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# Emerald Jewel

*A home renovation is as multifaceted as the gem that inspired its location.*

BY MERYL SCHOENBAUM  
PHOTOGRAPHY BY CHRISTIAN HORAN  
STYLED BY LISA MCDENNON

LISA CORCORAN HAS A HEART OF EMERALD. SHE GREW UP IN THE CALIFORNIA COASTAL COMMUNITY OF EMERALD BAY, SWIMMING IN THE SURF, PLAYING IN THE SAND AND CHARMED BY THE BUNGALOWS DOTTING THE COAST OF THE ART-COLONY ENCLAVE. SHE AND HER FAMILY MOVED TO OTHER SEASIDE AREAS IN LATER YEARS, BUT LISA ALWAYS LONGED TO RETURN TO EMERALD BAY.

“It has one of the most beautiful beaches in Laguna—a white, sandy beach that’s always clean,” she says. “It also has great amenities for kids, including pool areas, tennis courts, playground equipment, swimming lessons and crafts classes.”

Lisa and her husband, David, have a family-based business, Ellison, which makes art supplies and equipment that aid teachers. Their budget for a home in the upscale community was limited, so they used their network of friends and family to find a suitable home for their family in Emerald





Built-in wall units designed by Lisa McDennon are both functional and fashionable. They add to the cozy feeling in the Corcorans' library.



Bay. Someone they knew referred them to a real estate agent. The Corcorans met with him and requested that if anything came on the market within their price range he should let them know. One day the agent called to say there was a 1955 house for sale in their range that wasn't on the multiple listing service yet. They excitedly drove out to see it.

"It wasn't great—it had stucco and small windows, and the kitchen was painted aqua. It had a beautiful Bouquet Canyon stone fireplace that previous owners had painted over in white, but overall the house was in good condition. We saw the potential, and when I saw the view, it sold me," Lisa says. And in 1997, her longtime dream of returning to Emerald Bay became a reality.

"We wanted to create a beach, Craftsman-style look in the home," Lisa says. But the redesign would not be easy considering the age of the home, and the Corcorans wanted it done right, so they met with several interior designers, eventually hiring Lisa McDennon for the job.

"We interviewed her, told her our vision, and she got it," the homeowner says. "We went together to pick out tiles, and she would bring fabrics over so we could see how they looked on the chairs. We had a blast together. She showed us how dark and light woods could work together in a room—not everything has to match."

McDennon was an integral part of the project early on. "Contractor Tim Sacuy introduced me to Lisa and David just as the house was in the framing stages," she says. "Luckily we were able to provide input at that critical stage."

The first, and biggest, renovation they faced was modernizing the kitchen. "The galley kitchen had no windows. We knocked down part of a wall to be able to see through [to the dining room] and found a

Opposite, this page: Personal items displayed on the wall units' shelves include books, photos, plants and collectibles. A Moroccan-inspired end table adds an interesting pattern.





The Great Room looks into the kitchen and dining room. A wall was knocked out to open the space to the adjoining rooms. Homeowner Lisa Corcoran wanted to soften the look, so she added arches to the opening. Curved-arm teak chairs and a rounded coffee table also soften the lines of the wide-plank wood floors. In the dining room, two built-in hutches, also designed by McDennon, house serving pieces. The gray brick fireplace was made by David Corcoran.





One of the sitting areas in the Great Room features a fireplace made of La Jolla beach rock and stones from the front of the Corcorans' house. The fireplace is flanked by niches, which hold candles and a brain coral from a trip to Puerto Rico.



window that was covered up. My husband and I did all the work ourselves,” Lisa says.

For interior designer McDennon, the kitchen presented some structural challenges. Luckily, she was able to circumvent them with some creative thinking. “The biggest change we made architecturally to the inside was the transition between the living room/kitchen/dining room intersection,” she explains. “I came up with a solution to hide a very awkwardly located structural column. Removing it was not an option, because when we removed the wall we had to maintain one structural column. Unfortunately, the column was right in the middle of a walkway in the kitchen, so a revision to the layout was needed. My solution was to make the column part of the kitchen island. I enlarged the circumference with decorative wood paneling so it became a beautiful feature. We then added a second column to the opposite side of the island so it was balanced and had purpose. The two columns not only looked amazing and framed the island and kitchen, but now we were able to add arches above the columns—a feature the client was striving for since the beginning of the project,” McDennon says.

To achieve the beach-cottage feel the homeowners wanted, the color palette simply brought the outside in. “The kitchen was influenced by the sand,” the interior designer explains. “The countertops selected were honed limestone in sand tones, and coordinating abstract bas-relief deco tiles were imbedded into the backsplash of the back countertop with a perfectly matched sand color in a field of crisp white ceramics.” The wood cabinets were painted white to add to the cottage look.

