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Inside Michael Jackson's Private Kingdom

Photos & Interviews
by Harry Benson
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Classical Vocabularies

A VILLA ON INDIAN CREEK
ISLAND EVOKES THE GLAMOUR
OF 1930S FLORIDA



OPPOSITE: Architects Ernesto Buch and Maria de la Guardia and Teofilo Victoria designed a Neoclassical entrance for their client's residence in Indian Creek Village, Florida. "Stylistically, we're traditionalists," Buch remarks. THIS IMAGE: "My plan has only two seating areas, missed around a fireplace and an antique secretary," Marjorie Shushan says of the living room. "Throughout, she made large spaces feel intimate. Leather on stools from Donghia."



In 1929 Maurice Fatio, the Swiss-born architect to the Vanderbilts, Wideners, Phippses and other celebrities of late-1920s and 1930s Palm Beach, Florida, society, built a palatial villa in his signature Renaissance Revival style to house the Indian Creek Country Club on Indian Creek Island.

Others gradually sprang up around it, some rivaling Fatio's in splendor. The most recent of them is an amply scaled, 50-room, 34,000-square-foot residence with an equally amply scaled interior designed by Marjorie Shushan, whose first commission many years ago was also a large house on Indian Creek Island. Today she is back with what she jokingly calls "something like a

majority share in Indian Creek decorating."

Shushan had already worked for the same client on a place in the Florida-Spanish-Mediterranean style (an outgrowth of Addison Mizner's work in Palm Beach in the teens and 1920s), when he approached her about a new project. "The client's tastes grew up from that traditional Florida look," she reports; he did not want to "just go on with another traditional Florida-Spanish-Mediterranean house." Instead, he wanted something with the spirit of homes like James Deering's Vizcaya.

To interpret his vision, Shushan introduced the client to New Haven, Connecticut-based architect Ernesto Buch, who in turn brought in fellow architects Maria de

la Guardia and Teofilo Victoria, of de la Guardia Victoria Architects & Urbanists, a husband-and-wife team from Coral Gables, Florida. The result is a house that is adamantly Neoclassical—from the Doric columns at the forecourt's gate and at the main entrance to the waterfront elevation, with its tall three-arched loggia and its symmetrical three-arched wings.

The interiors are imbued with a similarly classical feel, thanks to Shushan and her frequent collaborator, interior architect Brian O'Keefe. "You have to see that the interior belongs to the exterior you've just seen before you enter. It all has to balance, to go hand-in-hand, to give complete continuity from exterior to interior," says

ABOVE: A sofa totaling 30 feet provides plenty of space to relax in the family room. The oil, left, and the lithograph are by Malcolm Morley. "My client loves planes, boats—anything with an engine," Shushan says. Holly Hunt floor lamp and vase behind sofa. Bowls on low table, Antiqueria Tribeca. OPPOSITE: She covered the walls in the dining room in a jacquard linen "to soften it and make it as cozy as possible," she notes. Chair fabric, Great Plains. Stark carpet.





the designer. "Symmetry plays a big role." Significantly, though, "the whole has to not just look good, it has to feel good. The grander the house, the greater the need to make it comfortable," Shushan continues, "and there can be no rooms with little purpose. Rooms with little purpose occur all too often in big houses; however, there are many rooms in this house, and every room has a clear purpose. You can live in any corner of any room in great comfort."

Shushan believes in unifying interiors with texture rather than style or color. "I don't pay attention to style," she says, and the furnishings and art used in the décor run from Han Dynasty to New York pho-

to-realism, with all bases covered along the marble-paved way, and all seamlessly orchestrated. The highly eclectic antique details accenting the dominantly contemporary furnishings, she explains, "are comfort making. There's a mix of the classic with a modernizing 21st-century eye."

Reflecting on the three years it took to complete the project, Shushan notes, "I went into this job with a client that didn't want to bring anything he had before, so I had to purchase everything. Yet from the time they dug the first shovel of earth, as a designer I knew I must commit to interiors that look like they do belong to the client and like they do belong to the

house. Then, when there was enough built to give a feeling of place, I took off from that. I moved from room to room very subtly, with great attention to detail. I have a very quiet look, totally restrained, and I'm thoughtful with important things like color. I only put color in a subtle sort of way—usually when a room is almost finished. I don't know any other way."

That being said, there are throughout Shushan's subtly ever-so-stylish interiors many visual moments that she admits are a "Wow!" And there is her own "celebratory nobilization" and "organic sense of space" in the Indian Creek villa that fulfills its inspiration. □

ABOVE: Neoclassical details define the master bedroom. Brian O'Keefe, who frequently teams with Shushan, served as the interior architect for the project. Bergères, Bernd Gockler Antiques. Bergamo bed frame fabric. **OPPOSITE:** Shushan added shades of blue to the neutral palette of a bath. Cowtan & Tout animal print on armchairs. Rogers & Goffigon slipper chair fabric. Drapery fabric, Great Plains. Clarence House drapery trim.



Part of the inspiration for the house "was a villa in Tuscany with one grand loggia—that gesture stayed in our minds," says Buch, and was incorporated into the house's rear façade. The structure was clad in Dominican coral stone, a material similar to the Florida keystone in earlier residences in the area. Mario Nievera was the landscape architect. Chaise longue, JANUS et Cie.

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