

FIXED —UP—

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PHOTOS BY ROB DOWNEY

An abandoned home in Riomar in Vero is transformed into a showplace

When Holly and Chris Brown decided to move from their home in Vero Beach's John's Island, they went on the hunt for a location that would be centrally located and close to St. Edward's School, which their three children attend. With a love of the water and outdoors, the couple also wanted easy access to the Indian River Lagoon. They found a location in Riomar that fit the criteria, but the house itself had been abandoned for more than a year. "It was in rough shape," said Chris. "The backyard was a jungle of weeds and the pool was black. But, the bones of the house were there. It was perfect for what we needed. Holly has a good eye for design and saw the potential." The property was in a short sale making the purchase more difficult than normal, but the couple persevered through the hurdles. They were adamant that this was the right place for their family.

Since Holly enjoys design, she worked directly with a builder and draftsman to develop the plans for renovation. "We like to have people over," said Chris. "We wanted the house to be functional for our family and friends, not just something pretty to look at." With that in mind,

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The Browns spend a lot of time in the family room and kitchen. The mirror above the fireplace disguises a flat screen TV.





Ed Reilly of Reilly Construction made certain that the beams in the formal living and dining room created offset Xes to complement the other unusual ceilings in the house. They were custom-made to resemble crossbeams from an old barn.



The renovated home in Riomar is perfect for the lively, young Brown family — Campbell, Chris, Carrington, CH, Holly and Winnie the pooch.

Ed Reilly of Reilly Construction set out to incorporate each of the couple's ideas to transform the old structure into a home the Brown family could enjoy.

"Ed was creative in working with the existing structure and lot lines," said Holly. "He's a good problem solver. We'd explain to him what we wanted a room to look like and he made it work."

"Holly and Chris were a lot of fun to work with," said Reilly. "We put together their ideas — things you don't see in every house. It was a little challenging because we didn't have an architect involved, but it was rewarding because it came out really nice." Reilly's favorite projects were the ceilings in the master bedroom and media room. Each had boxed millwork that were on the diagonal and offset, respectively.

CHALLENGES

"Our biggest challenge was the outside front portico," said Holly. "It had straight narrow columns that were really tall. We wanted to make it more inviting and charming." Here, they created two levels in the roof line above the front porch and incorporated circular openings on either side of the entryway. X-themed blue benches sit underneath the openings. The mahogany door with a raised transom window provides a warm welcome to visitors.

"Chris went to school at Tulane in New Orleans, so we wanted to add a touch of that culture to the house which is why we put gas lanterns to the entryway," Holly said. She helped design Chippendale-style railings with diamond patterns on the outside balconies off the second story. She also >>



The children occupy the upstairs wing. The custom staircase continues the theme of Xes and diamonds.

designed French-style gardens on either side of the entryway with boxwood hedges in the shape of Xes.

The ceilings, along with a continual theme of Xes and diamonds throughout the architecture, make the house unique. "I wanted every room to have something different as far as the lighting and ceilings go," said Holly. "Ed maximized the space and took the ceilings and doors as high as they could go. There was ample room in the attic to vault the low ceilings upward."

MIRROR ON THE WALL

"Ed's craftsmen are fabulous," said Holly as she looked at the living room ceiling. "He was most proud of this room." Holly challenged the team to construct beams that look as if they came from an old barn. The beams are placed together with square pegs and crisscrossed, forming an X. The couple built bookshelves on either side of the couch. Opposite it is a huge mirror. "My mom and I bought that mirror in the '90s in an antique shop in Palm Beach," said Holly. "When she and my dad sold their home, the prospective buyers wanted the mirror as part of the sale. My dad and I fought over whether we would ruin the sale of the house over this mirror. I finally won and they told the buyers it had to stay with the family. They continued to move it into two more houses, and I insisted that they exclude it from the sales. My mom gave me the mirror several years ago before we moved into this home. It's extremely heavy and difficult to hang. There are two holes at the top of the frame that bolts fit through to secure it to the wall. And, because of the weight of it, we had the builder put a stud across the back inside the wall where we knew we wanted to hang it. Hopefully one of my children will want it >>



The front entrance was softened and made more inviting by adding circular openings and diamond shaped benches.





The Browns designed custom ceilings throughout the house. The master bedroom ceiling has offset Xes. The abalone counter top, right, adds a tropical, Bali influence to the power room adjacent to the media room

as much as I did so it will continue to stay in the family.” The living room opens into what was once a lanai that has been transformed into the formal dining room with a view of the water.

The couple’s bedroom ceiling also sports millwork of boxes that form Xes. In the master bath, they added arches and unique mirrors with diamond shapes. The shower has a matrix of mother of pearl tiles and an oval window overlooking the garden.

