

A CHANCE ENCOUNTER WITH A FRIEND SPARKS THE TRANSFORMATION OF A DATED HOUSE TO A DREAM HOME

THE FIRST ❁ THE ONLY

VeroBeach *Magazine*®

Renovation With
Inspiration



A chance encounter with a friend sparks the transformation of a dated house to a dream home.

RENOVATION WITH INSPIRATION

BY ANN TAYLOR
PHOTOGRAPHY BY GRIDLEY + GRAVES



Laura Adams longed to return to the community she knew and loved. Thanks to an ad, she found a 1970s-era residence that needed updating. The location couldn't have been better and, thanks to a builder, architect and talented designer she met by chance, her home is just the way she hoped it would be.

As Laura Adams recalls what the 1970s house she purchased a year ago looked like, a smile spreads across her face. Everything she envisioned it could become is now a reality and she's not shy about expressing how she feels.

"I am so happy in this house. It's just the way I hoped it would be," she enthuses. "I had looked at other places here in John's Island but I didn't

In Laura's family room/office the soft sea-foam green of the rug that had been in her previous home dictated the color of the faux-painted walls, upholstered furniture and desk. "The desk was my grandfather's and I've had it for years," Laura says. "It's perfect here – in fact, all of my furnishings have found a place in this house. Andi has a special touch; she turned all of my pig's ears into silk purses."







In the foyer, a chest Laura has treasured for more than 30 years welcomes visitors. "It was a gift from one of my very good friends and it's always been in a different, prominent place in my other homes," she says. So, too, has the portrait of a young girl that was painted in the 19th century. "I look around and in every room I have fond memories of people and places that have been an important part of my life."

just want to buy anything; I wanted a house I could live in forever."

She found it, thanks to seeing an ad and taking a drive-by look-see that prompted her to find out more about the three-bedroom residence.

"As luck would have it, that same day I happened to run into Bob Gibb of the JI Real Estate Company and

told him I was looking for something without a swimming pool or sliding-glass doors and he assured me that the house didn't have either. But it did have all these wonderful windows, and the first time I came inside I could see myself sitting at my desk looking out at the golf course."

More often than not that's just where you'll find the retired financial adviser, enjoying her surroundings. Laura gives much of the credit to interior designer Andi Beck for making sure that the things she has held dear for so many years have, like her, found their new home.

Yet the two women might never have met had they not been in the same place at the same time.

"I've been very active with the Vero Beach Museum of Art for years. One morning I was there talking to the receptionist and Andi was there. Out of the blue she looked at me and said you have to read this book, *Water for Elephants*. Mind you, I'd never seen this woman before nor had I heard of the book," says a bemused Laura, who proceeded to forget the suggestion.

"A month later I was at the Museum and ran into Andi again. She asked if I'd read the book yet and I admitted I hadn't, but she was so insistent that I finally did."

Laura enjoyed the story so much that she gave it to her late husband, who was ill at the time. "He had grown up in Sarasota, and as a young boy, spent time at the Ringling Circus where he had seen the elephants. It was uncanny how Andi knew I just had to have that book for him to read."

Just how often does a chance encounter and literary recommendation lead to something more? Not often, and Laura is appreciative of the fact that it did since, well before the renovation dust had settled, she sought out Andi, now a firm friend, for advice.

"During my career days clients who were very dear to me gave me some wonderful gifts and I wanted them to have a special place in my house," Laura says. "My husband and I also did a lot of traveling and purchased some memorable pieces.



In the enlarged dining room, Cowtan & Tout wallpaper mirrors the tropical plantings in Laura's gardens. Leaf and floral motifs, both classic and reimagined, are back in fashion and her designer friend Andi is a fan. "It's like having a piece of art on the wall," she muses. Brazilian Ipe floors lend a warm glow throughout the house. A simple yet striking cluster of pears on the table repeats the theme of the painting above the buffet.

I look around and in every room I have fond memories of people and places that have been an important part of my life."

Laura decided that the John's Island house was what she had been looking for but that it needed some serious updating. She then contacted contractor Toby Hill of The Hill Group. "We had lived in a house that Toby's mother had owned so I knew the kind of quality work he does and his attention to detail," Laura explains. "During the walk-through he told me that the kitchen needed to be pushed out, the dining room had to be bumped out and I had to have a terrace and a portico. One thing he didn't say was that I needed

a new, larger master bathroom because he knew I was on a budget, but we both realized that in this day and age it needed to be done.

"Toby was great. He listened and was very direct, which I liked because everything was put on the table – the negatives as well as the positives. That's the way I had always worked with my clients, and I didn't want any surprises."

She didn't get any. "Toby gave me a monthly accounting showing exactly where I was in the budget, with specific allocations for specific areas. Before you even get started you have to have this budget, and Toby would go through it with me line by line. He was also there every morning at 7 o'clock overseeing the work.

"Another very important part of the equation was George



The original “corridor” kitchen lacked an island and breakfast nook. Thanks to a re-design and “bump out” that enlarged the space, a sleek functional center island and inviting eating area emerged. So, too, did Laura’s collection of Spode plates that for years had stayed hidden in a cupboard.

Bollis, the architect. He had done some work for me in the past and he came up with some really good ideas. Sometimes you’re not always going to agree, and George and Toby wanted me to fully understand there was an alternative and that I was the one making the final decisions. Also, I have to say they were very flexible because there were a few times when I changed my mind.”

