

Innovative Interiors

For designer Bethany O'Neil, working with what she has isn't a drawback—it's her strength.





Bethany O'Neil discovered the home on her daily walk through her neighborhood in Naples, Florida, when she happened to take a different path. "One of the things I loved about it was that it had French doors off the back when just about every other house in the neighborhood had sliders," she says. "I learned that the actual developer of the community built this house with the intention that he was going to be living in it himself."

The interior designer and her husband took advantage of the "For Sale" sign in the yard and spent the next few years making minor changes while they decided if the cottage was going to be their forever home. "And we were pretty content there until Hurricane Irma came along," Bethany says. While they were fortunate enough to avoid major damage to the house, the landscaping was destroyed and would require a fresh start. "This gave us an opportunity to really think, 'Are we going to stay here?'"



A beloved centuries-old armoire that once held design books now serves a different purpose in the family room. "I had this idea that if I had the doors cut in half to bifold, there was a possibility that the TV we already owned could fit in there, and it literally did within half of an inch," says homeowner and designer Bethany O'Neil. "A lot of the time, you just have to recreate what you already have to make it work for you in a new setting." As Bethany is drawn to rooms that hold aged pieces, even her art selections tend to be antique, and the gallery wall in the family room is a collection of works rescued from secondhand shops. "I brought them back and spent a fortune on having them framed," she says.





Soon, they'd hired an architect and builder and set about gutting the house. Rather than build an addition, they opted to work with the existing footprint, using creative thinking to repurpose and reinvent the home in a way that worked better for their family. "We bumped through the walls and utilized some lanai space in order to create the large kitchen that you see today," Bethany says, referring to the covered outdoor living area. "It allowed us to create this large kitchen that's open to the family room."

The old kitchen became a bar and butler's pantry, a "cavernous" hallway lent space to a powder room, and a laundry room was portioned off from the garage—each choice contributing to efficiency and easy flow. "So, it was a lot of late-night ideas and tiny inches," Bethany says, noting they took it from 2,400 to 2,850 square feet. "It's not a large house, but it lives large."

ABOVE RIGHT: Bethany put her skills as a designer to use in creating elements like the custom banquette that pairs a sectional with an oversize L-shape island. "I can easily seat six to seven people in that setting, and it's deep enough and comfortable enough that people love to hang out there," she says. "It really brings our family together."



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Regular hosting called for a formal dining space, but of course, Bethany took an inventive approach, incorporating the table into her work space. "I utilize the dining room every day for part of my office," Bethany says, adding that it serves as a meeting space when it's not being used for dinner parties. "It's really efficient."





And the creative solutions didn't end when the layout plans were completed. Bethany applied a similar thought process when reincorporating her collection of antiques into the new space—often with new purposes. “A lot of the furniture is furniture that I have collected over the years and have held onto, and either chose to use them in different settings [or] in different ways. But I couldn't part with them,” she says. “I really do love my antiques.”

Many of the pieces—as well as a large portion of the inspiration—came from extensive visits to France, including a two-week celebration of Bethany's 50th birthday that took place just before she designed the home. “I can't tell you how much that trip influenced all my designs for the past three years,” she says. A direct result of the trip was her desire to have gilded gold finishes throughout the cottage, which she included without making things look “too formal,” she says, “because we are a very active family, and we don't really have many rules.”





Bethany's daughter, Sophie, enjoys the same liberal use of antiques in her bedroom as is seen in the rest of the home, including an oversized mirror that once hung in the living room of a previous home. Above her bed, hand-colored lithographs featuring birds' nests have adorned the wall since she was a baby. BELOW: The primary bathroom underwent a redesign in order to accommodate a china cabinet that had previously inhabited the kitchen. "I couldn't live without it, so I had to create a space where it could be useful," Bethany says, adding that it holds extra toiletries. "I like my kitchen and my bathrooms to feel more like rooms and less like utilitarian spaces."



Even the most personal spaces in the home weren't free from reinvention—in fact, the bedroom underwent extensive renovations for the sole purpose of accommodating the Tara Shaw canopy bed Bethany had fallen in love with five years earlier. A raised ceiling, new dormer, and several other adjustments later, and the piece now serves as a centerpiece that Bethany still considers worth the effort—though she admits it was more challenging than she'd been prepared for.

Even so, she has no regrets—about the bed or the home itself. "I'm so thrilled with the outcome of it, and there isn't a day that goes by that I don't appreciate every single thing we did and changed," she says. Beginning with a chance discovery, the O'Neils' renovation journey proves that a little creativity—and a lot of determination—can result in something brand new. ✨

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In the primary bedroom, Bethany used a pair of antique cabinet doors to conceal the TV while adding a timeworn focal point.



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