

An Elegant Estate

a couple creates a luxurious home away from home

by Lisa LeBlanc-Berry | photography by Chad Chenier



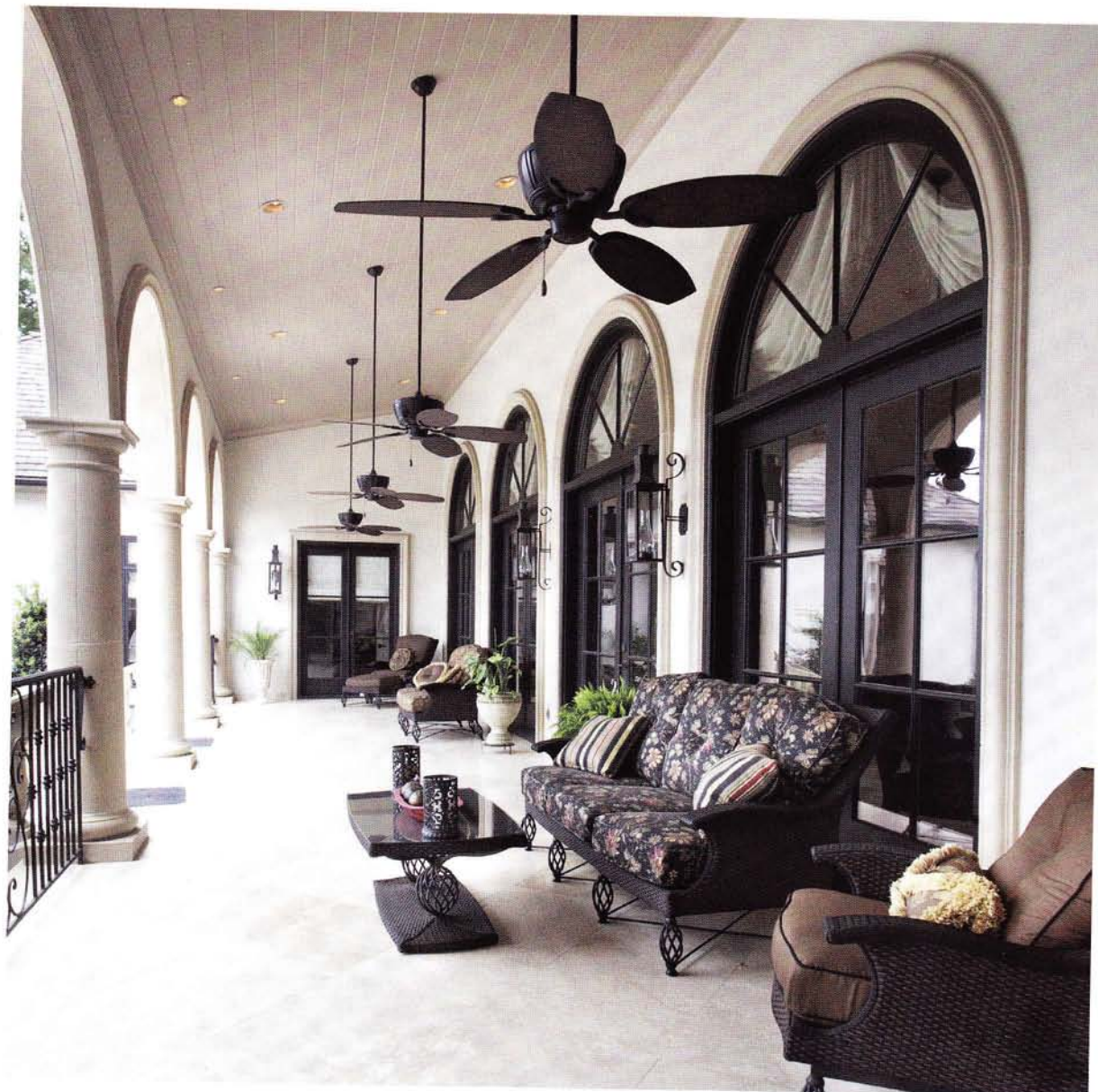
For renowned restaurateur Thomas “TJ” Moran and Judy Byers, the redesign of a Baton Rouge house was a true partnership. The couple has resided in Juno Beach, a resort town in Palm Beach County, Florida, for the past nine years. The sprawling new house, which took four and a half years to construct, was completed in November 2009, and reflects their love of outdoor entertaining while in Baton Rouge.

