 1959, just off McGregor Boulevard.

“It’s mid-century Modern,” she says, “very simple, very clean, with white walls, white brick and terrazzo floors. It becomes a backdrop for the furniture, which gives it color.”

Owens has a personal mission to identify Modern buildings along the Gulf Coast and to help their owners appreciate the value in restoring them to their original condition.

“Attempting to make them look Mediterranean or feel ‘Country Cottage’ is contrary to their simple character,” she says. Although only a few remain completely untouched by updates or renovations, it’s possible to see that they were designed for function, and with Florida’s climate in mind. Owens points out that many have excellent cross-ventilation, which negates the need for air conditioning a good portion of the year.

“Modern can be comfortable as well as stylish,” she says. 

— LIBBY BOREN McMILLAN



Photo by BRIAN TIETZ