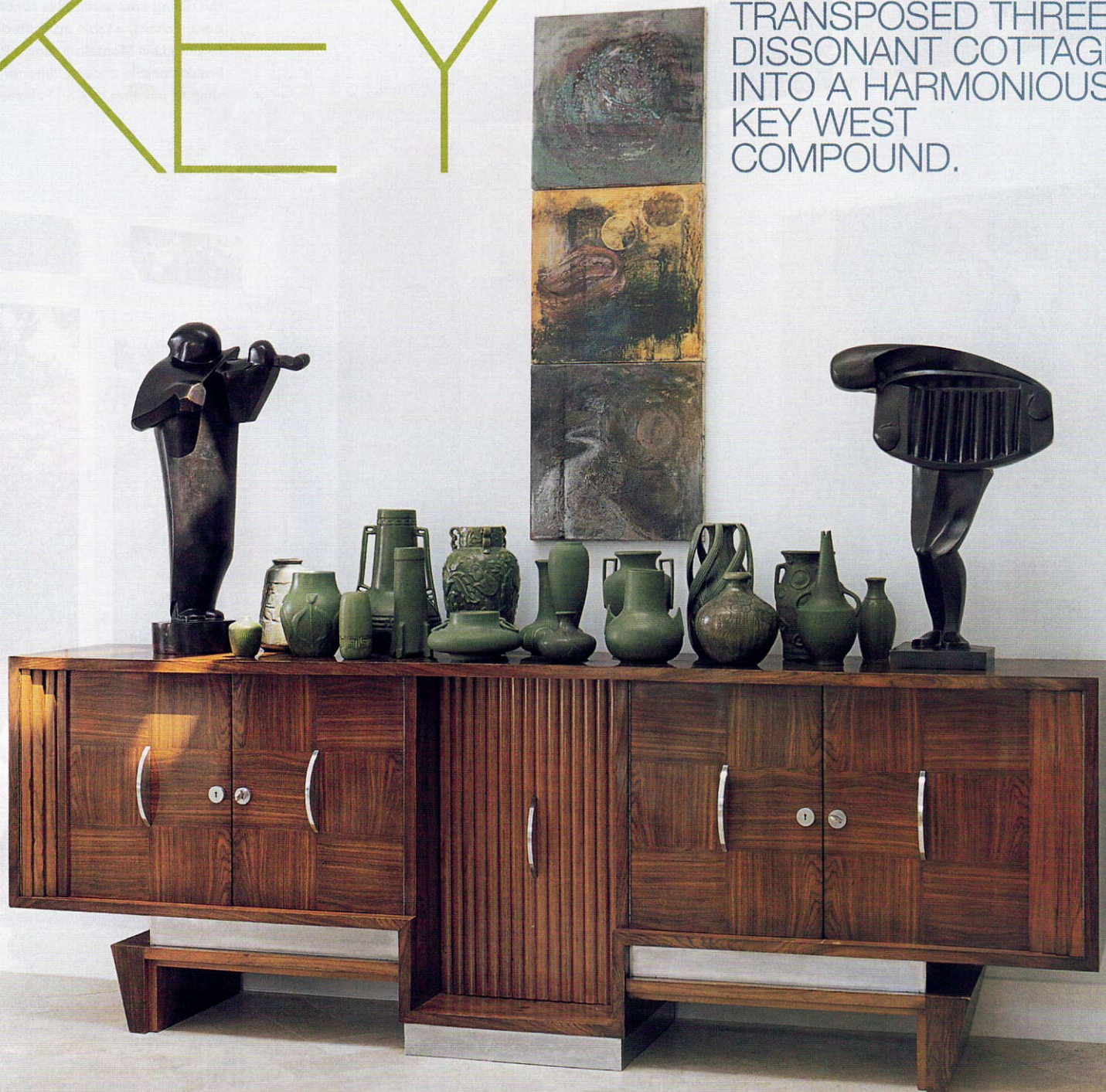


# IN A MODERN KEY

A PAIR OF ARTFUL  
HOMEOWNERS  
TRANPOSED THREE  
DISSONANT COTTAGES  
INTO A HARMONIOUS  
KEY WEST  
COMPOUND.





*What the Pros Know* To maximize kitchen function in the smallest amount of space, homeowners Gary Rubinstein and Neil Sweeney chose Brazilian cherry storage by Berloni installed with a difference. In addition to upper and lower cabinets, they specified a wall of drawers to hold utensils and ingredients. They added to the sense of openness by expanding the ceiling line to the roof rafters and cutting a skylight over the work area. "Throughout the renovation," says Rubinstein, "we kept opening up walls and adding skylights and transoms to bring more of the outdoors inside." Sliding glass door fronts and stainless-steel appliances (by Viking) reflect the abundant ambient light without breaking the plane of the cabinetry.

# Not

only were the buildings a wreck," says antique dealer Gary Rubinstein of his now tidy Key West, Florida, spread, "but there was a huge mango tree between the original cottage and the newer building out back with its roots veining the entire yard." The property, in fact, had been on the market for a year, an anomaly in the resort's Old Town, where sizable lots are rare and highly prized. "No one saw any potential," Rubinstein continues. "My contractor said, 'Don't bother looking, it's hopeless.' But it was exactly what we'd been looking for." Rubinstein and his partner, Neil Sweeney, who owns a heraldic research shop, bought the lot with a vague picture of its future in their collective creative eye.

