

C O A S T A L

WITH HER UNIQUE APPRECIATION FOR THE HISTORIC AND ULTRAMODERN SENSIBILITY, AN ARCHITECT TRANSFORMS TWO OLD CABINS INTO A CRISP CAPE COD-INSPIRED COMPOUND ON CAPTIVA ISLAND.

C O M E B A C K

BY LAURA KOSTELNY PHOTOGRAPHY BY TINA SARGEANT



Even though Joyce Owens is decidedly a “modern” architect, she’s every bit an expert on the preservation of historical structures. She spent 15 years as an architect in London before returning to the States. “English heritage societies loved us—they called what my partner and I were doing ‘modern interventions,’” she says. “I was always very mindful and careful with the original fabric of the buildings, even as I inserted whatever was needed for a 21st century lifestyle. We developed an approach that no one else was doing at the time, stripping everything down to the original bones and adding modern touches that didn’t actually even touch the walls—every new, contemporary element could later be removed if necessary.”

In 2004, Owens came back across the pond and eventually launched her eponymous architecture firm on the

Gulf with a realistic preservationist’s perspective on what exactly is worth saving. “Just because something is old doesn’t necessarily mean it’s good,” she says matter-of-factly. “You have to be clear about that. Sometimes, you have to take out a lot of bad—even if it’s really old—to get to what’s worth saving in a structure.”

It was that sensibility that brought a Chicago couple to Owens’ door. The Midwesterners had bought a dilapidated beach property on the shores of Captiva Island. The lot included a main house and guest house, both built in 1958 and completely untouched since then. “The property was called ‘The Pink Shell,’ and it had a real 1950s vibe,” the homeowner says. “There was even a pink Styrofoam shell outside. But the thing we loved about it is that the main house sat so close to the water.”

While everyone agreed the original, critter-infested guest house had to go, knocking down the main house was never an option, for two reasons: First, it had a certain beachy charm. Second: It sits low on the ground, right in front of the water. If they started from scratch, they’d have to build the new house farther back away from the ocean, and elevate it.



Demolishing the dilapidated 3,500-square-foot main house of this Captiva Island compound was never really an option if the homeowners wanted to retain the location close to the water. As a result, the home’s footprint remained the same, but the interior went through a radical renovation. The guest house, which sits higher up, was completely rebuilt as a 3,000-square-foot cabin that follows all modern building standards.

Architect: Joyce Owens, Architecture Joyce Owens **Landscape Architect:** Mariah Bakke, R. S. Walsh Landscaping **Builder:** The Walter Group **Lighting:** Hinsdale Lighting **Kitchen Cabinets:** Drury Design **Windows:** Andersen Windows & Doors **Pool:** Randy Cramer, Coastal Custom Pool & Spa.

The homeowner had an active hand in the renovation of the main house, creating detailed vision boards filled with ideas for everything from molding to lighting. She chose graphic Nouveau tiles by Land Porcelanco for the outdoor stairs leading to the front door. "I've always loved using patterns on floors—whether tile or painted wood for clients—and I thought it would help create interest and contribute to the vintage vibe that the original house had going for it," she says.





While the footprint of the main house didn't change, the design team worked the layout to improve the flow. The kitchen, for instance, went from the front of the house to the back to take advantage of the water views. The island has a walnut table-height section, surrounded by woven chairs, which are ideal for nearly alfresco dining. A chandelier by Oglethorpe Gaslight Reproductions adds an extra helping of cottage charm. The homeowner and her husband designed the cabinet in the kitchen nook and painted it a tranquil blue. "It hides a television," she says. "I chose the blue to complement the tile we have above the stove." The kitchen table is from Williams-Sonoma Home and the chairs are from Jett Thompson HOME.



Together, the architect and her clients came up with a plan to transform the 3,500-square-foot main house into a modern-day Cape Cod-style cottage. Owens' clients just so happen to be an interior designer and a retired graphic designer, and they came with plenty of renovation know-how and ideas of their own. "For this project, we created huge grids of all sorts of pictures—molding, hardware, lighting, you name it. We designed the cabinetry in the kitchen and the pool area," the homeowner says. "We knew every wall and every ceiling needed to be shiplap, and we knew we wanted the views to take over."

With an eye on their detailed vision boards, Owens got down to business designing an East Coast-style beach house with clean lines and hints of Cape Cod detailing on the exterior. The Fort Myers-based The Wolter Group—a luxury home contractor company—was brought on to handle the build.

Inside, Owens set about removing the roof and adding high open ceilings, bumping out space on either side of the front porch for small his-and-her offices, and moving the kitchen from the front of the house to the back to better take advantage of water views. While the footprint remained almost unchanged, the flow is much improved. "We didn't

Getting down to business is a lot less daunting in this light-and-bright home office, where you'll find this lovely desk, artwork by watercolorist Tom Bond and a pair of scarves by Oglethorpe Gaslight Reproductions. A hallway offers a peek at a dreamy guest room decked out in Nymphs Twill fabric by Lee Jofa. Awash in a sea of white and soft neutrals, the master bedroom also offers some of the home's best views. "It's the only bedroom that faces the Gulf," says the homeowner. The chandelier is from Currey & Company.





Owens worked with R.S. Walsh Landscaping on the grounds to take full advantage of the natural beauty of the area. “No matter the house style, my projects are about reaching out to nature,” the architect says. “Just plunking a house down on the beach? No thanks.” Left: The guest house sits above the main house, but was intentionally conceived to not detract from it. The guest house has a first-floor garage and storage area and a second-floor living area with bedrooms. “What is normally the attic space is the main floor in this home,” Owens says.



just do a big block of a house. The owners didn’t want some huge mansion that doesn’t get any natural light inside,” Owens says. “It’s a very comfortable three-bedroom, three-and-a-half bathroom home, but details like the grand kitchen, soaring ceiling heights and the trusses make it feel magnificent.”

While figuring out the challenges of a top-to-bottom coastal renovation were difficult, designing a brand-new guest house came with its own challenges. Because it was situated in a FEMA zone, it had to be raised 11 feet above sea level. “A guest house shouldn’t overwhelm the main house,” Owens says. “When it’s higher, it’s tricky trying to figure out how to avoid dwarfing the structure below.”

To that end, she designed a 3,000-square-foot home with a first-floor garage and storage area, upper-level common areas, and two bedrooms (including a bunk room that can sleep six) and two-and-a-half baths. “What is normally the attic space is the main floor in this home. It has great, pitched ceilings—it feels like you could be in your grandma’s attic,” Owens says. In the end, the guest house doesn’t take away

from the beauty of the main home below. “Joyce knew exactly what to do. It’s not the big elephant on the property,” the homeowner says enthusiastically.

Beach renovation and construction is not for those short on patience—the entire project took about three years to complete. “People sometimes bring in architects from other parts of the country, and it’s a hard thing to do. We’re dealing with coastal construction lines, flood zones, hurricanes, a different climate and so much more,” Owens says. “Even your lighting has to be wildlife-approved.”

And then there’s the beachfront surroundings. Owens worked with R.S. Walsh and designer Mariah Bakke on the grounds. “Mariah’s design really tied the two properties together to read as a unified compound,” Owens explains, adding that the designer was clever in her use of plants, selecting ones (like stately royal palms) that a year later, look as if the house and landscaping has been there for years. “No matter the house style, my projects are about reaching out to nature. Just plunking a house down on the beach? No thanks,” Owens says. Her clients say they couldn’t agree more. “We’ve got the Gulf as our backdrop, and the views from every room are spectacular,” the homeowner says. “There’s not a single bad spot to take a conference call.” ✕