

TREASURE ISLAND

The Transformers

Under the guidance of two designing men, an aged ranch house becomes a Mediterranean dream.

By Riki Altman-Yee

Photography by Mike Butler

Interiors by Ron Paras and Carl Stewart

Changing scenery is second nature to Ron Paras and Carl Stewart, retired interior designers who moved from Columbus, Ohio, where they met 24 years ago, to Florida, then to Georgia and back to Florida. But after the couple purchased a 3,200-square-foot ranch-style home on a prime piece of waterfront property in Treasure Island, they quickly agreed that the vista was just about the only thing that would remain.

"We knew the bones of the house were good," Stewart recalls of the five-bedroom, three-and-a-half bathroom home, previously owned for two decades by the mayor of Treasure Island, Walter Stubbs. "But there was a major mold problem and water damage. The mechanicals were a whole other issue. And the mechanical issues brought about some of the structural changes we made." Since they had to call on an architect to draft plans that would make the house permitworthy, Paras and Stewart decided they might as well incorporate their preferred Spanish/Mediterranean



SECOND ACT
When Ron Paras and Carl Stewart bought a waterfront ranch on Treasure Island, the house was well-known: The town's mayor was the former owner. But the home's poor condition gave its new owners the opportunity to completely reinvent it in Mediterranean/mission style. The redo team included contractor H.E. Feldman & Son, architect Contract CAD Services and, for the elaborate stonework needed, Quasimodo Masonry.



TREASURE TROVE
 Ron Paras and Carl Stewart filled the house with pieces they once carried in their home decor store, while others were collected throughout their travels. Styles include Asian, empire and antiques. The owners added the double-sided fireplace, and Paras designed the faux elephant tusks. Opposite page: Paras (seated) and Stewart (standing) strike a pose with Pookie (left) and Cinder (right).



influences and Mission-style touches to the facade.

Taking the property from dated to dynamic took workers two and a half years, starting with the removal of all the interior walls and the floors. In essence, the structure was stripped down to raw cinderblock. Eight-foot ceilings were replaced with vaulted ceilings measuring up to 13 feet in some areas. The overall floor plan was changed to incorporate an additional bathroom and one less bedroom. Now, in addition to the master, the house has two guest rooms and an office/library.

The men first envisioned the exteriors as heavy, textured stucco with stone accents, but masons convinced them to take the design further. Soon the couple was combing through thousands of stones, setting aside select pieces with embedded fossils or petrified wood for specific placement. "The more stone they laid, the more beautiful it was," Paras recalls. "We stoned the entire house. Even the chimney and the front of the seawall."

Taking advantage of the waterfront location, the designers strategically placed windows so guests would be able to see straight through the house to the Boca Ciega Bay. But before you even enter, the personalities of the owners are announced by a cast bronze statue—covered in verdigris—of three airborne frogs spitting water into an 8-foot-square quatrefoil fountain. "We like serious things but with touches of whimsy," Stewart says. You don't say.

Their favorite space is the kitchen, an open concept, with custom solid wood cabinetry designed for buffet-



style entertaining. The couple says their guests always tend to gather there. "We designed it to be one big living space," Stewart says.

Medium river travertine in cream and taupe helps to achieve the flow. Some of the 18-inch squares were cut in half to cover bathroom walls, showers and ceilings. "We like neutral tones," Paras explains. For contrast, Stewart says he chose artwork with bold expressions of color.

Their furnishings include Asian, empire, antique and contemporary finds, mostly sentimental pieces found during the couples' world travels, keepsakes from a home decor store they once owned and hand-me-downs from family members. Faux elephant tusks Paras had once designed for their store stand as focal points both in the living room and on the fireplace mantle. "Though we've been to Africa, I could never buy the real thing," Paras says. "They're crushed Carrara marble [mixed] with bone meal. They're about 20 years old, and over time the bone meal gave them a yellowed, ivory appearance."

The couple had so much inventory from which to choose, in fact, that the only new items they purchased for the home were a few decorative pots that sit outside near their saltwater pool. A lighted spa and fire bowls make for a lively nighttime scene, and if that weren't enough of an attraction, Treasure Island's seasonal boat parades provide the couple ample reason to invite the neighbors over. "They compliment us regarding how the house was transformed," Stewart says. "We didn't realize the extent, but I'm so glad we did it. All we did is take a great house and get it ready for the next 50 years." ■



HIGH LIFE
The bedroom offers one example of ceilings that were raised from 8 to 13 feet, and the room's position along the seawall affords a view of Treasure Island's seasonal boat parades. Opposite page: The master bathroom features Kohler Memoir collection fixtures and cast-iron sinks. Medium river travertine runs throughout the home, including on the walls in the master bathroom.

DESIGN DETAILS

TYPE
Single-family home

LOCATION
Treasure Island

INTERIOR DESIGN
Ron Paras and Carl Stewart

CONTRACTOR
H.E. Feldman & Son
hefeldman.com

ARCHITECT
Contract CAD Services
contractcad.com

RESOURCES
Busby Cabinets
Solid wood Hopsack kitchen cabinets
busbycabinets.com

Deja Vu Consignment Furniture
Outdoor decorative pots
and teak furniture
dejavuconsignmentfurniture.com

Famous Tate
Sub-Zero, Wolf and Miele appliances
famoustate.com

Ferguson
Kohler Memoir collection fixtures and
cast-iron bathroom sinks
ferguson.com

Oldcastle Coastal
Camelback stone and smokestack
brick exteriors
oldcastlecoastal.com

Stone-Mart
Medium river travertine
stone-mart.com