Shell Games

FROM SEASHELL PINKS TO GARDEN GREENS, BUNNY WILLIAMS’S GLAMOROUS REFRESH OF A MEDITERRANEAN-STYLE VILLA TAKES ITS COLOR CUES FROM THE HOME’S LUSH SETTING.
WHEN BUNNY WILLIAMS’S CLIENTS asked her to decorate a 15-year-old Mediterranean Revival house in Palm Beach, the three of them agreed that the house—whose style harks back to the 1920s designs of local starchitect Addison Mizner—should “look settled, like it had always been there.”

The retired couple already had one grandchild and hoped for more. With this in mind, they asked the original architect, Jeffrey W. Smith, to add a wing while redoing the pool and landscaping. Williams’s job was to provide that forever look, but one that was by no means dusty or dated. To that end, she bought lots of 18th-century Italian antiques, which were well suited to the vernacular, and then she brought the space into the 21st century by incorporating a range of current pieces.

In the dining room, for example, a contemporary resin-topped table coexists with an 18th-century Italian console and a 19th-century English mahogany cabinet, while works from the couple’s collection of modern art hang on the walls. Likewise in
The dining room’s Stark sisal rug was custom-painted in a pattern based on a classic Serge Roche design. Italian chairs, Sutter Antiques. Lamps, the Light Touch. Neo-classical console, H.M. Luther. Opposite, from top: 19th-century English cabinet (right), Alexander Cohane; walls, custom Venetian plaster. A French Regency console is flanked by metal planters on custom pedestals in the entry; 18th-century English mirror, Ronald Phillips.

The latter room’s palette stems from what Williams describes as an “aha moment” that she had while staring out the windows during the project’s very early planning stages. “I was looking at all the foliage, and I suddenly decided to do everything in an acid apple green,” she says of the living room’s upholstered furniture. “When you do one color, it’s less busy,” she says. Williams paired the vibrant hue with chocolate brown accents and splashes of eggplant and magenta, surrounded by ivory walls. The serene backdrop was deliberate, she says, “because I knew that the clients would be buying a lot of contemporary art with bright colors.”

Serenity also reigns in the master bedroom and breakfast room, where the walls are pink plaster, the result of another inspiration.

OPPOSITE,
FROM TOP:
In the wife’s walk-in closet, the vintage chair in a Pollack fabric is from John Rosselli Antiques; carpet, Stark. The chair in the husband’s bath is from Lee Calicchio; sconces, Hudson Valley Lighting; pendant, Profiles; wallpaper, Old World Weavers; custom marble flooring, Studium.

Above: In the master bedroom, she adds, “the silvery John Robshaw bed echoes the sheen of the inside of a shell. It’s fun to look at things like that to start your palette, to pick up something and think, Ooh…. Pink is such a great color. I used to avoid it, but now it’s my favorite.”

“When I think of Florida, I think of seashells,” Williams says. “If you look at the inside of a conch shell, it’s an amazing soft, pinky color.”

In the new guesthouse, the bedroom looking out onto the pool is swathed in “watery blue colors.” Meanwhile, the living room features a decidedly modern take on a classic Mediterranean tiled wall. “The walls were all done with photo imaging,” the designer says, marveling at the technique. “You just lay out the images of the tiles on a computer, and they’re photo-printed, and then you hang up the result like wallpaper.”

The house, now the perfect winter respite for the clients and their extended family, appears as settled as everyone had hoped. Williams, ever modest, gives credit to “some great old trees on the property that make it seem as if the house has always been there.” But the real credit goes to her deft mix of old and new, her application of the colors found in nature, and her inimitably fresh take on Palm Beach’s ersatz Mediterranean style.
The guesthouse’s living room is used for family gatherings and movie nights. Custom digital wallcovering, Artgroove. Sectional, Bradmore. Armchairs, O. Henry House. Elephant stool and mirror, John Rosselli & Associates. Opposite, from top: The loggia’s seating is by Bielecky Brothers; pendants, Paul Ferrante; rug, Bunny Williams for Dash & Albert. A fountain by Mario Nievera, who designed the property’s gardens. For more details, see Sourcebook.