Off of the kitchen is the dining area. French doors draped with sheer curtains and adorned with simple hardware lead onto a huge deck with table and chairs. The room features a fireplace that David Corco-

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**Natural accents are scattered throughout the Great Room.**





ran replaced with gray brick.

The living room receives abundant sunlight, sometimes resulting in too much glare, so the Corcorans remedied the situation by putting up sun-blocking shades. McDennon designed bookcases to display fashion illustrations done by Lisa's mother and photographs taken by her father as well as other personal items. The family's electronic equipment is housed in built-in wall units also designed by McDennon. "It's a comfy place to sit and read," Lisa says.

The great room lives up to its name—in both scale and impact. It has high ceilings made of stained, distressed wood and a big wood beam that looks like driftwood. However, with its immense proportions came an equally huge dilemma for the homeowners: Where do you put the seating area in such a large room? McDennon's solution was to form two seating groups. "There's a settee with pillows and a throw where you can sit and read. You get the breeze coming in and hear the waves crashing," Lisa Corcoran says. "It has the best view—you can see the waves rolling in. On stormy days, you can see storm caps on the ocean. When I come home from work, making decisions all day, it's a sanctuary for me. My husband loves the great room for its big TV and comfy down couch. We saw a cream-linen sofa that we had custom sized. The floor is wood planking—each plank is a foot wide—and as it gets distressed, it looks better. Everyone loves the floors," she says. McDennon's company, LRM Interior Design, received a Gold Award in 2009 from the ASID

Orange County chapter for Best Living Room/Great Room Design for their work in the Corcorans' home.

"For me, stylistically, the home is a combination of beach-cottage-meets-Craftsman influence and contemporary California lifestyle, sprinkled with a bit of worldly travel," McDennon says. "In certain areas there are more influences of one or the other. The kitchen, dining room and study feel very cottage; the living room/great room, staircase and main transition areas are more heavily influenced architecturally by a Craftsman style, and the furnishings within those spaces are more modern with a casual California beach feel."

And while she was pleased with the remodel in its entirety, the designer does have a favorite room. "The master sitting area [in the master bedroom] is my favorite spot in the house," McDennon says. It's all about the view and the light in this space, so when it came to decorating it, I felt that simple was best. Clean, simple linen Roman shades line the tops of the windows and allow unobstructed sweeping ocean views. I found a wonderful Indonesian bench to tuck just beneath the windows and a few simple accents. The blues in the pillows and cashmere throw echo the Mediterranean blues of the water and sky. Standing in this space you feel as if you have been transported to another place—the French Riviera or Greece—that's how beautiful it is."

As for Lisa Corcoran, the best part is that she doesn't have to travel anywhere to be at her dream destination.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF LRM INTERIOR DESIGN  
SEE SHOPPING GUIDE, PAGE 94.

**Opposite:** The master bedroom has a breathtaking view of the Pacific Ocean.

**Left:** Bringing in different patterns and textures in accent pieces, such as these throw pillows, coral and containers, add interesting personal touches to a room.



## INSIDER TRADING

Interior designer Lisa McDennon reveals how to get the Craftsman/beach-cottage look of the Corcorans' home.

■ Be sure to strike the right balance between simple, bold, more masculine pieces of furniture and softer elements, such as a blocky wood table next to a plush down-filled chair upholstered in an off-white linen.

■ Be careful with your "beachy" influences. Stay away from literal interpretations with fixed items, such as bath or kitchen tiles. Instead, look for items that reflect the essence of the beach; choose glass tiles or natural stones such as limestone or fossil stone (which has actual fossils and shells in it). This will give your home a more timeless and elegant look. But when it comes to accessories, you can really have fun. Take a small tray and line it with sand and set in an array of candles—great for a coffee-table centerpiece. Or pick out a bunch of your favorite shells and display in various-shaped glass hurricanes. A gnarled piece of driftwood makes a great piece of sculpture, too.

■ Play with textures and colors while keeping your base palette neutral. Mix different woods—smooth and distressed (the crisp white woodwork and trims juxtaposed with the distressed wood floors and weathered ceiling beams) and mix textiles—such as natural sisal rugs beneath supple linen chairs. Use shades of cream, white, taupe and gray as your base, and then add in splashes of color to accent.

The Corcorans' master bedroom is a perfect example of how to bring the outside in. An obvious way is to add greenery, such as the potted palm; a more subtle way is the handmade pillows in a white coral design that were made using die-cut shapes from fabric that were stitched onto the pillow covers. The beautiful wide-plank wood planks add to the natural ambience. It took several steps to accomplish the distressed look of the ceiling—a method that was also used in the Great Room.