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MIAMI





In the entry of a 1970s home, interior designer Ellen Kavanaugh created a “rug” of glazed terra-cotta tiles from Paris Ceramics amid floors from Absolute Hardwood Flooring. Mr. Brown London’s Parrot table centers the space beneath Hector Finch’s Lollipop globe. Against a mural by artist Austin Kerr, Julian Chichester’s Avellino bench sits beneath McGuire’s Hoku mirror.

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ometimes, it takes a professional’s eye to see a home’s potential. Such was the case for one couple who purchased a 1970s dwelling that hadn’t been updated in decades. Upon observing the expansive grounds and

promising footprint, a team of experts helped their clients look past the jumbled floor plan, Mexican tile and dated finishes to visualize what the property could be: a bright, coastal-inspired sanctuary. “We saw great spaces and bones,” says interior designer Ellen Kavanaugh. “We gave the couple the confidence that we could make this house really wonderful.”

Such a transformation required a major renovation. Residential designers Daniel Ménard and Gianni Varnava partnered with general contractor Chip Valle for the job, with Michael J. Johnson serving as architect of record. They knew the structure’s low ceilings and enclosed areas were a main source of the home’s dark interiors, so they forged a plan to refine the layout in a way that would enlarge spaces and introduce more natural light. “The original house had a lot of hallways and small rooms,” Varnava recalls. “We consolidated areas to have better flow and more openness throughout.” The team also raised ceilings wherever possible, including in the reconfigured family room, and crafted several with tray, barrel and groin vaults for a captivating touch. “It was basically like building a new house,” Valle says of the remodel.

Although much of the work promoted the concept of opening up the structure, there was one space where the opposite occurred. At the front exterior, the team enclosed a portion of the long outdoor courtyard to form a proper foyer with archways leading to the great room. “The entry allows you to access different parts of the house without having to go through the main living area,” Ménard explains. Knowing this scene would set the tone for the rest of the home, and desiring a lighthearted, fresh take on traditional Palm Beach style, Kavanaugh selected striking glazed teal terra-cotta tile flooring and commissioned an airy, modern

tropical mural on the walls. “We knew right off the bat we wanted this mural,” she says, “so we designed the space to enhance it.”

Beyond the foyer, crisp white walls and pale oak floors offered a clean backdrop for the interior designer to make daring color choices in unexpected places—such as the great room’s sky blue ceiling. A nod to the pool beyond, it is coated with a highly buffed Venetian plaster, creating a luminous quality to reflect light. “I find it’s interesting to take a bold risk with a few finishes,” Kavanaugh notes. To keep the large-scale space—split into dining and living areas—physically and visually uncluttered, the interior designer incorporated pieces such as white upholstered furnishings, a Lucite coffee table and natural textures, including a long wood dining table capped by rattan peacock chairs. Oceanic blues and leafy green tones add doses of color on pillows, artwork and accent chairs, underscoring a tropical feel.

Meanwhile, most of the private spaces take a quieter turn. The primary bedroom, for instance, features a palette of soft blues and creams, complementing the tray ceiling’s lime-washed cypress. “Anytime you add natural wood to a ceiling, it makes the space feel like it has a soul,” Kavanaugh says. “It brings so much life.”

New French doors also introduce light into the primary bedroom and offer views of the backyard, where landscape designer Todd MacLean adopted the interior’s color scheme. “There are hints of blues and greens we wanted to bring from the inside out,” he says, pointing to the Alexander palms and green island ficus near the pool. He also installed bougainvillea along the columns of the loggia, which Kavanaugh transformed into a flexible alfresco gathering space using natural materials and color accents similar to the interior tones.

Radiant and welcoming, the house is a testament to how anything is possible with a stellar renovation, the interior designer says. “This project is a perfect example of clients going out of their comfort zone and giving us the freedom to make bold choices they absolutely love,” she reflects. “They’re thrilled with their new home and wouldn’t have had it any other way.” ■