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A covered terrace leads to the pool and gardens, which were redesigned by landscape architect Mario Nievera. OPPOSITE PAGE: Designer Meg Braff was inspired by the architectural vernacular of stucco walls, stone floors, and Spanish influences.



Polished in Palm Beach

Designer **Meg Braff** and landscape architect **Mario Nievera** refresh a Gilded Age gem, honoring its architectural heritage and its tropical setting



by Marion Laffey Fox
photographed by Jeff McNamara

BELOW: The homeowners retained the existing wallcovering and carpeting in the living room but added new fabrics, coral accents, and furniture including the antique table used for games. OPPOSITE PAGE: Upholstered chairs and an X-form iron-and-gilt table make the breakfast room, overlooking the gardens and pool, a comfortable spot for coffee.



Within the mix of spectacular Palm Beach architecture is a particularly distinguished Mediterranean-style house designed by architectural icon Marion Sims Wyeth. Built in the late '20s for Michigan furniture magnate Jesse Bassett, the aristocratic stucco and tile-roofed mansion quickly became an icon of Gilded Age design.

With such a divine pedigree, the grand old house did not escape the attention of the current owners, who happened to be renting next door. They readily admit that they were so enchanted with it, they bought it immediately after it became available seven years ago. Today, the house reflects its glamorous past but is clearly enjoying the outright love affair its new owners are having with the property. In a seamless collaboration with designer Meg Braff, they preserved some of the previous owner's choicest schemes on the first floor and encouraged the designer's creativity and flair everywhere else. Outside, landscape architect Mario Nievera added a pool, reconfigured the space to allow for more expansive vistas, and rebuilt the dining pavilion, giving the owners several places to entertain.

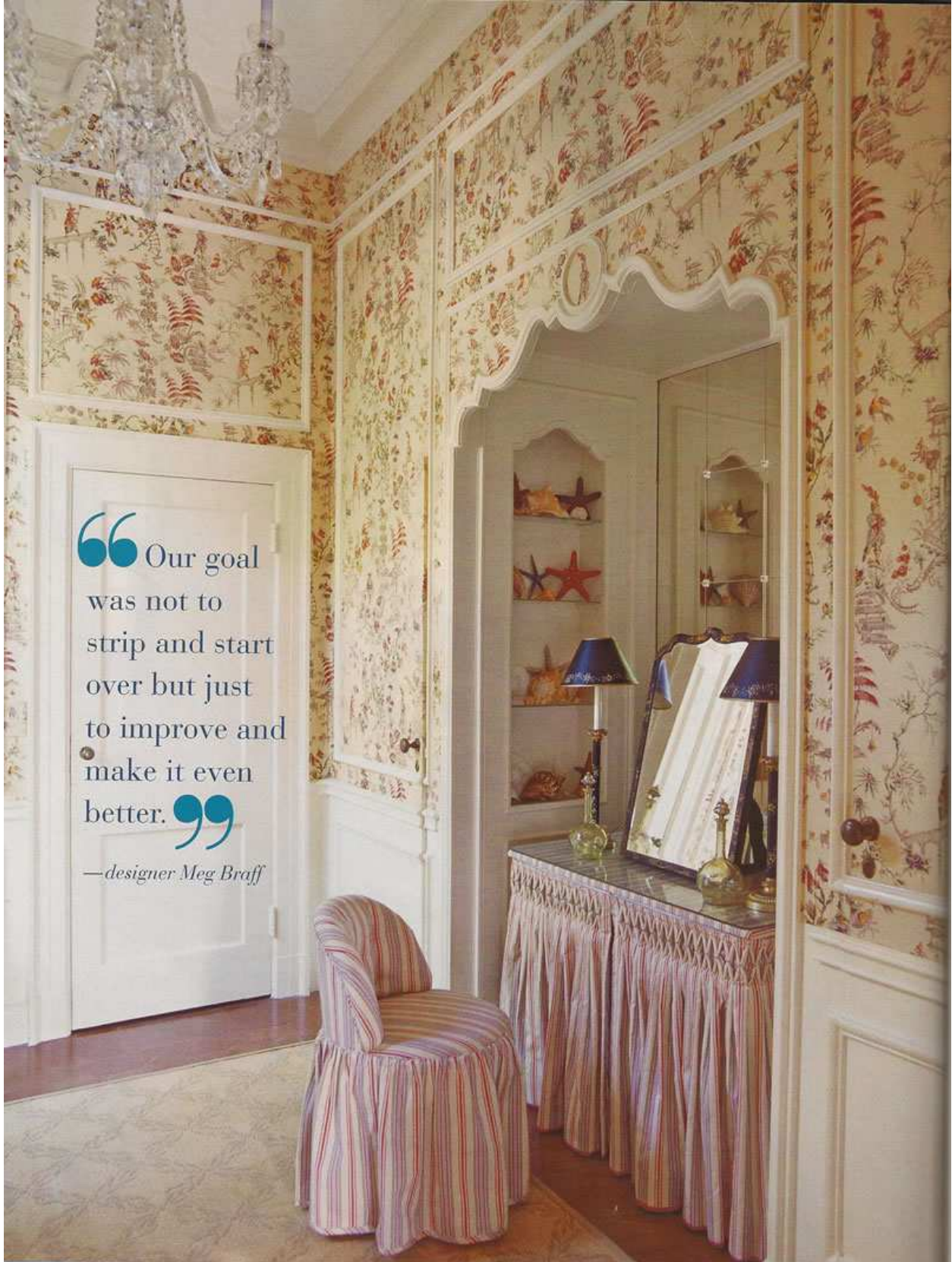
"This was definitely not a cut-and-burn project," says Braff. "Our goal was not to strip and start over but just to improve