Moran has owned numerous restaurants and franchises throughout America, several of which are located in Baton Rouge, including TJ Ribs, Ruffino’s, and Ruth’s Chris Steak House. Moran opened the first-ever franchise of the New Orleans-based steak house owned by Ruth Fertel in 1976, instigating its eventual expansion to dozens of locations around the world. Byers was formerly the general manager and helped develop the concept for TJ Ribs. “I’ve sold all the other restaurants, and we sold our house in Chicago, but we still have Ruth’s Chris,” Moran says. “I’m sitting on my boat in Palm Beach right now and the weather is beautiful. We love it down here.”

A real estate investor, Moran originally purchased the house in Baton Rouge with the intention of selling it. After reconsidering its potential, the couple decided to renovate instead. Landscape architect and planner Eduardo Jenkins was hired to develop the grounds, which are now surrounded with formal gardens and native Louisiana plants ablaze with color. “Eduardo did an exceptional job,” says Byers.

“I own the property next door, which is 10 acres,” says Moran. “This house had stood idle for three-and-a-half years. It didn’t suit us as it was. So we took it down to the slab and added 5,550 square feet.”

The French cast stone and stucco house was expanded to 11,800 square feet. “The focus on the house was the back rather than the front,” adds Moran. “We wanted to entertain with privacy. We saw a house down here in Florida at the Golden Bear Golf Club that we liked, so we copied some of its elements. It was like a Lego set, putting all the pieces together.” Moran and Byers brought their architect, Gregory Roberts, to Florida to study the homes they liked. ➤







The first priority in the redesign was creating a home with a splendid outdoor living area. A pool house and tennis courts were incorporated into the plan. "We added a raised pool house for live bands," Moran notes.

The rear of the residence has a deep veranda facing the pool area, with numerous ceiling fans and graceful arched transoms over wide French doors that open from each side of the house to offer a view of the outdoors.

Inside, the home reflects the couple's vision of elegance and comfort. Upon entering the foyer and living room, there is a feeling of drama due to the soaring height of the ceilings. "Judy did all of the interior design work," Moran points out. "I must have looked through 1,000 books," Byers modestly rejoins. ➤

White travertine floors were selected for the first floor, with the exception of the master bath, which is marble. A graceful Savoy House chandelier with a tortoise shell finish casts an elegant note to the all-white living room. The winding staircase nearby was designed by metal artisan Keith Planche, and adds grandeur to the palatial setting.

The dining room is appointed with a romantic Shonbek chandelier with sparkling Swarovski crystals. The dining table has a unique eight-legged design with a beautiful croch mahogany top and a gadroon carving that ripples outward towards the table's edge. The bold, sensuous curves of the china cabinet are enhanced with intricate moldings and columns.

The cozy master bedroom has a bed that looks as if it belongs in a manor house in the British Isles. Elaborately shaped with detailed carvings and fluted posts, it is complemented by oversized nightstands and dressers with gentle serpentine shapes.

From the interior décor to the resort-like pool area and architectural grandeur, the total transformation of this once plain residence proved to be a labor of love after four years in the making. One of the contractors, Eric Delatorre, fell in love with Pamela Castel, the executive assistant of TJM Restaurant Management, and the two were married during the renovation. "Without the assistance of Pamela Castel-Delatorre, we would have been lost during the years of construction," Byers says. "It took a while, but it is a beautiful house. We really enjoy spending time there when we are in Baton Rouge," Byers adds. ♦

Although not an interior designer, Judy Byers did a remarkable job with the interior decorating of the couple's 11,800-square-foot second home. Her objective was to create an "elegant yet comfortable" environment designed for entertaining. Byers and Moran reside in Florida, but enjoy frequent visits to their former hometown of Baton Rouge.

