

On the shady loggia, the designer commissioned custom pieces to match a vintage McGuire outdoor set, covered in fabric by Schumacher.





easy does it

Designer
Todd A. Romano
proves that
the expert use
of old-school
decorating
techniques can
result in a
Florida retreat
that's brimming
with youthful
energy and
modern flourish

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he couple first saw interior designer Todd Romano's work in their daughter and son-in-law's New York City apartment, which they greatly admired. So when the wife contacted the designer, she naturally assumed she would be reaching him in Manhattan, or perhaps in L.A., where Todd has a West Coast branch of his Todd Alexander Romano showroom.

She explained that she and her husband had just purchased a smaller house a couple of blocks from the six-bedroom, oceanfront family home on Hobe Sound where their five daughters, now grown, had descended en masse on school holidays while they were growing up. Then she asked when he might be able to fly down to take a look?

"I'm in Palm Beach!" Todd recalls exclaiming. "I was just 40 minutes away, working on another job. You see, it was kismet from the start."

Soon, he found himself touring the couple's "old" antiques-laden, water-view house, mentally taking its measure. Then they all walked through the new place. The moment he saw it, Todd was smitten. One story, with a clay-tile roof and a charming Dutch front door, it felt to him less typically Floridian and more California vernacular cottage-style, like something you'd see in La Jolla, Carmel, or Pebble Beach.

"You enter through that Dutch front door, yet you are still outside," Todd explains. In fact, first you encounter a foyer, with three solid walls, one of which has a door leading to a guest suite. But just a few steps ahead, you find yourself on a loggia that, on the right, is completely open to the breezes that cross the garden

The house's welcoming Dutch door is painted coral; the flanking shutters are black-green. ■ "I like to nod to the best of the past, but make it fresher, lighter, and more modern," Todd says. In the living room (right), his signature lamps sit on a modern metal-and-glass console table, available at Todd Alexander Romano showrooms in New York and Los Angeles. A Pierre Frey print covers a pair of bergères, while a vivid toile by Bob Collins & Sons adds a bit of fun on the throw pillows.







and the swimming pool. Opposite that opening is a wall of wood-framed glass sliding pocket doors that, when open, render the living and dining area indoor-outdoor, as well. In fact, every room in the house, save one (now the study), directly accesses the outdoors.

"She loves a project," says Todd of his client. Having already done the "big house on the ocean," as well as other residences in the Northeast, she and her husband, both "attractive, smart, funny people who are active in the community's civic and social life," were ready for something not just smaller, but also "younger, fresher, more relaxed and adventurous," he says.

The designer took an interesting route to reach that end. Today those words—"young," "fresh," "relaxed," "adventurous"—often are code for "midcentury modern." And when his clients, whose previous house was filled with English and French antiques, gave a thumbs-up to a modern metal-and-glass console table and a pair of chartreuse gourd lamps, Todd recognized that they had exceptionally limber taste. But he also knew that overdoing that sort of thing would do justice neither to them nor to their new house.

Instead he reached deep into his decorator's bag of tricks and pulled forth a fistful of techniques that indeed harken back to the middle of the last century, and to the way traditional decorating was done at that time. For example, the grasscloth wallcovering in

Todd A. Romano

This native Texan turned devoted New Yorker is known for his fresh, traditional interiors. Trained under legendary designers Tony Ingrao and, later, Mario Buatta, Todd struck out on his own in 1999. He balances old-school elegance with a welcoming informality by taking an irreverent, playful approach to formal spaces. His Upper East Side store

in New York is a source for candy-colored gourd lamps, preppy upholstered furniture, one-of-a-kind antiques, and sophisticated art, as well as fabric and wallpaper. His latest venture, an L.A. branch of Todd Alexander Romano, brings his signature style to the West Coast.





A pagoda-roofed folly houses the couple's golf cart. ■ Opposite: The living room's whitewashed brick and pickled cedar-plank paneling get an enlivening jolt from a lemon green glaze lining the shelves, a perfect foil for a collection of blue-and-white china.

A master bedroom featuring a large bed with a white linen coverlet and blue floral patterned skirt. A chandelier hangs from the ceiling. French doors with blue floral curtains lead to a garden. Two framed pictures hang on the wall. A nightstand with a lamp and flowers is next to the bed. A white upholstered bench is at the foot of the bed.

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To prevent sun damage to the custom-colored Travers & Co. linen fabric, the master bedroom curtains are four layers thick. The walls are stenciled in a white palm-frond stripe.



the dining room is hand-stenciled in the same blue pattern as the Pierre Frey fabric that covers the dining chairs. The tole lantern above it is painted, giving the space a monochromatic pattern-on-pattern mien. Each bedroom is done up with a single patterned chintz. But when the thin fabric is used for upholstery, it is quilted for added dimension and strength, another classic 1950s decorating trope.

"We brought big-house standards to this smaller house," Todd says. His attention to detail is unsparing. Curtains with simple flat-ribbon trim, which appear breezy, in fact weigh as much as winter overcoats due to their layers of interlining, blackout lining, and geometric-print lining, so that when glimpsed through the windows from outdoors (as they frequently are), their backs are as pretty as their fronts. Walls are hand-lacquered or glazed and in some instances also stenciled. Fabrics and wallpapers are custom-colored precisely to the clients' tastes.

While the renovation and decoration of their new house was taking place, the couple was summering up north. A few days before their return to Florida, Todd and his team had everything they'd retained from the old house delivered from storage and arranged along with the new. "They flew down with just their carry-on bags," he recalls. When the pair arrived, their most treasured antiques and artwork from the old house were there to greet them. For a transition that normally traumatizes all involved, this was a downsizing for the ages. Says Todd, "They were so happy." 🌿 For more information, see Sources, page 110.



The guest room (top) is done in a pale, custom-colored gray-and-yellow chintz by Bob Collins & Sons against citrine walls. ■ The owners entertain on the loggia and the expanse of patio (above) that separates the house from the pool.