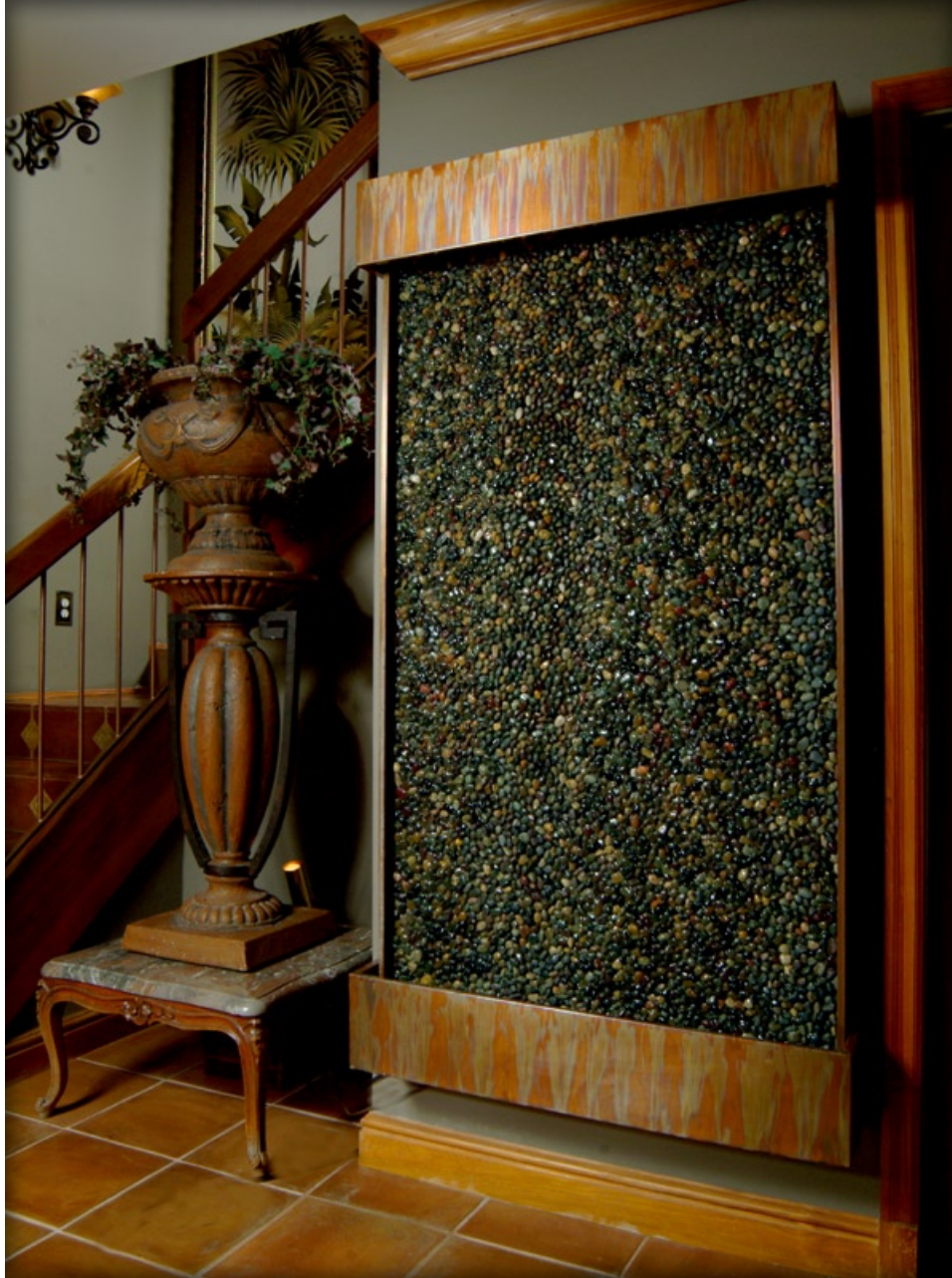


Tropical RETREAT

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PHOTOS BY ROB DOWNEY

Homeowners emphasize natural elements indoors and out



Waterfall above, pond left.

A

s soon as you walk into Laura and Bobby Guttridges' foyer you are transported into a lush paradise with its six-foot-high rock waterfall and tropical flowers everywhere, precisely the look Laura was going for in her Central Beach home in Vero. "I want guests to have a rain forest feel when they walk in," says Laura. The Guttridges' home is "upside down," with the main living space upstairs. The couple, who are active in numerous local >>





Dine Finished



Master bedroom 2aa

charities, completely redid the upstairs, creating an open floor plan with the kitchen, dining room and living room seamlessly flowing into one another. Continuing with the tropical retreat theme, they painted all the walls sage, and in the kitchen installed granite countertops in an earthy Verde Peacock color that's complemented by green leafy oak trees visible through both the kitchen and living rooms' stunning tall windows. "My friends call our home 'the treehouse,'" says Laura, a stay-at-home mom to 5-year-old Celeste.

The only feature they kept from the original house in the kitchen was an antique vent, which conveniently was already painted a soft green. The dining room, next to the kitchen, features a mirror with a spectacular cypress wood frame that Laura and Bobby bought at the Under the Oaks art exhibit in Vero. Another special touch is an elegant stained glass light fixture that softly illuminates the oak dining room table below it.

