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A Georgian revival home in John's Island gets a fresh coastal modern look

SEA-INSPIRED RESPITE





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CLEAN, COASTAL TOUCHES PREPARE A JOHN'S ISLAND GEORGIAN REVIVAL HOME TO WELCOME ITS NEW OWNERS

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With the siren call of the sea constantly beckoning just beyond our doorsteps, it makes sense that we yearn to bring nature's soothing palette indoors and create a living space that provides the sense of respite we experience from swaying palms, shushing sands and gently lapping waves. In this recently renovated abode, a capable team came together to do just that.

The owners of this coastal-inspired John's Island dwelling — a recently retired physician and his wife — are based in the Midwest but have frequented Vero Beach since the late 1970s, as they took regular trips to visit the wife's parents, who had a residence at John's Island for over 30 years. Aside from their main residence in Des Moines, Iowa, the couple also has a home in Palm Desert, California, where they spend the months of October and March.

Still, Vero Beach, with its sentimental value and stunning natural scenery, proved impossible to resist, and the homeowners decided to

invest in creating a residence they loved here. "We knew we wanted to continue the tradition of creating wonderful, multigenerational family memories together, and no better place than Vero Beach," the homeowner says. "When looking to purchase a home here at John's Island, we were looking for a southwest water view, a neighborhood feel and enough space to accommodate a growing number of grandchildren. We feel like we found the perfect home for us."

The home — built in the Georgian Revival style, the roots of which date back to a look popular in the 18th and 19th centuries — originally sported interior appointments that bent toward the traditional, and understandably so. Beautiful as it was, the home's existing layout and finishings did not embody

Glass panels and an arched transom surround the formal Palladian entry, in keeping with the graceful symmetry of Georgian homes.



the couple's vision for its future. "We wanted a relaxed, coastal look with a timeless feel, and we wanted our family and guests to walk in and be at home right away," the homeowner shares.

To that end, she enlisted the help of Leah Muller Interiors. "I had always admired Leah Muller's homes; when I kept tearing out photos of rooms for a file that I was keeping, inevitably they were Leah's work!" she laughs.

"Leah Muller Interiors is distinctly coastal modern," agrees interior designer Leah Muller. "Our inspiration is typically our surroundings. We take cues from the natural colors and textures of island living, with an eased contrast of modern lines and metals to create what we call 'coastal modern.' It's our brand. No matter the weather at the beach, the color palette is always right on. The grays and taupes of a stormy beach day are as much at home as turquoise and cyan on a clear sunny day."

She continues, "Our clients have a desire to try something new, something they've never had before. It's exciting to watch them try it and grin from ear to ear like they just sipped their first margarita!" she laughs.

"We just connected from the beginning," adds the homeowner. "I loved her enthusiasm, sparkle and eye for

Modern metal demilunes beneath lacy-edged mirrors reflect light from Palladian French doors, while mixed textures — a tropical sisal rug and natural split rattan chairs — deliver a coastal modern punch.







The breakfast area light fixture is one of the most surprising design elements.

detail. The unexpected bonuses that came along with Leah, though, were her incredible organizational skills and space-planning talent — and, most important, introducing us to Ryan Jones.”

A Vero Beach firm specializing in high-end estate management, renovation and construction services, Ryan A. Jones and Associates was entrusted with the construction work required to totally refresh and modernize the home. Jones completed a wide scope of work on the home, from a new roof to a fresh paint job inside and out, but arguably his most eye-catching contribution was expanding the interior floor plan of the common areas into a more open and welcoming layout.

“I think the most major change to the inside of the house was taking the old, conventional sort of boxed-off, semi-separated kitchen from the family room and just opening that all up, which required some structural work in the roof trusses,” Jones explains. “That’s probably my biggest accomplishment on the interior side. Leah did all of the design and all that, so I just executed all of her ideas.”

Muller, too, is a fan of the change and its dramatic effect on the overall



Taj Mahal quartzite stone countertops, DW Design’s Wood-Mode cabinetry and an island painted French blue for a bit of fun make the kitchen an easy place to gather.



feel of the home. “Now, the sun streams into the kitchen from two directions, and what once was a darker, tighter kitchen is now the heart of the home,” she gushes.

“I think we’re all looking to simplify — to declutter our homes and surround ourselves with positive people and fewer things,” Muller comments. “Our clients have grown children with kids, and they wanted a house where they would spend casual time with family and bring friends from home. They like to entertain, so the house needed to be a place that felt like pure fun and pleasure.

“Our color boards immediately were driven by happy colors in each room. The rooms are bright and cheery, with coastal elements and surprising, modern lighting and artwork. It’s a house they can escape to that really expresses them,” Muller shares.

“Priority number one was to invest time and money into the most-used rooms of the house: the living room and the kitchen that opens to a family room. We didn’t make major changes to the architecture, but instead made small tweaks with big impact,” Muller reveals. In addition, she replaced the home’s existing maple floors with European white oak, an essential step in creating the coastal foundation that



A French blue sofa beneath artwork from Addison Gallery adds cheery color to the family room; the raffia-wrapped cocktail table can handle anything from wine glasses to sippy cups.

helped build the storyboard of the home.

