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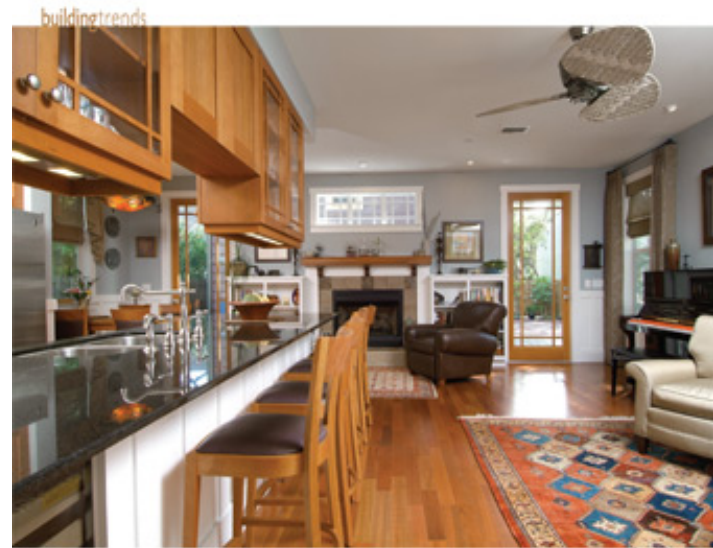
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Bringing Back The Bungalow

An artistic couple finds inspiration (and home) by building an American icon

By Matthew Schroeder
Photos by Matt McCartney

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Downsizing—it's a word heard all too frequently throughout the media. Yet in a slightly similar twist to the cost cutting measures of large corporations, homeowners are beginning to streamline their own lives, building more inviting and efficient homes. Often dominated by today's bigger, faster, more mentality; the idea of living "rich" typically means owning an overly-large, overly-opulent home. But as housing sizes increase and rooms become more cavernous, many of the inviting characteristics that truly make a home feel "rich" begin to disappear. Intimate rooms with thoughtfully designed interiors are what give homes their wealth of charm. Amidst the explosion of new housing developments throughout southern Florida boasting super-sized houses, established neighborhoods such as Laurel Park are experiencing a dramatic rebirth. Artists, professionals and entrepreneurs are snatching up and renovating the colorful collections of Mediterranean revival style and Bungalow homes. Of the nearly 300 smaller abodes blanketing Laurel Park, few capture the true essence of the Bungalow lifestyle better than George and Suzie Palagonis's urban hideaway.

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Pollington's vibrant hideaway.

A bright side to the downsize

"We're not the kind of people who need a big beige home on a golf course to make us happy," explains George. "We already tried that...and it just wasn't for us."

The home George speaks of was an expansive 3,600 square feet in one of Sarasota's premier gated golf course communities. After living there for some time, the Pollingtons realized they had more home than they could possibly need. Most of all they missed the vibrant activity of living in a close-knit community where they could easily walk about to do daily errands.

Their escape from the confines of the gated community came by way of a vacant lot in the heart of Laurel Park. The lot didn't allow for a large home—and the Pollingtons didn't want one. At 55x98 feet, the lot contained a mature oak tree, an existing three-car garage and mother-in-law suite above. A total of 26x46 feet was all that was left to build the bungalow. It was important that the home's overall style and size mesh well with the area's other houses and surroundings. With 1,700 square feet of living space and plenty of outdoor decking, the Pollingtons' coastal cottage style bungalow is roughly half the size of their previous home, though it takes full advantage of its size by maximizing every inch. For additional space, one of the existing garage bays was converted to a hobby room, complete with Mexican tiled floor, which Suzie uses as her pottery studio.

"Since I focus on smaller infill urban lots, I am forced to think differently when designing and building new homes," says Devin Rutkowski, owner of Laurel Park Ventures, Inc. who specializes in Craftsman and Mediterranean style Bungalows. "It's all about maximizing space everywhere you can."

