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Sol Mates Cottage

Captiva, FL

Architecture Joyce Owens LLC | Fort Myers, FL



Since 1948, the Sol Mates Cottage has perched atop a Captiva Island dune facing the Gulf of Mexico.

But its life began long before that.





Photo credits: Joshua Colt Fisher



Barron G. Collier – for whom Collier County, Florida, is named – built the home in 1912 on nearby Useppa Island. It was taken by barge to Captiva in 1948 by Col. Frances T. Colby.

Since FEMA and other rules now restrict new structures from being built in locations like Sol Mates’ dune, said Joyce Owens, FAIA, RIBA, the architect who renovated the cottage, “You can’t build in those places anymore.” Because of its unique location, the cottage’s present owners chose to keep the home and modernize it rather than tear it down and contend with new construction siting requirements.

The historic structure was not without its problems.

“It looked beautiful on the inside, but in a different style,” Owens said, adding that the cottage had an odd layout, a result of more than 100 years of piecemeal renovations, that made the flow through the home awkward. This most recent remodel was the first time the home had been completely stripped, she said, and the first time an architect was involved.

Owens’ renovations dealt with years of moisture damage in the floors, walls, windows and roof of the wood-framed cottage. There were elements worth keeping, including the original beadboard paneling and ceilings. While remediating water issues, Owens’ team also redesigned the flow of the home, prioritizing open space, natural light and sweeping Gulf views.



A wall between the kitchen and dining room was removed, creating a unified kitchen and dining area that opens to the living room. The finished cottage pays homage to the cottage's history while modernizing the space into a fully functional family home.

"The idea was to be very careful to maintain scale but make bold decisions, like taking down the wall in the kitchen," Owens said. The master bedroom was also relocated to take advantage of the ocean view through a new window and patio door. The master bath was reimagined with materials chosen for their high gloss finishes to maximize the small space.

Modernist-at-heart Owens said her years of experience in historical renovations, including 15 years working in London, were instrumental in keeping the soul of Sol Mates intact. ■



