

# Mobile Bay

monthly / JAN • FEB 1998

**Ashland Place Opens Its Doors**

**Day Spa Sampler**

*Head-to-Toe Pampering*

**Wine Guide**

*What to Try, Where to Buy*

BULK RATE  
U.S. POSTAGE PAID  
GREENFIELD, OH  
PERMIT NO. 28







The gracefully curving staircase overlooks the minimalistic entrance gallery.

Facing page, top: Inside and out, the Taylor residence is painted shades of white.

Facing page, bottom: French doors lead from the master suite to the pool.



# neutral ground

**Recently renovated and expanded, the Taylor house combines respect for historic architecture with an appreciation for contemporary style.**

**TEXT** MICHELLE ROBERTS

**PHOTOS** KARIM SHAMSI-BASHA

THE TAYLORS ARE A COUPLE who know what they want when they see it, and Richard Taylor was immediately smitten with the home on DeLeon Avenue at first sight, years ago. He and his wife, Mary, were then living in a nearby cottage on Old Shell Road, and when he would jog in the beautiful Ashland Place neighborhood, he couldn't help noticing the deteriorating yet appealing home that sat perched on a hill. "Every time he went jogging, he would say he wanted it," Mary remembers. "Then, one day, it was for sale."

After spending so much time admiring the home from afar, the Taylors were disappointed when they actually set foot inside. The main house, which is situated per-

pendicular to the street, was divided into small, dark rooms, and over the years various owners had added an array of buildings at the rear of the lot, facing the

street. On the recommendation of some friends, they consulted with architect Pete J. Vallas, A.I.A., who immediately recognized a diamond in the rough. "We had a harder time seeing the potential," Mary confesses. "It was so choppy and small."

Once they moved in, the Taylors let their ideas simmer for a couple of years so that the major renovation and addition would be exactly what they needed and wanted. In fact, their architect remembers spray-painting on the walls of the old structures where the French doors would go. Completed almost a year ago, the changes have transformed the home into a sprawling, light-filled, family-friendly residence that will be one of the highlights of this year's Mobile Historic





## Homes Tour.

Although the home was originally constructed in the 1920s, the renovation has transformed the inside into a stylish, state-of-the-art masterpiece that's the perfect backdrop for Mary's contemporary art collection and Richard's primitive antiques. Outside and inside, the house is subtly painted shades of white. Mary describes her decorating style as "monochromatic, neutral, minimal...I like a mix of modern blended with old—clean lines and classic pieces."

A red brick walkway leads visitors from DeLeon Avenue up a set of stairs, through an unobtrusive wrought-iron fence, and across the park-like, oak tree-dotted lawn that was designed by Atlanta landscape architects. The original two-story home has a recessed porch on the second floor whose new, sheaf-of-wheat railing adds historic detail to the home's facade. An unexpected shot of pea-green color on the front door

and a deeper shade of white on the original hinged shutters also provide texture and interest.

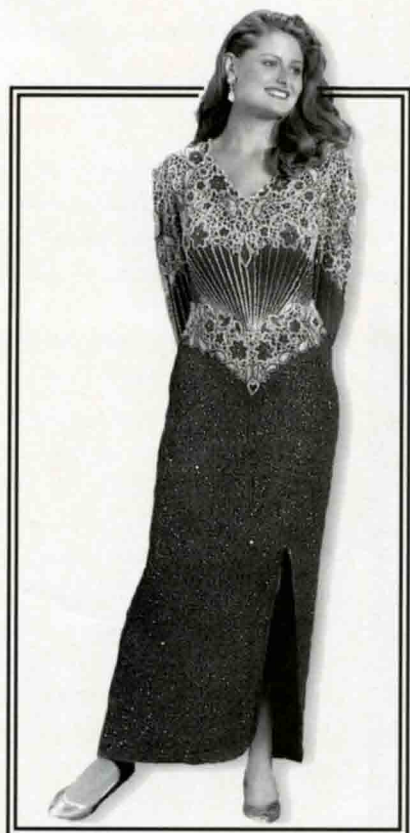
During the renovation, the old wings were torn down, and a wonderful new addition took their place, meeting the house at the rear corner and extending across the back of the lot. The lawn is now like a courtyard which, with its sparkling pool and trickling fountain, serves double duty as both the front and back yard. "The house never opened up to the pool before," says Mary. "Now we use it all the time." The addition, built of white brick (to match the brick chimney on the old house), features four sets of French doors that open onto the wide porch that almost runs its length and is lit with gas lamps. Diamond shingles on its roof help it blend in with the historic neighborhood. "I wanted it to look like an old carriage way or servant's wing," says the architect.

Although the Taylors spend most of their time in the new addition, the main

entrance to their residence is through the old part of the house. "So much of restoring the house was opening it up," Mary says. The front door now opens into an airy entrance gallery, with pale hardwood floors, white columns, and a bold zebra-skin rug setting the tone for Mary's minimalistic decor. Recessed lighting in the ceilings throughout the house spotlights her collection of artwork and substitutes for more traditional chandeliers.

To one side of the window-lined gallery is Richard's spacious office, which contains the only original fireplace, and to the other is the matching dining room, where a wall was torn down that originally divided the room into a tiny dining area and a cramped kitchen. The gallery now forms a center axis with matching rooms and fireplaces at each end—a trademark of Vallas's architectural style.

