

REINVENTING A Beach Classic

A vacation home becomes a contemporary art showcase



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PHOTOGRAPHY BY PABLO MASON



Seeking a beach home as a vacation retreat from the Phoenix heat, Canadian-born Joe and Marjorie Davies (names changed for privacy) looked at more than 100 San Diego houses, but what they found disappointed them. They opted for a contemporary “city house” in La Jolla’s village, but never gave up their original idea of a beach house, where they could enjoy ocean breezes and entertain friends and family, including their two children and two young grandchildren.

One day, while walking towards La Jolla Shores, they found a coastal contemporary home they admired, just a short walk from the beach.

“It was the first house that checked all our boxes, but it was in terrible disrepair,” Joe says. “We liked the architecture, design and layout, with the living room, dining room, master bedroom, kitchen and view decks on the main level and four bedrooms downstairs for family and guests. We thought the people who designed it thought a lot like us.”

They decided to make minor modifications to the original design, created by the late La Jolla architect Stuart Baesel, while gutting the 4,800-square-foot house. They planned to restore its structural integrity and bring it up to date with a seismic retrofit and modern energy-efficient plumbing, electrical, mechanical and entertainment systems.

Above: The long walkway, leading from the front door through the great room to the oceanview terrace, showcases several artworks—and also has a stairway to the lower level. Shown here are Lori Cozen Geller’s eight-piece sculpture “Oblivion,” an antique wooden-grain holder and James Verbicky’s mixed-media piece “Citta Samana 9.”

Facing page: Homeowners Joe (holding miniature schnauzer Sergeant “Sarge” Pepper) and Marjorie Davies relax in the more formal seating area of their great room, centered around their irregularly shaped Wendell Castle-designed “Sizzle Talk” coffee table. Above the fireplace hangs “Garden of Eden” by Mauro Perucchetti.

Landscape architect David McCullough chose low-maintenance, drought-tolerant Mediterranean-inspired plantings, including cypress and olive trees, lavender, rosemary and boxwood, to complement the white stucco home, which retains its original wrought-iron gate leading to the front door.





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Clockwise from top left: With its high ceilings, Portuguese limestone flooring and natural light flooding in from the courtyard, the entry provides a gallery for large artworks. • The terrace, which opens off the great room, offers the perfect casual spot for dining or lounging. • Joe and Marjorie decided to create a single great room, with two distinct seating areas.

To develop design-build plans, they engaged Hill Construction, whose founder, Pete Hill, built the original house around 1980. This time, Joseph Diasparra served as project manager and oversaw construction, which took about 10 months.

“The footprint remains pretty much unchanged. We altered the layout a little upstairs, moved walls downstairs and added skylights,” Joseph explains. “The owners wanted a clean, efficient use of space with an elegant use of natural materials in rooms where the focus was to be on the art and furniture,” as well as easy indoor-outdoor living.

With French doors opening onto the enclosed courtyard, the Davies use it as part of the interior, especially for dining and entertaining.

“We loved the arches and arched windows throughout the [original] house, going into the courtyard,” Marjorie says. “We added a beam on the south side to increase the size of the courtyard,” creating a covered loggia, featuring a dining table and casual seating. For added privacy, landscape architect David McCullough planted a green wall on the

The Davies' use the courtyard, which connects to their great room through arched French doors, as an extension of their interior space for both daily living and entertaining.





courtyard's east side, which took "a year or two to grow up," she adds.

"We often play games such as bocce ball (using bean bags instead of balls) and ring toss, and use it as an exercise room. Our grandsons spend hours riding their scooters in endless circles around the firepit and our miniature schnauzers spend most of their time playing and sleeping there," Joe explains.

Because they knew exactly what they wanted, the Davies designed the interior themselves. They wanted to create a comfortable, bright home with ample space to display their contemporary art collection, while also exploiting the home's natural setting and light.

"We like our house to be a light and happy place. That's why we're drawn to colorful, contemporary, happy, abstract art," Joe says, explaining both he and Marjorie must like anything they purchase.

Their color palette centers around white—which makes their art stand out—with limestone flooring throughout, off-white living room sofas and tan carpeting downstairs.

The couple already owned the Persian rugs but purchased most of the rest of the furnishings, art and accessories locally in California.

"We like a lot of California artists. We like to support the local community," Marjorie explains.

The importance of art in the Davies' lives is obvious when you enter the home through the ornamental wrought-iron front door, retained from the original house. Two large paintings hang on the western wall—"Tub" by Charles Arnoldi and "Citta Samana 9" by James Verbicky—and are separated by a stairway featuring Lori Cozen Geller's mounted eight-piece sculpture, "Oblivion."

The couple acquired many of their furnishings from La Jolla's MOS My Own Space and Roche Bobois and from Design Space and Roche Bobois and from Design Within Reach. Lots of the art and sculpture pieces came from La Jolla's Madison Gallery.

Among their favorite pieces is the irregularly shaped coffee table, "Sizzle Talk," by Wendell Castle, which sits in front of



Above: The kitchen was reconfigured so that Marjorie and Joe, who both enjoy cooking, can easily prepare meals together.

Top: Marjorie, with Beatle Bailey and Joe with Sarge, chat in their family room.

the fireplace adorned by a colorful Mauro Perucchetti sculpture of glass apples, “Garden of Eden.”

Joe and Marjorie both enjoy cooking and had great fun redesigning the kitchen, which offers easy access to the courtyard and northwest-facing oceanview terrace where they often entertain. Using a software program, Joe designed the cabinetry with generously sized granite counters, which Hill Construction had built. They incorporated a steam oven for healthful food preparations.

Downstairs they rearranged the bedrooms to create full bathrooms and lots of storage for each bedroom. They also reconfigured a wine storage area to make a large, cheerful family room adorned with Ron Burns portraits of their dog, Zoe, and their daughter’s horse, Challenger.

“The guests and kids use it all the time,” Joe says. “It gives them some privacy.”

Outside, Joe and Marjorie wanted a Mediterranean look to complement their Greek island-inspired architecture, using water-efficient and low-maintenance drip irrigation.



Above: The master bathroom was challenging to design because it's long and narrow, but the couple was able to incorporate a glass-enclosed shower, two sinks, a vanity/makeup area, toilet and bathtub. Top: The master bedroom features "Citta Samana Dip III," by James Verbicky over the bed.

"Simple but sophisticated," explains David, their landscape architect.

The home has three distinct zones with different planting requirements. The west-facing terraced front yard receives full sun, suited to Mediterranean plants. There, David chose a palette of green, gray and white, using cypress and olive trees, lavender, upright rosemary, boxwood and white roses.

The interior courtyard is partially shaded, ideal for plants typical to South Africa, including ferns, variegated ginger and creeping fig used to create the vertical green eastern "wall."

For the secluded, shady backyard David planted low, light-tolerant Surinam cherry—tall, hardy, vertical plants—to ensure privacy for downstairs bedroom occupants. For easy maintenance, he installed high-quality artificial turf instead of grass.

It's an elegant retreat from the heat that Joe and Marjorie relish. And they've definitely made it a home, filling it with cherished art and welcoming friends and family to come, visit and enjoy it with them. ❖