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TROPICAL VICTORIAN: The exterior of this vacation home in Islamorada sports pastel paint over tidewater cypress siding from Louisiana.

G GINGERBREAD G • E • M

Islamorada house chock-full of charm

Wanted: A large ocean-front house in the Florida Keys, big enough for a three-generation family and assorted friends for extended vacations.

Must be Victorian style, light and airy, with lots of porches and luscious colors.

And don't stint on the gingerbread.

By JO WERNE

Herald Home Furnishings Writer

If Roy and Jean Murphy had advertised for their dream vacation home, the ad might have read something like the above.

But with the help of two architects, a building contractor, and Jean's goal of designing a house to suit her impressive collection of antiques, this dream house overlooking the Atlantic Ocean in Islamorada became a reality after nearly three years of planning and building.

The project cost around \$1 million, not counting the property, which was originally a coconut plantation and recently a mobile home court.

The Murphys (she's a native of Miami, he of Dublin, Ireland) bought the property, removed

palms to make room for the house. They kept a 19th Century, Coach-style cypress cottage on the edge of the property. That's where the home's caretakers live.

The lengthy project — including 16 months of actual construction — "took a lot of 'me' out of me," said Jean from the couple's residence in Bethesda, Md. "But it was worth it; we love the house."

The result also pleases her husband, president of a wholesale building supply company, their four daughters, sons-in-law and three grandchildren. In small groups or as a clan, the Murphys spend about six months of the year in their gingerbread gem. They almost always have friends staying, too. They hosted 40 people for Thanksgiving dinner last year.

The team involved in this project includes architect Tom Davies of Annapolis, Md., who executed the original design; architect Alan Green of Islamorada, who handled the engineering; Michael K. Dooley, president of Long Key Con-



tractors, who built the house; and artist Doug Mason of Doug's Trading Post in Islamorada, who carved the extensive gingerbread trim. The project kept 25 construction workers employed for 16 months.

A three-level structure resting on 10-foot-high pillars (a Florida Keys building code requirement in case of a storm surge), the house is concrete and stucco wrapped in tidewater cypress from Louisiana. It has a tin roof, storm-proof glass in 15 skylights, and approximately 10,000 square feet of quarried tile flooring from Mexico.

There's about 5,500 square feet of interior space and 2,800 square feet of porches — most with a view of the ocean. A 200-foot dock with a chickee at the end stretches over the water.

Crammed with the most modern conveniences, the house, featured in the June issue of Builder magazine, exudes Victorian charm via unusually shaped rooms, gingerbread porch railings and trim, latticework, old-fashioned white wicker furniture and chintz-covered sofas.

Let us count both the conveniences and the charm:

- Four bedroom suites, each with its own



ANTIQUE HEAVEN: A collection of antique furniture, accessories and toys fill the great room, which sports arched windows and an unusual planter with a watering system designed by Michael Dooley.

Sweet features make house a gingerbread wonderland

bath, zoned air conditioning unit and porch. Each contains its own wet bar, refrigerator and microwave oven, so guests can have a snack alone if they don't care to join the crowd.

■ The master bedroom/bath suite includes a library (a wall of built-in books and desk), a sitting area, kitchenette, walk-in wardrobe, and an outdoor shower so the owners can shower with a view of the ocean.

■ A great room on the second level, which is open to the master suite above via a hexagonal-shaped planter that surrounds the opening. Crammed with various kinds of bromeliads and vines, the plants flourish under the skylights.

■ Architectural touches that say "Victorian" include arches, gingerbread trim and lattice, shingled trim on the exterior, beveled and etched windows, and stained-glass hangings. Some interior walls are faced with bead siding — narrow strips of siding that were prevalent in 19th Century homes and are still seen in Key West homes.

■ Pastel colors mixed with strong primaries add zest to the rooms. The shell pink exterior is punctuated

ed by vibrant rose, white and a royal blue that sometimes matches the rich color of the sea. Interior colors include these shades in the living room and master bedroom suite. Guest rooms are painted vivid yellow, blue or green.

■ Beautiful antiques, collected and restored over the years by Jean Murphy, fill the house. The great room is a delightful mix of fabric prints and colors, topped by needle-point pillows (the couple has several cats, so feline motifs are preferred). Three antique sofa and side tables are crammed with family photographs in a variety of frames. Antique dolls and other toys are tucked into corners. The result is cozy English style that looks right at home in the tropics.

Dooley recalls his wonderment at the sight of a large van pulling up to the house upon its completion. "It was full of Jean's antiques, and I wondered where she would put them all," he recalled. "But she had a place for everything. She knew where things were going to be placed while the house was under construction."

But Dooley, a Miami native who studied real estate and finance at the University of Florida, recalls

more of the nitty-gritty of fashioning a house out of an ocean beach. Before construction could begin, he had 200 tons of sand dug out, and pushed it up to the back of the property. The hole was filled with crushed rock.

"When we get a storm surge, the sand will be pushed back, but the crushed rock will keep it from undermining the foundation," he explained. "It cost \$20,000 to do that. People don't understand what it takes to prepare property for building here."

Most houses, new or old, continue as works in progress for years. This vacation home is no exception. At the beginning of the project, the Murphys didn't want a pool, but now they do. So more sand is being dug out on the ocean side for a free-form pool with quarry stone coping and waterfalls.

Another vast project is having aluminum hurricane shutters custom-made for 78 windows. But because Dooley detests the high-tech look of aluminum, he's having gingerbread boxes made to hide them.

"Shutters are ugly, but necessary," he said. "I just want to camouflage them as best I can."



GOOD OLD DAYS: The home's gingerbread scrolls used in doorways and on porches were bought from Cumberland Wood Craft Co. in Durango, Colo. A tin roof, shingled exterior trim and beveled, etched windows add to the look. The home's hurricane shutters will have gingerbread boxes to camouflage them.