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"Gore"-geous Style

With John Gore at the helm of the design dream, every room is an unforgettable event

BY **DENISE MULLEN**

PHOTOGRAPHS BY **SCOTT SMALLIN**

"Every room should be an event."

It's an aesthetic philosophy. And it's certainly the motto of interior designer John Gore.

After a 14-year hiatus from the Art Museum Tour of Homes, we were able to mosey through his 1950s cottage turned private residence when it opened its doors to the public once again in March for the home tour benefit.

Gore prefaced that he had recently gone through the process of "simplifying" his beach oasis, stowing away tchotchkes and candlesticks, banishing welting and tassels from furniture and adding in statement pieces with "clean lines."

The purging and preening does move in a more refined expression, but Gore's years as a visual artist are as ingrained and defining as a fingerprint.

Every room, hallway and transitional space is a deftly painted vignette, a still life worthy of framing or evoking the feeling of walking into a motion picture frame.

Doubling the size of an old beach house with a main floor carport is a challenge all its own, but instead of fighting with the footprint and tearing down every non-load-bearing wall, Gore embraced its nooks and crannies, unfolding an enchanting "maze of rooms."

It bears the John Gore stamp. It's a design sense that he realized years ago, in St. Petersburg, Florida.

Back in his "bohemian days" of the 1970s, Gore and friends began investing in Florida properties. A grand old Normandy-style estate in St. Petersburg that had been converted into a 14-unit

It's hard to believe that this stately home with historic sensibilities started out as a 1950s beach house. The kitchen is decked out with Habersham cabinetry, new cork flooring and a fetching animal hide patchwork rug.

What to do with an upstairs porch that you never really use? Gore turned his into a small but stunning formal dining room featuring a mirrored table.

apartment house caught his eye. Despite its needy condition, he and a partner bought the grand dame and moved to Florida with barely a dollar to spare between them.

"Out of necessity, I learned how to take a room and make it look spectacular for very little money. We redesigned all 14 rooms ourselves. I laid vinyl and carpet, painted, upholstered, made window treatments and ate black beans. We ate black beans until we were sick of them."

And as necessity is often the mother of invention, Gore's artistic sensibilities were flung headlong into interior design, a skill that would serve him well for the rest of his life.

"I found through this project that I really liked design. We came up with a décor theme for every room. I found some cheap banana palm print wallpaper at a shop and turned one of the units into a tropical banana plantation. I also did a Mary Tyler Moore room in lime green, yellow and white floors!" he says, laughing out loud.

But the fruits of the their labor paid off big when they sold the same property for nearly three times what they paid for it.

When Gore purchased his 82nd Avenue North house in 1987, he faced down cold masonry block construction and an entire downstairs that had been devoted to a two-car garage and maids' quarters.

Borrowing concepts from Charleston,

Above: An out-of-the-way space becomes a media room with comfy seating and surround sound. At left: A soaking tub communes with the natural elements of live plants and parakeets.

Like the interior of Gore's home, the outdoor grounds, pool and gardens create their own event.

Savannah and French Colonial Caribbean, he wanted the renovation "to look and feel like it has been around for years and years."

And, one by one, spaces developed their own character and were transformed into destination events.

The carport became the home's foyer, salvaging the custom milled pine ceiling. Stucco, inside and out, louvered interior doors and replacing windows with French doors, "capture the ambiance of the French Colonial period in the Caribbean."

Upstairs porches transitioned into one dramatic dining room and a French country breakfast nook with all the Provencal charm of wire-faced cupboards and woven rattan seats.

A small media room with surround sound gives a nod to Africa, inspired by his-and-her ebony Kenyan clay heads sculpted by Gore's mother in 1960.

Then there's the "tub room," a tropical soaking respite shaded by lush plants and flanked by bird cages chirping with live parakeets, while an upstairs bathroom recently went "Parisian boutique," replacing yellow and black tile with Carrara marble and a Napolean-esque free-standing sink.

"You don't want any room to be too serious, but it should have a little history ... at least one antique, even if it's only a box on a table."—John Gore

"You don't want any room to be too serious," says Gore, "but it should have a little history ... at least one antique, even if it's only a box on a table."

Or in the case of Gore's home, a strategic smattering of inherited and collected paintings, antique chests, his

mother's china and framed family artifacts, including letters from past U.S. presidents.

Mixing up things in his living room, Gore kept the "perfectly good" sofa and chairs, but brought in a large acrylic coffee table and lamps. What makes the modern, see-through table work like a charm here are traditional turned legs and fretwork.

Seamless updates to the kitchen pack more functionality while keeping the Old World vibe intact with Habersham cabinetry. For the more edgy elements, you need only look down and behold the cork floor and patchwork animal skin rug.

And in true John Gore style, classic draperies in the guest room stay put, but the walls were recovered in a textured grasscloth in provocative shades of red.

"It's always a challenge to get a room just right," says Gore. "But once you have that right mix, it's very hard to duplicate."

In fact, it becomes its own unforgettable event.

Just follow this brick pathway into the enchanted garden. As the perfectly staged promenade of plants and statuary promises, you won't be disappointed.