



Text Nina Korman Photos Jeff Herron

# NOW AND ZEN

RETURNING A FORT LAUDERDALE RANCH TO ITS ROOTS



AFTER MOVING FROM Seattle, Washington, to South Florida, Lori and Mark Yerex, a young couple with understated modern taste and a can-do attitude, embarked on a wary house hunt, expressly searching for a fixer-upper. "In this area, remodeled usually equals ruined," said Mark referring to Middle River Terrace, the Fort Lauderdale neighborhood where, after four months of searching, they finally found this 1956 ranch house on the river.

Not exactly in pristine original condition, the cozy three-bedroom, two-bath house had been tampered with over the years. The carport had been enclosed and transformed into the master bedroom. And plumbing from the attached laundry room had been utilized to create a small en-suite bathroom.

Undaunted by the challenge, the couple set out to renovate without destroying their new home's basic structure.



Beginning in the front yard, they relocated the driveway, which stopped short of their bedroom window, from the west side of the property to the east. Removing a couple of very large wooden box planters proved a bit more difficult – and surprising. The boxes contained not only soil and several areca palms but also toilets, sinks and construction debris left over from a previous remodel.

Once the site was cleared, Lori opted to create a Zen garden. The fitting exercise in patience, timed to the monthly large-haul trash pick-ups, took a painstaking 18 months to complete. The reward is a soothing space watched over by a small Buddha statue nestled in the white pea gravel. Mondo grass, papyrus, bamboo and gurgling water features add to the restful atmosphere. An existing white privacy fence stretches across the front yard and prevents passersby from peeping through the home's glass front door.

In the home's previous incarnation, a step over the threshold revealed an abundance of heavy dark wood furniture, filmy curtains covering windows and glass doors and faded Oriental rugs masking tired-looking terrazzo floors, found in every room except the master suite. A rainbow of pastel colors predominated. One room was pink, another baby blue, and still another cornflower yellow. Emphasizing the claustrophobic vibe, nearly every window in the house was painted shut.

Able to see beyond the demoralizing interior decor, the couple focused on architectural details such as the long curved wall, separating the galley kitchen from the foyer and living room and the impressively high-beamed ceiling. They removed all the curtains and painted the walls stark white. Lori slowly chipped away small white tiles from the kitchen, where the original cabinets remain. The second bathroom got a coat of aqua paint, new white fixtures and shiny chrome faucets. A professional floor refinisher repaired and revitalized the terrazzo. To achieve a sleek, gallery-like look, baseboards, which had been

OPPOSITE PAGE, CLOCKWISE FROM BOTTOM RIGHT: Giant Pandora box-like planters fill the front yard in its pre-renovated state. The zen garden attracts people and animals alike; Curly, the owners' yellow lab. Stone planter is from Pistils & Petals, Miami. Bamboo from Tropical Gardener and Bamboo For You, both in Fort Lauderdale. THIS PAGE: The back yard awaits a new sea wall (top). Lounge chairs offer a spot for relaxation on the "beach" in the revitalized back yard (bottom).







**BELOW:** Oversized dark wood furniture from the previous owner dwarfs the diminutive foyer. **OPPOSITE:** Well-edited modern furniture, along with artwork from the owner's friends, fit the house and makes for an airy space. The Arik sofa is from Ligne Roset, Coral Gables. The Platner dining table from Knoll was ordered through Hive. The sputnik light fixture, dining chairs and credenza were purchased at vintage stores in Seattle. The terrazzo floor was refinished by Colonial Floors.



removed for the floor work, were not replaced and walls were refinished to mask their absence.

In the living room, a wall of sliding glass doors leads to the backyard, an area which received its share of refurbishment as well. The crumbling seawall was replaced. A patch of white sand was added near the water's edge to form a petite makeshift beach. Lemon, lime and kumquat trees were planted and banana trees relocated. A wooden fence on the perimeter of the property was painted mustard yellow. Lights were positioned to showcase the landscaping at night and a hot tub was moved off the patio and onto the grass. A back porch originally clad in slippery gray tile, a danger wet or dry, was retiled with 20-by-20-inch cream-colored cement squares.

A three-and-a-half year odyssey, this renovation was not the Yerex's first and it certainly won't be their last. Accustomed to living among dust and debris, they've also rehabbed homes in Seattle, Chicago and Detroit. With skylights about to be installed in their master bath, they're already thinking about their next project. Where they will settle is still uncertain, but, one thing is assured, somewhere a fixer-upper awaits their care. **H**