Elegant yet livable, the home straddles the delicate balance between practicality and beauty. “We like to craft functional and inspiring spaces for our families,” Muller explains. “This is an on-the-go, active family, and the spaces are meant to be lived in. Life sometimes gets messy, especially with kids. With this in mind, we wanted fabrics and materials with easy maintenance features. We were able to do that with indoor/outdoor fabrics and natural fiber rugs. We also like to create solutions to lifestyles, using such materials as LED lighting and family-friendly surface trends on floors, walls and countertops.”

The homeowner, too, appreciates the balance Muller was able to deftly strike. “My favorite elements of the design are how they incorporated our family’s heirlooms into each room — for example, the chairs in the living room at the small table, the chest in our master bedroom, the round table and chairs in the kitchen, the artwork in the entryway and den — while still creating a modern vibe, as well as the beautiful ocean colors throughout the home and the way they reconfigured the kitchen space into one large

Cole & Sons blue palm wallpaper creates an accent wall in the guest room, where a custom camelback headboard and modern glass table lamps make for a cozy sleeping area.





Soothing spa green, a custom Benjamin Moore color mix by Muller, carries from the master bath into the bedroom. Cushy upholstered chairs covered in Kravet fabric and the client's own Queen Anne-style chest are situated in front of the bright window.

gathering area.”

She adds, “The most unexpected surprise was the light fixture in the breakfast area. It makes that space pop!”

Another unmissable yet subtle element of the reimagined home is its light color palette, namely, the predominantly white or almost-white walls. Here, white doesn't mean blank space; stroll through this John's Island vision and you'll find that white is in fact a tasteful theme of the space, from the exterior all the way through to the airy indoors.

“The truth is, white will always be a staple in a beach home,” Muller says. “Just look at all the coastal homes, new and old, around the world — in Europe, Greece, South America — whether it's because it's a safe choice or because

it works with other colors, it evokes a clean, fresh feeling. White isn't going away any time soon. It simply works.”

At the end of the day, each party agrees that ultimately what made the renovation a success was assembling the dream team of experts who could pull it off, while enjoying each other's company from start to finish.

“We were thrilled to work with the homeowners,” Muller says. “I won't lie; this was a challenging project that deserved time and attention. But I couldn't wait to begin working with them on it. It was exhilarating.”

“I stayed for three weeks after my husband returned home, and Ryan, Leah and I met almost daily to churn out the many details for our remodel,” the homeowner shares. “It was a fabulous collaboration, and throughout the

project we had tremendous communication. They both strive — along with Shannon Colkitt, who was a big part in this process, as she did a lot of leg work for Leah and was very involved in helping me choose items for our home — to understand their clients' needs, and managed to help us create a better end product.”

Serving the homeowner in this way was no accident on Muller's part. “My New Year's resolution was to help my clients understand the importance of our early and consistent involvement, seeing the project through the build and final furnishings phases,” Muller explains. “Our design process at Leah Muller Interiors is made up of several phases; fortunately, these clients understood that it would take time to conceptualize and develop the ideas



Overnight visitors in the second guest bedroom are treated to tropical serenity with turquoise and orange fabrics, bright bed linens and seagrass headboards.

gathered from our initial meetings to a final construction plan, and they orchestrated a terrific team of professionals to renovate their home.”

Jones agrees. “Leah and I have done other projects together, so I know what her expectations are, what she likes and what she doesn’t like,” he explains. The two have collaborated on around half a dozen projects now, with another potential project on the way, so they understand each other’s work styles and find that they often see eye to eye as they bring a client’s vision to life.

“She and I work very well together,” Jones says, “not to mention the fact that [the homeowners] were some of the finest people that I’ve ever worked for — very, very easy to work with.” In fact, he goes on to say, the homeowners were the highlight of this project for him. “We [finished] the project and

we’ve actually been taking care of their house ever since then, so they’ve turned into a long-term client for us.”

Because the homeowners are here only seasonally, they appreciate having someone they trust look after their house while they’re away. “The peace of mind knowing our investment is well taken care of is invaluable,” she says. Estate management was a natural extension for Jones’s firm, which functions to provide end-to-end estate makeover and management services. “We take care of all the ins and outs of the house: the lawn, pest control, checking on the place every week to make sure everything’s in order and doing any and all general maintenance on the house as things progress.”

The striking beauty of the finished home is such that the homeowners are eager to return whenever they spend

time away. “When we walked in and saw our home transformed, it truly made us feel like it was Christmas morning. Every detail was perfect! Our home is light, happy and harmonious,” the homeowner raves.

Jones, too, is proud of the end result of the collaborative effort of Muller, the homeowners and himself: “I drive past it on a weekly basis, and the place just shines so much from the outside and shines so much from the inside,” he smiles.

As a drift of salt air dusts the surface of the Atlantic Ocean, passes over the Indian River Lagoon and then winds through the rooms of the home, buoying the spirit of every occupant, it’s impossible to ignore the sheer magic of an inspired space brought to life by locals who appreciate the powerful allure of the sea. ☼