

DESIGN FOR THE WELL-LIVED LIFE

MARCH 2006

HOUSE & GARDEN

MIX IT UP!

ECLECTIC DECORATING
WHAT WORKS—WHAT DOESN'T
Color FRESH COMBINATIONS



Glory Days

A woman with blonde hair, wearing a blue polo shirt and white pants, stands behind a white wrought-iron railing. The room is grand and ornate, featuring a large chandelier, framed pictures of pumpkins, and round tables with vases of white flowers. The floor is made of light-colored marble.

A SUN-DRENCHED PALM BEACH HOUSE BUILT IN 1939
GETS AN AWARD-WINNING OVERHAUL THAT RESTORES AND
ENHANCES MUCH OF ITS ORIGINAL HISTORY



Hilary Geary Ross leans against an original banister in the entry hall, opposite page, which is defined by such striking pieces as a Foliate lantern in white and gold from Niermann Weeks, NYC, a collection of blue-and-white Chinese and Japanese jars and garden seats from John Rosselli International, NYC, and rosewood and gilt octagonal tables from John Hobbs, Ltd., London. ■ The stately exterior, this page, is vintage Georgian Revival style.

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ilary Geary Ross and Wilbur Ross knew they wanted a home in Palm Beach. Fixtures on the society and business pages, respectively, they had met years ago and married others. After she was widowed and he was divorced, they met again and decided to marry, a state that has brought them as close to heavenly bliss as possible on earth. They needed a Florida backdrop designed to amplify their happiness, the better to share it with family and friends.

Windsong, set on a corner lot that juts into Lake Worth, does that in spades. Built in 1939 for Ellsworth C. Warner of Minneapolis, this Georgian Revival house designed by John Volk is recognized as one of his masterpieces, with gracefully flowing spaces and exquisite details. In 1989, Windsong received a landmark designation from the Palm Beach Landmarks Preservation Commission.

The couple bought Windsong in 2003. "It spoke to you, it played to the elements," Geary Ross says. "The light just raises your spirits." Filled with references to Palladio and Adam, the structure has good bones, but the couple opted to give it a little boost to bring out its former glory and full potential. Geary Ross tapped architect Thomas M. Kirchhoff, who specializes in working on historic homes in the area, and celebrated designer Bunny Williams. The team embarked on a seven-month restoration project, which won the coveted Ballinger Award for 2004 for excellence in the restoration



The airy living room has several seating areas for conversation. Louis XV-style chairs are from John Rosselli International, NYC. Chairs, center, are in Claremont's Palma damask in Or Havane. Bunny Williams, Inc., designed the bergère chairs, back right. A 19th-century Amboyne center table from Guy Regal, Ltd., NYC, sits on an Elizabeth Eakins carpet in the Hock Grid pattern. Custom curtains by Bunny Williams, Inc., in Nancy Corzine's Federica Stripe. Custom-carved Acanthus chandelier, from Niermann Weeks. Custom-colored walls in Venetian plaster, applied by J. E. Miller & Son, Inc., West Palm Beach, FL.





The serene library, above, has slipper chairs from John Rosselli International in Robert Kime's Tree of Life, a custom Lawson sofa from Schneller & Sons, NYC, and John Boone's Piquet low table with French crackled lacquer. Portrait by Chiu Ya Tsai.

■ A sea-inspired table setting, opposite page, includes Alexis stemware from William Yeoward, Haviland chargers, and silver shells from Ruzzetti & Gow, NYC. Holly Hunt's Adam wheel-back chairs surround Oscar de la Renta's radial expansion table, through Century Designer Showroom, NYC. A custom dhurrie by Rug Loft, NYC, and curtains in George Spencer's Strié Pale Pink, through Claremont, bring touches of warm color.

and rehabilitation of historic architecture. "The nicest thing about winning is that it shows a sense of integrity about the design," Williams says.

Everybody had agreed on what to do. The loggia needed to be reopened. The second floor required reconfiguring to create a suitable master suite and luxurious guest rooms. A set of back stairs needed an overhaul so that houseguests felt welcomed, not hidden away. "We decided to put it back to what it had been," Williams says. "It had lost a little character. A lot of the process was doing things that make logical sense: how it flows from one room to another, how you're going to use a room. That's what drives design decisions."

Kirchhoff examined Volk's plans and historic photographs before taking on challenges such as installing impact-rated French doors without destroying the dining room's original crown moldings. He reinforced the roof and the way it ties to the walls, and restored the windows and shutters. Mario Nievera worked on the landscaping, and Scott Robertson, a decorative painter, provided finishing touches, including the powder room's faux terrazzo floor. "The Rosses were fantastic," Kirchhoff says. "They gave me carte blanche to bring it back to where it should be."

Jennifer Feldman, a senior designer in Williams's office, oversaw the day-to-day work. The Rosses wanted a light-filled residence, so Feldman used lots of bright colors. "Hilary was excited about everything—she was at every meeting," Feldman says. The living room is melon Venetian plaster. The master bedroom has a blue and white scheme. Color and art fill guest rooms, the foyer, the hallways, and the staircases. ▷



THE MIX

HOW IT WORKS

- **COLOR** Neutral tones create a calm backdrop for a wide range of furnishings, such as Louis XV-style chairs and an Acanthus chandelier. Don't overpower a classical composition with pop colors.
- **ASSEMBLING** Rosewood and gilt tables and Chinese and Japanese jars in the entry recall America's fascination with Europe and Europeans' fascination with the East in the 19th century. Geary Ross groups like with like, so these objects do not clash.
- **ART** Contemporary Chinese art, like the portrait in the library, gives a forward thrust to a timeless space.





In the cool, elegant master bedroom, this page, Claremont's Ice Blue Cordoba wool damask is on the chaise and Toile Chenonceau in Cream is on the sofa. A bed frame from Century Designer Showroom, a Louis XV bergère from John Rosselli, and curtains by Trudi Foster Interiors, Inc., Palm Beach, add scale. The carpet is custom handwoven wool from A.M. Collections. ■ The powder room, opposite page, glows with Nancy Corzine's Harlow vanity and a Murano glass chandelier from Jean Karajian Gallery, NYC. See Shopping, last pages.

The reopened loggia is everyone's favorite room, and the Rosses begin and end the day there. Geary Ross is pleased with other spaces, too. The living room, with a palette of pale apricot, beige, and white, "is very calming, soothing, and comfortable," she says. She also delights in her crisply cool and relaxing master suite. The powder room, an all-out fantasy with mermaids that is original to the house, generates smiles and the occasional giggle. Geary Ross describes the cypress-paneled library—restored the old-fashioned way, with elbow grease and wax—as the "bad-weather room."

Although the architectural work is finished, the interiors are not. "They never end," Williams says. One ongoing project is the art. The Rosses, avid collectors, started acquiring important work from China's emerging artists after seeing the collections at David Tang's elegant China Club in Hong Kong and its Beijing counterpart in the former residence of Manchu general and imperial wannabe Yüan Shih-k'ai. An oil portrait by Chiu Ya Tsai hangs in the library; the artist is "very successful at blending the historical Chinese aesthetic with a modern aesthetic," Wilbur Ross says, "and I think that's what makes it so powerful." The couple are enthusiastic about a new sculpture, a flying Buddha. "I want to hug it," Geary Ross says.

"I hope they'll always collect," Williams says. "That's what makes a house alive." Elizabeth Blish Hughes is a writer based in New York and San Francisco. □



