

Originally a gift for forgiveness, the Christmas Cottage links Naples' past to its present. When they renovated, its current owners modernized the materials of the façade, but maintained the board and batten design. The metal roof and radish red were inspired by a picture of an old barn the Paolinis had seen.



*Style* COASTAL COTTAGE

# The Christmas Cottage

STORY AND PHOTOGRAPHY BY  
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*"I will honor Christmas in my heart,  
and try to keep it all year."*

CHARLES DICKENS



**Ellin Goetz's approach to the landscape design was to create privacy and to plant what was native to the area. The white picket fence resurrects one that was on the property years ago, placed to keep wild boars at bay.**

It was October when Trish and Larry Paolini first met Dorothy McLenon. They were looking for their dream home in Naples, Florida, and the first house they were shown belonged to her. Trish was surprised to see a decorated Christmas tree on the porch. "I love Christmas and told her it was nice to see someone decorating so early in the season," she recalls. "Dorothy replied, 'Sweetheart, I've had that tree up for fifteen years. One Christmas, I couldn't bear to take it down, so it's been up ever since.'" Hearing this, Trish turned to Larry and whispered, "This is our Christmas Cottage."

Dorothy had been given the home six decades earlier as a present from her husband when she had threatened to leave him. He knew she had loved the cottage from the time she was a little girl, thinking it was the most beautiful house she had ever seen. He bought it for her to make amends. Having lived in Naples all of her life, Dorothy hated the thought of leaving, but when she could no longer maintain the house, she decided to sell. For five years, she rejected numerous offers on her house, because none of the potential buyers would agree to leave it standing. "Dorothy actually took less money from us because we promised not to tear it down," says Trish. "For me, tearing it down was not even a consideration. One of the reasons we love Naples so much is its historical charm."

Ironically, there was a time when Trish could not have imagined herself living in Naples: "I had lived in Florida for nine years and had visited different parts of the state, but never Naples," she says. "I thought it was a boring place for retired people." That view changed dramatically during a long weekend trip the Paolinis took five years ago. Walking down Fifth Avenue, Trish had an epiphany. She turned to Larry and said, "I have to live here." Larry replied, "Maybe when I retire." But Trish was adamant about buying immediately. She knew that if they waited for retirement, they would be priced out of the market. By complying with an elderly woman's wish that they not



CHRISTMAS COTTAGE





The interior's finish work pays tribute to the original batten walls, beadboard, and hard pine flooring. The stacked moldings, Larry says, "really set the house off in old Florida style." Shopping locally for furnishings, the Paolinis based their color scheme on lime green light fixtures found nearby. Space was made for a baby grand out of respect for the home's long-time owner, who had several pianos.

destroy her sixty years' worth of memories, they were able to purchase and have since renovated their dream home.

The Craftsman-style bungalow, built some time between 1902 and 1914, originally housed the construction overseer of the Naples Company, responsible for building the 600-foot Naples pier and the Naples Hotel, which stood at 12th Avenue South. At the time, there was nothing on either side of the house, from the Gulf to the Bay.

When it came time to renovate this century-old gem, the Paolinis chose professionals dedicated to historical preservation. Heading the project's team were architect Falconer Jones, who has served for seven years on Naples' Planning Advisory Board and who is currently working on a Preservation Ordinance with the City Council; builder Larry Porter of Porter Van Arsdale Construction, who has been active for the past ten years in historic renovations as well as new construction; and Ellin Goetz of Goetz and Stropes Landscape Architects, her most recent project being the Palm Cottage Gardens in Old Naples. "All the people who worked on our house were artists," says Trish. "They loved their work and treated us like friends and family."

The team left the original lines of the house intact, though the ceilings were raised to increase its airiness. A wing was added to the western elevation to allow for a carport, laundry area, and kitchen, while the eastern end gained a master bedroom, bath, and sitting room. Outside, a lounge and dining area with a fireplace, just steps above a single-sided walled pool and Jacuzzi, extended the living areas. Two small guest cottages were integrated to make one generous space for visting family and friends.

The Christmas Cottage exemplifies the type of approach Falconer Jones favors: upgrading and embellishing with modern amenities and materials while preserving a home's original character. "I don't take





Easy transitions from inside to out is what Florida is all about. The fireplace connects the interior and al fresco living and dining spaces. The black kitchen table (opposite) makes a dramatic contrast to the green wicker chairs, while the artwork hanging above, made from painted copper plates, incorporates all of the colors found in the house. The pool's wave wall adds architectural interest and guards privacy.



the purist view of renovation," he explains, "where you're creating an exact period museum house, such as the Palm Cottage, Naples' oldest home." In Old Naples, Jones has completed at least ten "restomods," a term used by restorers of vintage automobiles, which when applied to historic homes, means period details are maintained though floor plans are updated.

Builder Larry Porter believes that people are tiring of the oversized stucco homes that have proliferated in Naples and instead are turning back with new respect toward historical styling and preservation. Still, he says, "I want to see more of the history of Naples being celebrated in construction. It makes sense. You get a better home, a better lifestyle." He has modeled his approach to renovation on what he has seen in Key West, "It's an art form that I've taken a lot of cues and learned lessons from."

Among the joys the Paolinis experienced during the renovation process was the chance to glimpse snippets of life in early Naples. Recalls Larry, "One day a couple of women who must have been in their 80s came by to tell us they had lived in the guest houses behind the pool area. 'We bought the houses from the builders of the Naples Hotel, they said. 'We grew up there, learned to tie our shoelaces in front of the fireplace and had tea parties with white gloves.'"

As a tribute to Dorothy's love for the cottage, the Paolinis constructed a white picket fence out front. "She said she remembered having one long ago to keep the wild boars out of the yard," says Trish, who adds, "I also made sure to have a piano in place. Besides her Christmas tree, Dorothy had four pianos in her living room." Along the way, Dorothy obviously acquired much wisdom, recognizing as she did in Trish and Larry, the proper keepers of her memories and the preservers of a piece of Old Naples. ☺