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AMERICA'S PAINTED LADIES

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FLORIDA ISLAMORADA

220 Atlantic Street. Roy and Jean Murphy wanted a large oceanfront Victorian. They wanted it to be light and airy with lots of porches and luscious colors, and they spent three years planning and building it. The property had been a coconut plantation, then a mobile home court. They got rid of the mobile homes, but transplanted twenty-eight coconut palms and kept a nineteenth-century coach-style cypress cottage on the edge of the property as a caretaker's cottage.

Jean worked with architects Tom Davies of Annapolis, Maryland, and Alan Green of Islamorada on plans and then with Michael K. Dooley of Long Key Constructors when they built the house in 1987 of tidewater cypress siding from Louisiana over concrete and stucco. The tin roof has storm-proof glass in the fifteen skylights, and there are ten thousand square feet of quarried Mexican tile flooring.

Jean wanted tropical gingerbread, so she drew a palm tree design, and Doug Mason of Islamorada made templates so that the pattern could be repeated around the two verandas. The shell pink exterior is punctuated by vibrant fuchsia rose, white, and a French blue that sometimes matches the color of the sea. Boxes with pretty gingerbread will hide the aluminum hurricane shutters that protect the seventy-eight windows because, alas, the coral reef that protects the white sand beach can't keep hurricanes at bay.

Although the house has modern conveniences, the unusually shaped rooms, gingerbread porch railings and trim, latticework, old-fashioned wicker furniture, and chintz-covered sofas add up to a home with Victorian charm and feeling.



(Overleaf) The center of the house is the two-story living room, which houses part of Jean's eclectic collection of antique furniture and toys. An automatic plant-watering system was designed by Michael Dooley to keep the plants green when the owners are away. The partly hidden two-story "dollhouse," a minibookcase created by San Francisco's Eric Landsdowne in 1988, inspired the colors used on the inside of the house.

The old carriage is filled with antique lace and teddy bears. The oldest teddy bear is Henrietta Paxford from Oxford. In the big chair, a doll named Victoria sits in front of the old English table and mirror on the back wall. Balustrades from a balcony on a cast in Granada, Spain, support the coffee table in front of the sofa. The writing desk is a family heirloom. And the fluffy hatbox on the footstool is made of antique lace and ribbons. The French doors open onto the spacious veranda looking out on the Atlantic. This house is a fantasy come true, a tropical beachfront made-to-order Victorian.