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CHARLESTON STYLE & DESIGN

SUMMER 2019



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LONG-DISTANCE RELATIONSHIP

*A Mount Pleasant construction company
helps clients navigate a renovation*

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photography by HOLGER OBENAU







The new owners wanted a large backyard, as the wife is from Australia, where people tend to live in the backyard.

previous: Renaissance South Construction was tasked with renovating a home while the clients lived 500 miles away. The owners' wish list included simplicity and durability while providing enough room for family and friends to visit.



IF YOU'VE EVER LIVED through a home renovation, you know what a unique challenge it can be. Big decisions feel intimidating; small decisions can get tedious, and locating the right materials or furnishings consumes all of your evenings and weekends. Charleston's gauntlet of zoning laws, building codes and environmental regulations add a whole other layer of complexity. Put together, renovating a home in the Lowcountry can feel like a full-time job. Now imagine trying to do it from 500 miles away.

That was the challenge facing the team from Renaissance South Construction. The clients bought a home on Isle of Palms and intended to modernize and future-proof it before they retired. Having renovated several homes together during their marriage, the husband wanted his wife to have total control of this project.

Coming from a design family, the homeowner had a vision. "We wanted a first-floor bedroom, lots of room for friends and extended family to chill out, and an elevator," she says. "I also wanted everything to be simple and durable, but I didn't want it to be too beachy." As an Australian, her main focus was on the large backyard. "Australians live in the backyard. It's where everything happens," she continues. "We wanted a pool, a place to hang out in the shade and lots of



For the interiors and furnishings, the owners first selected the countertops. From there, flooring, custom cabinetry, contemporary lighting and fixtures were chosen. The kitchen is spacious and offers plenty of casual seating.





lush landscaping, with shrubs and flowers.”

Working with Bronwyn Lurkin of Herlong Architects, the Renaissance South team got to work. “There can be an overwhelming and intimidating number of decisions to make during a renovation, especially for an out-of-town client,” says Rob Crawford, president and owner of Renaissance South. “To make it easy, our team organizes information from the homeowner, breaks it into manageable pieces, then facilitates the selection process.” That’s where Anne Hassold Harris comes in.

Harris’ job is to work with the pre-construction team to dissect (or explode) the project and identify all of the aesthetic items that need to be selected. She organizes items into groups, then takes the homeowner shopping in a very intentional sequence.

For example, there are far more backsplash tile selections than there are countertops, so Harris starts by helping clients find a countertop that inspires them, so they can more easily make a tile selection that complements it. Also, cabinets take time to be produced, and a final design can’t be determined until the appliances are selected.

“For any client, but maybe especially an out-of-town client, we want to make the selections process go as smoothly possible,” Harris says. “The process starts with a conversation with the client. I try to find out what, if anything, they already know they want. I always encourage clients to start a Houzz ‘ideabook’ or Pinterest page so I can get a feel for their taste.”

Harris has the clients come to town as soon as possible for a shopping trip. “We have vendors we work with regularly, so all meetings will be set ahead of time, and I send any pertinent information, so the meetings





The owners' vision for the renovation was to keep the rooms simple and durable. That is evident even in the en suite, with its soft blue walls and modern yet simple tub and vanity.



The house feels coastal, but each room includes elements to warm it up and keep it from venturing into nautical or beachy. The living room features soft blue walls and chalk white woodwork, which make the room feel cool but cozy.



are efficient as possible," she says.

Renaissance South uses a streamlined, web-based system to track all of the client's selections. Each homeowner receives a unique login for their project, where they can see pictures and pricing for all their choices.

For the Renaissance South team, communication is critical. "The project manager for this home, Mark Doll, is a great communicator, and he is very proactive in making sure he has all he needs to keep the project moving smoothly," Harris says.

Doll's reputation precedes him. "I cannot

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speaking highly enough about Mark," the homeowner says. "He was a complete Southern gentleman, from start to finish. He's practical, realistic and technically superb. We weren't there—so things could have gone south in a hurry—but he looked after everything, including the quality of work being done by subcontractors."

The result? Enter from the broad, breezy front porch, shaded by a centuries-old live oak. The living room is so peaceful I can feel my blood pressure drop instantly. Soft blue walls and chalk white woodwork feel cool but cozy. The dining room is modern and welcoming, with a fantastic view of the verdant backyard. The open kitchen is fresh and neat as a pin, with custom cabinets,

contemporary lighting and fixtures, and plenty of casual seating.

The new first-floor master bedroom is an addition to the home's footprint. It's just the right size and has his-and-her closets and a brand-new en suite bath. The house feels coastal, but in every room some elements warm it up and keep it from venturing into nautical or beachy.

In the backyard, a sparkling lap pool is a perfect place to cool off or get some exercise. Another ancient live oak presides over bountiful shrubs and flowers. Underneath the house is a space for an outdoor kitchen and dining area. Modern sliding barn doors disguise ample storage space for beach gear.

"We could not have done it without the people who came on this journey with us," the homeowner says of the Renaissance South team. "Anne was fabulous. She kept track of all the decisions I had to make. She knew where to take us shopping, and she was great behind the scenes at making sure we were getting the best value and quality. She was also incredibly tactful and gently nudged me when I was going down the wrong path."

"My favorite part of my job is seeing the clients' personalities come out in their homes. I get to spend a lot of time with them in the up-front stages, and we usually get pretty close," Harris says. "The homeowner had such a great vision for the way she wanted her house to look, and I am thrilled by the way it all turned out."

The complexities of a long-distance renovation can be a challenge. Fortunately, the Renaissance South team had the experience and skill to keep the nightmares out of their client's dream. *

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The back of the house features a lap pool and areas for dining and an outdoor kitchen.