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This (New) Old House

Inside the Peterson's cozy, bayfront home

By HEATHER GOFF | Primary photography by BILL STARLING |



When Monica Peterson saw this spacious house on Mobile Bay in December of 2002, she just knew it felt right. Now, she and her family of seven proudly call the waterfront haven their home. Its Colonial Revival style lends an all-American feel, full of comfort and familiarity.

"(The house) reminded me of the movie *Father of the Bride* with Steve Martin," Monica said. "It kind of had that Americana look to it that I adore, and I just fell in love with it." ◆◆



To make it perfect, the Petersons drew up a few revisions to the 1970s-built home. A master suite was added downstairs with two smaller bedrooms above. The kitchen was also expanded from its original galley form to a more open design, complete with a breakfast nook.

Still, Monica wanted to preserve as much of the home's initial integrity as possible.

"I respected the woman who originally designed and built the house and raised her children in it," Monica said. "She put a lot of effort into researching it and I didn't want to just throw her stuff away. I wanted to reuse it in our house whenever we could."

At the home's center, a side-by-side living room and family room showcased heavy, heart pine beams running across cathedral ceilings. However, Monica wanted to lighten the bayfront area and had the beams removed. The valuable wood was then planed to make paneling for the study.

"When I learned we could do that, I thought, 'Well, that's a great way to keep something that was original to the house,'" Monica said. "I just get a good vibe about the people who built this home. I didn't want to disrespect where they had raised their children. And it's special to know that the home you're raising your family in was a family home to someone else." ♦





Photos by John David Mercer



MORNING VIEW | Mystery stands watch in the breakfast nook, which features a refinished dining room set handed down by Monica's grandmother.





DYNAMIC DUO | A dual-sided living area combines functional comfort and refined elegance.





Photo by John David Mercer

Most of the original light fixtures were kept, as well – including two large lanterns at the back of the house. The front windows are also from the former owner’s design. The wavy, glass pieces are multi-paned and framed with wood, a high-maintenance detail in this region. Yet, the rustic element adds character and authenticity to the home.

“I just love the exact proportion of the windows – they way they are cut,” Monica said. “They’re glazed in a different way, too; they don’t make these anymore. It just gives it a different feel, rather than brand-new manufactured windows.”

While keeping many of the home’s classic, colonial-style elements, Monica also folded more contemporary pieces into the décor. Raised in New Orleans, she drew from the city’s elegant, French-Creole style. She also found inspiration in the quaint, beach community of Seaside, Fla., one of the family’s favorite vacation locales.





“It has some of the details of old New Orleans that I find comfortable because I grew up there and that was just part of the landscape for me,” Monica said. “And I just love the architecture in Seaside, which works well with our house – kind of the nostalgic, Americana look.”

A sizeable cypress door, reclaimed shutters and Bevolo light fixtures were all transported from the Crescent City. A formal dining room accented with gilding and an oversized, round table also reflect the traditional allure of old New Orleans. A stained glass window above the wet bar gives another colorful nod to the area.

Adding to the home’s relaxed Southern feel, its airy design and abundance of light are reminiscent of a coastal cottage, as well. Monochromatic creams and yellows lend a soothing, cheerful tone. And located on a hill overlooking Mobile Bay, the home boasts an incredible waterfront view. Floor-to-ceiling windows throughout capture each sunrise and sunset.

This blend of time-honored architecture freshened with comfortable, personal details is an idea borrowed from the pages of Russell Versaci’s *Creating A New Old House*, Monica said. The approach aims to marry modern living and classic design, to produce a new house that looks and feels like it’s always been there. ♦

SIZEABLE FIND | The aged, cypress front door is a reclaimed piece, transported from New Orleans.

“That book just kind of nailed it for me – as far as a respect for the old and living with the past,” Monica explained. “And Hays Town is another architect who takes the beauty of age and throws something fresh into the mix to make it your own.”

Using some of the home’s original elements and other reclaimed materials helps create a sense of timeless durability. Heart pine floors, matte marble countertops and areas of exposed brick indoors also convey comfort and warmth.

“I didn’t want my home to look like a brand-new subdivision house or feel like a museum,” Monica said. “I wanted my family to be relaxed and call it home – not feel like we’re messing up the carpet or leaving a ring on something. This makes it a lot cozier and interesting. Because the home is really just the experience of living in it and the family that lives there.”

For more information, see Resources on page 79.



FRENCH FINERY | Set for eight, a large dining room table and gilded accents reflect a formal take on New Orleans tradition.



AL FRESCO | This outdoor entertaining area is perfect for year-round family gatherings.