In transforming the neighborhood eyesore, the men would not be polishing a diamond in the rough, exactly. If there was a diamond to be had at the end of the process, it would have to be cut from considerably less precious raw material.

First the mango tree had to go, which was not as easy as it sounds. In tradition-rich Key West, indigenous mature trees are protected. You can't just chop them down to dig a pool or add on to your house. So the mango tree was uprooted and moved to the front of the perimeter ("an agonizing process through miles of red tape," says Rubinstein).

To renovate the cottages, the men hired Rob Delaune, a local architect with experience in the preservationist renovation guidelines of the tourist mecca. His projects maintain exterior historicity yet unfold inside like pop-up books of modern effects.

**PRODUCED BY LINDA O'KEEFFE AND MARGIT BISZTRAY. PHOTOGRAPHS BY COLLEEN DUFFLEY. WRITTEN BY MARGIT BISZTRAY.**



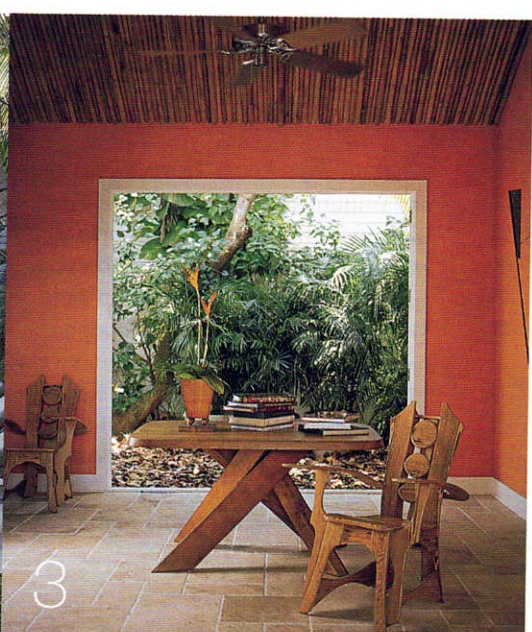




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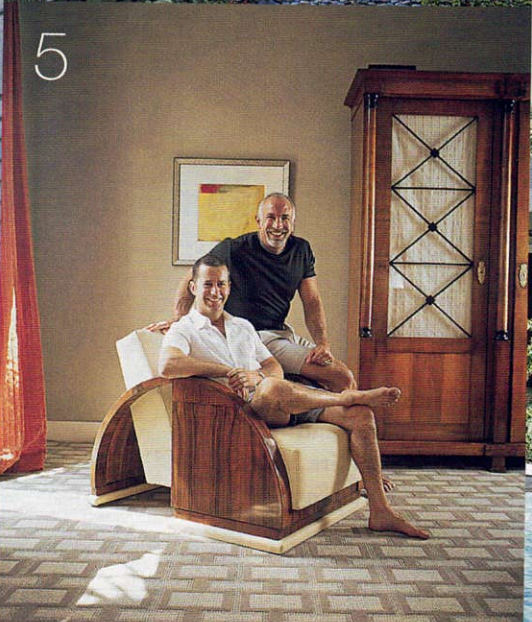
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1. A pair of J. Robert Scott chairs flank an 18th-century Italian console in the entryway of the main house (the guest cottage is visible through the open front door).

2. A new pool is lined in slate to mimic the fountains in the entryway of the main house (lounges are from Michael Graves's Metro line).

3. The pool house, its French doors thrown open to the foliage, features a vintage Charlotte Perriand table and custom contemporary pine chairs under a split bamboo ceiling.


4. Rubinstein and Sweeney refurbished the guest cottage's vintage porch chairs bought at an antique shop outside New York City.

5. Neil Sweeney sits in an art deco chair by Paul Dupré-Lafon with Gary Rubinstein behind him in the master bedroom. The armoire is Biedermeier, the carpet by architect Robert A.M. Stern.

6. Rubinstein designed the pool's waterfall with art deco lines.

## Our

initial plan," reports Rubinstein, "was to expand enclosed space from 1,200 to 4,000 square feet for the original two buildings, plus a third one (the pool house) that came with a later purchase of adjacent property." As the work proceeded, there were, of course, changes. "Each time," says Rubinstein, "the Historic Architectural Review Commission had to approve them. We drove them nuts."

The enlarged main house holds a kitchen, the master suite, guest room and 2½ baths, as well as a living/dining room with 25-foot ceilings and a wall of French doors that unfold onto the new pool. The house is at once open and private, and the classic and antique feel right at home alongside works by contemporary artists. The one-room pool house "just steps away" is a restful sanctuary, says Sweeney. "At sunset it absolutely glows."  See Resources, last pages.



One of two bungalows on the original lot is now a guesthouse; the structure behind it serves as the main house—where furnishings are eclectic and sophisticated. The living room credenza (opposite), a circa-1940 collaboration of Gio Ponti and Franco Albini, conceals a revolving bar. It displays two large bronzes by the modern French artist Ferdinand Parpan (acquired from the Miami estate of Gianni Versace) and a collection of arts and crafts pottery. The painting is by New York City artist Carl Palazzolo.

