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Idea House 2005

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2005 PALM BEACH IDEA HOUSE

Hot House

Peggy Guggenheim had Palazzo Venier dei Leoni. Doris Duke had Shangri La. In the homing tradition of these legendary collectors, Beth Rudin DeWoody settles on a spectacular property in West Palm Beach. With dreamy vista of Palm Beach Island, she has fashioned a compound where she can surround herself with family, friends and the collections that inflame her passions.



Water World | *The Pool (Above) is on a perpendicular axis between the house and the Intracoastal. The elongated shape features a vanishing edge on the Intracoastal end and a chaise shelf on one side.*

BY NEWELL TURNER | PHOTOGRAPHS BY ERIC STRIFFLER



BETH RUDIN DEWOODY, who has been wintering in Palm Beach with family for most of her life, can vividly recall the Palm Beach of the 1950s and '60s, when life centered on a quiet, more laid-back lifestyle. Seven years ago, while visiting her father's guest-filled house over the holidays, she realized it was simply time to look for her own place. "I wanted to find a great fixer-upper, and I really wanted a place on the water," she explains.

Checking in on a friend from the art world who was staying at a bed and breakfast in Northwood, DeWoody discovered a neighborhood that she hadn't known existed. Along the northern end of Flagler Drive in West Palm Beach, it was a neighborhood in the early stages of a transformation. More to the point, the waterfront properties were surprisingly undervalued. So with the same unfailing intuition that made DeWoody one of the first high-profile shoppers in the vintage shops on South Dixie, she moved quickly to purchase a spec house that looked out over the Intracoastal. Soon two adjacent properties came on the market, and DeWoody had the plat for her new compound.

The third and last house added to the property was a non-descript 1950s split-level that appealed to DeWoody's interest in mid-20th-century design and offered the perfect retreat for her on the expanded property. A plan began to take shape for the house that was envisioned as the main living and entertaining space for the compound. "I like the idea of compounds," DeWoody explains, "because I'm not into McMansions. I wanted a place where everyone could be together and still have privacy."

Given DeWoody's passion for collecting, she also needed the guidance of interior designers Randall Beale and Carl Lana to fashion the rooms into livable spaces that wouldn't become mere storage rooms for her growing art and decorative arts collection—they're broad in themes and many in number.

Based on friendship and shared aesthetic sensibilities, the client and designers developed a rare mutual trust, and Lana and Beale immersed themselves in the project. With architect Hugh Huddleson, they introduced details and materials to the structure of the house, giving it more of the mid-century modern spirit that DeWoody desired. "We set out to revive a neglected building built in a neglected stylistic era," adds the architect, "and it was modest not



spectacular for its time. Following the lead of a client with remarkable skills in recognizing not yet fashionable things—we set out to make an environment that is strikingly, confidently fresh and unencumbered by conventional predictability.”

Inside, the house had a very low ceiling and small spaces. The circular dining room was originally a terrace that previous owners had enclosed but not integrated with the house, according to Huddleson. They removed the ceiling in the living room to see how much height could be gained and came up with a structural collar tie solution to leave it all exposed. The rafters were then simply painted white for a casual beach-house style. Upstairs in the master bedroom, the architect came up with a creative solution to install the ceiling above the ceiling joists for an additional foot of valuable height.

The stairway was reconfigured to spill into the living space, tying the rooms together and giving “procession”and



heightened experience when moving through the house. “Certain rooms have a defined character that makes them stand apart as true installations,” Lana elaborates.

“Beth can mix many periods at once.” A collector of both high- and low-brow art, she has a smart, artistic eye for combining the two. The challenge for the interior designers was to enable that gift—not stifle it.

While many of the furnishings were purchased as they trolled in antique and vintage shops here and in the northeast, the designers were also given access to DeWoody’s extensive collections, most of which are in storage.

“Design is about having really good style. It’s not about copying your girlfriend,” Beale says. “There’s nothing worse than a living room that looks like a hotel lobby. Design is also supposed to be a reflection of the times in which we live. But, in the end it’s all about your personality.” ☀