'HER DOMAIN'

Just off the dining room is the master bedroom, which is painted a rich scarlet, complemented by red-wine velvet curtains, a frosted amber glass chandelier, and a luxurious bed-cover that's a warm blend of red and gold that creates an unlikely combination of cozy and sexy — the perfect boudoir. Laura decorated the bedroom, like the rest of the house, herself. >>



Portrait





Kitchen 2a and Pool, right.

While she had the option of hiring an interior designer, with Bobby's blessing she chose not to. "This is her domain," says Bobby, a trial lawyer. "She's the boss."

Interior design came naturally to Laura, which surprised her. "I never knew I had such a good knack for decorating," she said. "And I think the house really reflects our personalities."

Bobby did his part, too, building for daughter Celeste an adorable pint-size loft complete with stairs that lead to a snugly, enclosed sleeping area. And just a few months ago he finished another project, an outdoor bathhouse that is 12 feet by 12 feet and has bamboo walls and a striking copper tub and shower in their private backyard garden.

Bobby was inspired to build the bathhouse because he loved to take icy baths outside to soothe his joints and was tired of his temporary outdoor tub, a trough bought at a >>



bath house

feed store. "One day he had a vision and drew it," says Laura. With the exception of the deck, he built the entire bathhouse by himself in a few months.

OUTDOOR OASIS

Today, Bobby isn't the only one who enjoys bathing outdoors; Laura also soaks in the tub, but she fills it with warm water. Like her mother, Celeste delights in a warm bath, but her favorite part is playing with the tub's water sprayer. "She can get the bath house as wet as she wants; sometimes she really has a ball spraying everything in there," Laura said.

Laura has three other children, furry ones, that she rescued from the Humane Society who occasionally get to take baths outside too: Rudy, a Dalmation Terrier mix; Victoria, a Havanaes; and Kitty, the cat.

Like Laura's furry friends, the bathhouse blends perfectly into the outdoor oasis, a tropical garden that looks and feels >>



deck outdoor living room

like an extension of the house. The garden is replete with plants and shrubbery, all native to Florida or well able to adapt to its climate. "I won't have any that require special pampering because I refuse to fertilize or use pesticides," said Laura, who does all of the landscaping. "I find gardening meditative and I enjoy going out there."

As a naturalist, Laura loves the many oak trees that decorate the garden, keeping it shady, although the lack of sunlight does make it difficult for certain things to grow. "It's hopeless to have grass," she said. Instead, she put down stone pathways, laying each stone herself, with the outlying area covered with attractive mulch and greenery. The pathways lead to different hidden nooks, including a wood cabana, a perfect place to relax in one of its wicker chairs.

Adjacent to the cabana is a small pond filled with koi and rescued turtles, and a few feet from that is a 6-by-12 wild-life rehabilitation enclosure where she has nursed squirrels, >>



Den

raccoons and opossums back to health. Laura also has an animal cemetery in her garden where she buried five cats, all who lived into their 20s. Watching over them is a statue of St. Francis of Assisi, the patron saint of animals.

A SPECIAL PLACE

The centerpiece of the garden is a curvy black lagoon “couples pool” that blends in perfectly with its surroundings. It is the ideal place to refresh on a hot day while listening to the calming sound of a waterfall a few feet away. Decorating a wall of the house that faces the pool is a mural that Laura and Bobby commissioned from artist Connie Koehler. “I asked her to paint a Key West-style mural. Very tranquil and remote looking,” says Laura. “The dog painted on the mural’s porch is a wonderful companion dog we adopted.”

The Guttridges built the pool around the time they added another focal part of the house, a **tropical deck**. As the main congregation area when they have guests, the 500-square-foot deck >>



Exterior



Cabana House 1

takes center stage during a party with its festive tiki bar and a fireplace surrounded by palm trees and an attractive brown wicker couch with matching chairs.

When the Guttridges are not entertaining they spend a lot of time upstairs in the comfortable living room with Celeste, watching TV or playing games. But when Bobby or Laura need to get some work done, they head downstairs where each has an office. Bobby calls his 'the man cave,' an add-on he built in 1997, when the couple bought the house. Bobby keeps his scotch whiskey and cigars in the uber masculine room with its handsome brown leather chairs and couch. It is also equipped with his favorite picture of Laura, who was a swimsuit model in the 1990s. The man cave also houses Bobby's trophies, including a grand champion he won for the 2011 Dancing with Vero's Stars competition. Maintaining his privacy is not always easy, though. "It's a constant struggle to keep two girls and a cat out of there," he says with a wink.

Next to his man cave, Bobby has a mini gym with all the >>



Bar above, pool and mural, right.

equipment needed to cross-train. But with two rooms for him, Laura scored the larger office, which could easily be a second master bedroom as it's quite spacious with an ample en-suite bathroom and elegant French doors that open up onto the pool, a view that fills Laura with joy when she works at her computer. "I love looking out to my garden. It's special," she said. "In fact, the whole house is special. It's where I started my life with Bobby and Celeste." *PR*