Andi can’t help but laugh after hearing that. “Laura was about to drive her team crazy because she couldn’t decide

on the color of the shutters,” the designer recalls. “We chose sand for the exterior shade and I was going with a white for the shutters but she didn’t like that. Then we tried black but it was too stark. I’m sure Laura had to be aware that we were wondering if she would ever make up her mind!”

It took a drive around Central Beach to finally come up with a color Laura liked. When she spotted a house with shutters the color of sea foam that was it. “I loved



Laura and Andi agree their greatest challenge was choosing furnishings for the living room. “My husband and I traveled and collected a number of things over the years that mean a lot to me. The question was, where were we going to put them?” says Laura. You’d never know there was ever any doubt. Teal love seats, a striking painting, Chinese screen and eye-catching pair of bronze lamps appear as if they’d been together for years.

the color, but I said to Andi, how do we find out what it’s called? She said don’t worry, I’ll just walk up to the front door and ask the owner. It turned out they had had several similar requests.”

Laura is so pleased with the way everything turned out that she frequently takes a walk-around of her own, savoring the changes and how they came about. The kitchen is a perfect example.

“Before, it was basically a long corridor with no island

or breakfast nook so we bumped it out and George helped with the design,” she says, gesturing towards the seating area by the southwest windows. The tray ceiling was painted blue, mirroring the color of the sky, and the glass bowl in the center of a round table shimmers with shades taken from nature.

“I liked the kitchen in my previous house so much that I asked Indian River Design Concepts to reproduce it. They also did all of the cabinetry and counter tops throughout

the house, including the wet bar which was always in the right spot for entertaining but was dated in design and function. The before and after is like night and day.”

So is the living room, which both Laura and Andi agree posed the biggest challenge placement wise.

“We pretty much knew where everything was going in the rest of the house except here. It’s really a small room and Andi had to help me work around that,” says Laura, seated in one of two teal love seats that face each other on either side of the fireplace.

“During my career days I spent a lot of time in Singapore and Hong Kong and a good friend of mine lived in Japan so I visited there. My husband and I also collected a number of things over the years that mean a lot to me. The question was, where were we going to put them? Andi and I started playing around with ideas and I have to admit I was a little frustrated but she stood her ground and knew what she was doing.”

“I think rooms tell you what they want you to do with them,” Andi muses. “Laura had some really wonderful pieces to choose from and she put her trust in me. One thing she absolutely insisted on was that we put the horse she bought in Palm Beach on the table behind the love seat, and she was right. Laura would get these ideas and call me to see what I thought.”

One of those ideas was a perfect 10. “I really didn’t have anything to put over the fireplace that I was comfortable with. Then one day when I was out shopping, I took a peek in the window of the Megan Candler Gallery. There was this painting in my colors so I called Andi and asked her if she would stop by and take a look,” says Laura. “It’s actually a fresco, plaster on canvas, which was fascinating to me, and the artist used two canvases to create a wonderful water-reflection effect. Andi agrees with me – it really adds a special touch.”

More special touches can be seen in a regal Chinese lady perched on a pedestal in the corner, a gift from one of Laura’s clients, and an eye-catching pair of bronze lamps, another gesture of appreciation.

“The only things Laura bought for the living room were the horse and the Chinese screen,” says Andi. “That just goes to show you can move things around from house to house, room to room, and they can serve different purposes. Laura has so many wonderful things she’s collected and loved and they found a

home here.”

What amazes Laura is that it took only one week to move everything in and decide on placement. “Andi is a lady of execution and dispatch,” she smiles, leading the way into her office and sunroom.

“I spend almost all my time here,” she says. “The rug, which had been in my previous office, dictated the colors and Andi knew it would be perfect here. She had the sofa and chairs reupholstered and the walls faux-painted in a linen look, then put everything together including my grandfather’s desk. I’ve had it for years and it’s perfect here. In fact all of the furnishings, including the lamp with its wonderful Swarovski snowflakes that catch the light – everything has found its place. Andi has a special touch – she turned all my pigs’ ears into silk purses. It’s really amazing how well things worked out.”

That includes the enlarged dining room where an airy palm-frond wallpaper by Cowtan & Tout inspired by nature sets the tone. Leaf motifs and florals, both classic and reimagined, are back in fashion and Andi is a fan. “What’s being shown are wallpapers that are very natural-looking, that bring in color and enhance a space. It’s like having a piece of art on the wall.”

Laura agrees. “Over the years my husband and I collected Spode plates but we never displayed them. They were just kept in a cupboard. Andi placed them in the breakfront in about 30 minutes.” She also knew just what to use as a centerpiece – two crystal candlestick holders and a matching bowl full of pears; beautiful in its simplicity.

A walk-about would not be complete without a stop in the foyer where a chest Laura has treasured for more than 30 years stands tall. “I’ve become quite attached to it. It was a gift from one of my very good friends and it’s always been in a prominent place in my other homes.”

Smiling down from above the chest is the painting of a winsome young girl. “It was done by an English artist who painted in the latter part of the 19th century during the Mary Cassatt period; Andi and I didn’t have any problem placing that at all. You could say we’re two minds that think alike,” Laura smiles.

“I didn’t want an elegant mansion, I wanted a home that was soft and comfortable where I could be happy. Now I have it.” ❁

At the request of the home owner, her name has been changed.