Touches of blue pick up the color on the painted pecky cypress ceiling in the sun-infused loggia.







“Our goal was not to strip and start over but just to improve and make it even better.”

—designer Meg Braff

BELOW: "The views from the master bedroom are so lovely—we wanted to keep the curtains and fabrics serene," says Braff, who chose a palette of celadon and ivory. OPPOSITE PAGE: Upholstered walls, a skirted dressing table, and a crystal chandelier give this powder room a feeling of opulence, while starfish and shells are a reminder of the tropical setting.



and make it even better. It was an effort to keep the best of the existing design, such as the remarkable upholstered powder room, as well as be sensitive to the intents of the original, larger-than-life architect. It was never meant to be stagnant or museumlike. It is, after all, a real family home, and the spaces needed to be pretty, livable, and inviting."

Braff acknowledges early challenges stemming from the fact that she signed on in August with the understanding that the family wanted to use the house for Thanksgiving. Within that short 10-week window, she organized the job into two phases: The first focused on making the almost 12,000-square-foot house attractive for the holidays. "It was all about paint, rugs, sheets, and towels," she says. "The first floor received the least amount of attention because we were fortunate to have so many beautiful options from the previous owner and from my clients' other homes. The result was a blend of many cherished pieces and new things we found at the fabulous auctions and estate sales that abound in and around Palm Beach."

After the holidays, the more ambitious phase began: The second-floor bathrooms, along with six guest bedrooms and sitting rooms, were renovated; another space was converted into a large dressing room; and the master suite was redecorated. Citing inspiration from the architecture, Braff worked closely with her clients to create the relaxed but elegant environment they envisioned. "The house has grand proportions, but the rooms are properly scaled," she says. "Juxtaposing antiques with newer pieces makes it feel freshly imbued with layers of interest."

Braff underscores the fact that the project succeeded because it was a wonderful collaboration. "It is a grand Gilded Age home reinterpreted for a modern family," says Braff. "I believe Marion Sims Wyeth would approve." ♦

For details, see Sourcebook, page 114.