From the gallery, a graceful circular staircase leads up to a den for the chil-



Dress Shown is for Representational Purposes Only  
\*Entire Stock Not Included

## METZGER'S HAS MOBILE'S MOST BEAUTIFUL MARDI GRAS GOWNS

*...and they're on sale now!\**

Metzger's selection of stunning  
Hand Beaded Sequin Evening Gowns  
has never been more dazzling.

Choose from a rainbow of exquisite colors and styles  
available in sizes 4 to 24  
...all famous name designers and all beautiful!



## METZGER'S

3704 Dauphin Street at I-65 • MON.-SAT. 9:30 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. • 334-342-6336

dren. A wall of windows overlooks their fenced play area behind the house, and a white awning filters the sun. Overstuffed chairs in a textured fabric mix with framed black-and-white photos of Richard's family. "He's very nostalgic," Mary says of her husband. At one end of the hall is the former master bedroom—now a guest room—and at the other end is four-year-old Mary Sears's bedroom, where her mother has made a concession to bright color with wide blue-and-white striped walls. Overlooking the front porch is eight-month-old Richard's bedroom.

Back downstairs, the dining room flows into the addition, which features a kitchen, family room, master bedroom and bath, porch, and double garage. All of the rooms in the addition have 12-foot ceilings and travertine stone floors (which also flow outside to the porch and around the pool), as well as woodwork that matches the old part of the house. "The minimal style is great with the kids," Mary says. "These floors can't be messed up. That's what I love about the addition. The architecture of the house is so pretty, with a few pretty pieces. I like the openness and serenity it brings."

The striking kitchen features a custom-built, stainless steel bar, an eating area that overlooks the yard, and cabinets that almost reach the ceiling. The commercial range, indoor grill, and other state-of-the-art appliances give the Taylors a culinary advantage. "Richard loves to cook, and he tells me what a good cook I'm becoming," Mary says. "It's this fancy kitchen, I guess." The kitchen's counter-height, wood-burning fireplace built of white brick was one of Richard's special requests.

The kitchen leads into the family room, whose transom-topped French doors open onto a deep porch lined with rocking chairs. "We *live* right here and out there," Mary says, gesturing to the kitchen, family room, and porch. The seating arrangement in the family room directs attention to the fireplace, whose mantel came from a Magazine Street antique shop in New Orleans. On either

side of the fireplace are built-in cabinets hidden behind hinged pine doors—one folding back to reveal the television and the other a wet bar. At one end of the sofa sits a unique end table that exemplifies Mary's love of a few bold, beautiful objects: a piece of a column capital salvaged from a building in Philadelphia that she picked up at a Fairhope shop.

Architect Vallas found enough tall, antique pine doors at a New Orleans wrecking yard to use throughout the

addition. Each door also has high door-knobs and keyholes to match the old part of the house.

Beyond the family room is the master suite, simply furnished with a white matelassé coverlet and luxurious throw pillows, two gloriously comfortable chairs loosely upholstered in khaki cotton, and textured sisal carpet. The bedroom's curved wall is lined with plantation-shuttered French doors, leading directly into the pool, which is

# Together...

## We can put you in your dream home.

- **Lot Loans**
- **Construction Loans**
- **Construction Perm**

**Jim Shepard**  
431-9376

**Scott Gashaw**  
431-9444

**Beverly Baxter**  
431-9280

Call us today for special financing.

# SouthTrust Bank

Member FDIC





The striking kitchen features a custom-made stainless steel island, abundant counter space, and a counter-height wood-burning fireplace.



In the addition, the living room's neutral palette highlights Mary's art collection.





**An old shop counter was transformed into Richard's bathroom vanity.**

just two steps away. "Richard loved the idea of stepping right out into the pool," Vallas says.

His-and-her bathrooms flank the master bedroom, with huge, skylit closets meeting in the middle. One thing Mary wanted in her bathroom was a sunken bathtub, which is surrounded by windows for wooded views all around. Skylights in the closet ceiling give the couple natural light. Richard's bathroom vanity, made from an antique pine shop counter with a marble top, features dozens of convenient drawers. His oversized, travertine steam shower stall has double shower heads.

While the addition was under construction, the Taylors were concerned that it was too large; they didn't want to overpower the original house. "Richard wanted to be subdued and respect the house," says Vallas, who points out that creeping fig vines have been planted all around it. "I told him that it will soon 'go away,'" Vallas jokes. Although the vines are only just beginning to grow up the bricks, the Taylors couldn't be happier with the result of their renovation and addition: old meeting new, now completely synchronized. ■

*Michelle Roberts is editor of Mobile Bay Monthly.*

**Antique pine doors fold back to reveal built-in bookshelves.**



## ACCESSORIES \* HOME FURNISHINGS

\* GIFTS \* GOURMET FOODS \* POTTERY

\* CUSTOM GIFT BASKETS \* IRONWARE \*

**Fun  
Fashionable  
&  
Affordable**

**New merchandise  
arriving daily!**

**The  
Market  
at  
Spring Hill**

212 N. Beltline Hwy.

(334) 470-8048

Between Old Shell Rd. & Spring Hill Ave. on the East I-65 Service Rd.