Like the Pollingtons, Rutkowski deeply values Sarah Susanka's philosophy of the "Not So Big House" that places emphasis on quality over quantity. A shared belief focusing on comfort, rather than impressing the neighbors, cemented the collaborative partnership. The preservation of detailed workmanship here honors the timeless Arts and Crafts movement and helps to distinguish the Pollingtons' home and Rutkowski's designs apart from others. Given the home shares so much with the past, it's easy to forget that this is a new home with all the bells and whistles today's technology offers.

Luxury essentials

A rampant mélange of natural materials, open spaces and light fuse with Mission style elements to form a relaxing environment breathing with life. Rutkowski's admiration for architect and furniture maker Gustav Stickley is evident from the living room and kitchen areas to the baths and bedrooms. The open floor plan eliminates unnecessary barriers, keeping spaces brightly lit with minimal need for artificial light. Built-in bookcases and cabinetry become part of the home's architecture, not pieces of furniture placed within it.

"I try to create a central gathering space in each home," says Rutkowski. "Most often the kitchen and family room areas work best since that's where people enjoy spending most of their time."

Separated by hanging wood cabinetry with undermount lighting and countertop seating, the family room and kitchen area are essentially one open room highlighted by window groupings, built-in cabinetry and plenty of wood detailing. Brazilian cherry lines the floors, where it winds its way from the family room and breakfast nook into the kitchen. Stainless steel appliances sparkle against the abundance of warm woods and granite countertops. A glass tile backsplash and whitewashed cypress tongue and groove ceiling create an added burst of color and texture to



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the space.

“The kitchen’s a great example of how Arts and Craft style can successfully mix with other styles,” remarks George. “The appliances and hood have a very contemporary look, while the faucet and ceiling lend themselves to being more traditional. It’s a perfect balance.”

Comfort finds home

The delicate equilibrium beginning in the central gathering area continues along the first level into the media room and full-bath. A series of built-in shelving and cabinetry in the media room surrounds a 51-inch flat-screen TV. George’s career in sports marketing also allows the space to ideally function as his office, as well as a guest room for overnight visitors. However, the most clever use of space is the first floor bath situated beneath the staircase, close to the media room. Overnight guests can wash up here in the comfort of white wainscoting and floral-print wallcovering designed in the Arts and Crafts style.

Upstairs, the Pollingtons have created their private retreat with the master suite. The colorful bedroom is adorned with sky blue walls and cloud white wainscoting for a delicate ambiance flooded in natural light. Wood flooring and a vaulted tongue and groove cypress ceiling with exposed beaming complete the room, taking the soothing atmosphere to a higher degree in the master bath.

“Along with the kitchen, this is definitely our favorite room in the house thanks to the whirlpool tub,” says George. “We exercise frequently and use the tub three to four times a week to relax in after working out.”

A tankless gas water heater fills the Kohler chromatherapy tub in quick time. The room is kept open and bright with adjustable wood blinds and period style lighting. Built-in shelving displays decorative accessories next to the tub and toiletries to the side of the vanity area. Void of any unnecessary accoutrements, the bath is simple and fresh—ideal for a couple always on the move.

The Pollingtons make it clear that scaling back doesn’t mean giving up the luxuries that provide a home with drama and character. Like all good architecture, their bungalow accentuates its surrounding landscape.

“There’s a real soul to the house that comes from the combined talents of the many craftspeople who worked on it,” says George. “Best of all, we finally have a place where we can just be ourselves.”

article resources

Designer and builder: Devin Rutkowski CGB, Laurel Park Ventures, Inc.

Architect: William Allison

Cabinetry: Billue Guinyard, Metro Cabinet Company

Flooring: Brazilian cherry

Countertops and backsplash: T.H. Winston

Sinks: Kohler

Faucets: Danze, “Opulence” collection

Dishwasher and refrigerator: G.E.

Cooktop and oven: Wolf

Exhaust hood: Miele

Lighting: Rejuvenation Lighting

Wallcovering: Bradbury & Bradbury Art Wallpapers

Furniture: Thomas Moser

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