When asked what their favorite room was, both Holly and Chris immediately responded that it was the kitchen and family room. “We had a traditional house in John’s Island that had a small galley kitchen and family room,” said Holly. “The kitchen was where we were most of the time. When we had toddlers running around, we decided that we needed a larger family room off of the kitchen area.”

OPENING THE SPACE

At the Riomar house, removing a wall and raising the ceilings opened the space up to complete a kitchen, dining area and family room. Holly found beams reclaimed from an Oregon farmhouse to go over the casual dining table. “I wanted to add a little rustic accent,” said Holly. “It gives a sense of this being its own special dining area.” The beams do indeed

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The kitchen island has a huge slab of granite that has beveled edges. The mantle over the stove top was designed by Holly.

add a cozy feel that helps separate the kitchen from the eating area.

Holly and Chris made substantial changes to the kitchen, too. The center island has a beautiful granite top. "Mike with Stones of Italy is a real artist and has a good eye when it comes to granite," said Holly. "To give the island countertop a different look, he added a ridge along the edge, which is really difficult to do."

Other details in the kitchen include beautiful cabinetry and mill work. "Dave at Final Touch Cabinetry is wonderful to work with," said Holly. "He's remodeled several kitchens for me. He makes sure everything is perfect down to the last hinge." Holly envisioned a mantle and corbels above the stove, and Dave worked with her to come up with a traditional style that is truly unique. A handcrafted tile wall is behind the stovetop where a pass-through window once was. Tall doorways and windows on the east side of the kitchen >>



The mud room adjacent to the kitchen is the perfect place to store hats, coats and other attire.

lead out to the patio and backyard. “Our other house had an outdoor kitchen, so we really wanted one here, too,” said Holly. Again, the ceiling is a unique feature of this functional, breezy outdoor room. The couple hand-picked pecky cypress logs to create a rustic Florida feel. “We had Thanksgiving out here with the fireplace on,” said Holly. “It was wonderful!”

LAGOON VIEWS

The patio overlooks the pool and mangrove shore of the Indian River Lagoon. “We did a lot of work re-designing the backyard,” said Chris. “There was a steep decline towards the water, so we filled it in and raised it so the children would have more room to play. We also moved trees around, so we would have room to throw a football.” A kid at heart, Chris had a custom treehouse built with peeled locust Y branches for the railing that has a zipline where kids young and old can zip toward the water.

Chris, who grew up in Darien, Conn., was in North Palm Beach for a wedding when he met Holly, a graduate of Pepperdine Law School who practiced tax and estate law. The couple immediately hit it off and were later married. They honeymooned in Bali, Indonesia, where they became enamored with the Balinese culture and décor. They returned with furniture, statues and other items, and during the renovation of this home, they made sure there were appropriate places for their Bali collection.

Bali statues surround the house and sit among the lush tropical vegetation in all parts of the yard. On >>



The pecky cypress ceilings in the outdoor kitchen are reminiscent of old Florida decor.

the north side of the house is a Bali outdoor shower made from pecky cypress and river rock.

Inside, the media room, which was once a bedroom, shows off a Bali flair with artwork, lamps and statues. In the corner of the media room is a table that Chris' grandfather brought back from Bali with ornate legs and bits of ivory. The ceiling is unique with offset box millwork.

CHILDREN'S AREA

A room that formerly held dog kennels is now a beautifully decorated space where the Brown's three children — their sons CH, age 10, and Campbell, age six, along with their daughter, Carrington, age nine — work on the computer or just hang out with friends. Each child has its own storage space where coats, shoes and hats are kept. Winnie the dog makes sure that the children stay entertained along with the children's other pets: a guinea pig, a hamster and a rabbit.

The stairway leading to the second floor has a custom staircase of X's and diamonds. The children have their bedrooms upstairs along with a fun game room that has built-in bookshelves. The boys' rooms have a nautical theme, including the bathroom, which has ship's portal mirrors and water charts adorning the walls.

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Balconies on the second story provide a place to view wonderful sunsets.





The decor in the media room is heavily influenced by the Bali culture. Chris's grandfather brought back an intricately carved table from Bali.

The downstairs den, which used to be a dining room, is a place where Holly and Chris can spend some adult time. A beautiful desk houses a computer. Antique paintings of Chris's great-great grandfather, John Burke, who died in 1865, and his grandfather, Harry Riddle, who died in 1935, adorn the walls.

After more than a year of renovation, the Browns now find solitude in a home that incorporates unique, functional features and is a perfect place to raise their family. *PR*



Renovating the front of the house was most challenging. The boxwood European-style gardens and the New Orleans style gas lanterns bring eclectic variety to the entryway. The mahogany door is custom-made from South America.