

What's New Is Old Again

Story and photographs by SUE KOVACH

Special to Residences

A twist on a well-known adage, "Everything new is old again," could be the slogan of the Mediterranean-revival movement — building new, Mediterranean-style houses to look like older homes.

This style of architecture, reflecting Mediterranean coastal influences, defined South Florida in the 1920s and has gained new momentum locally in the past 20 years.

Builders and homeowners alike have discovered that designing new housing in the style of older homes benefits all: New homes blend with historic neighborhoods, and homeowners can live in the "big old house" they may have dreamed of owning, yet without all the problems that often come with antiquity.

For designers and builders, working with revival homes can be a great change of pace. Architect Jon Moore and his partner, Harold Smith, of Smith and Moore Architects, have enjoyed designing many Mediterranean-revival houses at clients' requests. But they had never built one on spec until now.

The two bought a 75-by-120-foot lot in the historic El Cid neighborhood with a "tear-down" 1950s ranch-style house. Knowing the popularity of the "new is old" movement, they believed that if they built a Mediterranean-revival-style home, the buyers would come.



In the footsteps of Mizner: Harold Smith, Greg Davies and Jon Moore on the steps of the new home reminiscent of the style of architect Addison Mizner.

The architects teamed with builder Greg Davies, who specializes in this type of home, and the lot on Belmonte Road now holds a two-story, 4,000-square-foot, four-bedroom, 3½-bath residence that looks like it was "born" 80 years ago.

"The design of the house had to fit the neighborhood. We decided on Mediterranean, as there are lots of old Mediterraneans in that area," Moore said. "We did an oral presentation in West Palm Beach City Commission chambers, and the plans were approved by the planning board."

The secret to creating a duplicate with old-style splendor is in the details, Moore said. This meant doing research — and using their years of experience designing Mediterranean homes — to be true to the time period, both inside the house and out.

"When you walk into the house, you think it's a renovation, but it's

Please see **OLD AGAIN**/28



Better than ever: The plain 1950s ranch-style house (left) was replaced by the 4,000-square-foot Mediterranean-revival-style home (above).

An arched loggia overlooks the cascading spa and pool trimmed in Spanish tile (below).



Attention to detail: Includes cast-iron chandeliers, to Corinthian columns, beamed ceilings, ornately carved fireplace mantels, and Spanish tile.

actually new. It has all modern appliances, and everything in the baths is new, but the fixtures and finishes look old," Moore said.

Architectural details of the 1920s, like those seen in houses designed by famed Palm Beach architect Addison Mizner, are the hallmark of the house. They include cast-stone detailing, a large pecky-cypress arched front door, textured stucco finish inside and out, clay barrel-tile roof, pecky-cypress ceiling beams, wrought-iron lighting fixtures, and cast-stone stairs with decorative Spanish-tile risers.

In some places, old meets new in a big way. The old-style arched windows with cast-stone sills, for example, are impact-resistant and meet current hurricane codes. An added feature: pull-down screens that are hidden from sight until you need them.

Outside, homeowners will have a loggia with three arches and cast-stone columns. They can bask at the modern pool and spa, surrounded by a yard that's typical of the earlier time period.

"In the 1920s, landscaping was very simple and tropical, so we modeled our yard along those lines. There are coconut palms and a huge seagrape tree in the front yard. We planted mostly native, salt-tolerant plants," Moore said.

A high point of the design, literally, is the third-story observation tower, a detail that was prevalent in the 1920s. It is accessed by a ladder from the second floor at the top of the staircase and offers a spectacular view of the Intracoastal Waterway.

A cookie-cutter house simply won't do for homeowners who prefer the grandeur and fine details of the past. Modern architectural trends come and go. But Mediterranean revival is a breath of fresh air from the past, and it is a style that is here to stay.



Gateway to the past: A wrought-iron gate opens to a dramatic arched entrance and antique-looking wooden door (above). Arched windows and a lamp emphasize the theme.



Era of elegant living: One can imagine entertaining in this spacious living room (above) with its beamed ceilings, polished wood floors and regal columns.



No detail neglected: Even the bathrooms feature vintage-theme sinks and cabinets (left).