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HOME
STRETCH



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Lush tropical landscaping surrounds the Dundee House, also known as the Sunset Park house, in South Tampa. Its rendering was featured in a 1924 newspaper ad. Courtesy of Jody Beck

Photos by Seamus Payne

MODEL

BY MAGGIE DUFFY



South Tampa residents know the Sunset Park house, perched on the corner of West Shore and Bay to Bay boulevards. It is a historic South Tampa landmark. Designed by architect Wilbur B. Talley and built in 1927, the 3,200-square-foot home, known as the Dundee House, was the first in Sunset Park. Its rendering was featured in a 1924 *Tampa Sunday Tribune* advertisement encouraging others to build in the neighborhood. It has been home to Gerald “Shorty” Wilson, a former principal of H.B. Plant High School and assistant superintendent of Hillsborough County Schools. He lived there with his wife, Dorothy, from 1943 until his death in 1975. Dorothy lived there until her death in 1984. Later, Fred Smith, a sea captain and harbor pilot who was president of the Tampa Bay Pilots Association, lived there from 1984 to 2005 with his wife, Susan. New life and a modern interior have been breathed into the home by its most recent owners, married architects Jody Beck and Ross-Alan Tisdale, who own Tampa-based Traction Architecture.



A large island has been added in the Dundee House kitchen. Below is a photo of the kitchen before it was renovated by married architects and owners Jody Beck and Ross-Alan Tisdale.





Ross-Alan Tisdale, Jody Beck and sons Jonah and Robin relax around the portico of the house, which they purchased in December 2017. *Photos by Seamus Payne*

Beck, who is a Tampa native, was familiar with the house. When she was chairwoman of the City of Tampa's Architectural Review Committee, she saw it come up for sale.

"I've always been very engaged and interested in historic homes, so when I saw this one go on the market, I was very intrigued," Beck said. "With all the details and features the house had, I thought that we could make something really interesting here. Even for historic architecture in Tampa, it's very unusual."

It's unique in that the structure, featuring a wire-cut brick exterior, was built around a massive ballroom with vaulted ceilings. A plaster frieze of acanthus leaves imported from Paris wraps around the Mediterranean-inspired exterior. The H-shaped floor plan allows for cross breezes

The couple purchased the home in December 2017. They were living in a 1,000-square-foot 1919 bungalow in Palma Ceia and, with two growing boys, were outgrowing that home.

While their award-winning architectural firm skews way more modern, Beck said the house has a bit of a modern sensibility in the geometry of its proportions. "Our whole idea was to respect the details of the house and to

make our interventions distinctly different so it wasn't competing with the shell and the beautiful architectural details," Beck said.

They spent two years renovating the house while researching its history. During that time, they made the decision to move their architecture firm from a rented space into the iconic ballroom.

That decision proved to be beneficial for getting the work completed and as a showroom of sorts for clients. "We use the house as a way for people to understand that there's a difference between living in a house that's been thoughtfully considered and designed by an architect and a house that isn't," said Tisdale. "Since we do a lot of residential work, it's kind of a palpable eye-opener for people to look around and see the care in which this house was originally produced. In architectural terms, that's called embodied energy."

There was a learning curve to adjusting to working and living in the same space, but there are now "private zones" for the couple's two boys, Jonah, 8, and Robin, 11.

When the renovation began, they found they had to replace all of the plumbing, electrical wiring and duct work. On the exterior, the wire-cut brick was cleaned and re-pointed. Mullion windows were revealed by removing



A jade green tile wall provides a burst of color in the master bathroom.

aluminum awnings that were probably added in the 1950s.

Major changes were made to the once-cramped kitchen, removing a wall to open it up and installing a large island. The black and white linoleum floors were replaced with wood floors. An etched glass window depicting Capt. Smith's beloved ship remains intact, another nod to the home's history.

What is now the living room had once been an outdoor space that was enclosed at some point. They chose materials that evoked the feeling of being outdoors.

The color scheme is largely bright white, to accentuate the architectural details and allow for shadow play with all the light that comes in. It's contrasted by vibrant pops of color in blues, greens and golds. Beck said the colors reflect the lush tropical landscaping outside.

In the master bathroom, hexagon tiles reminiscent of the original flooring were installed. A bathtub was removed in favor of a stand-alone shower. The jade green tile wall makes a dramatic statement while keeping things minimal.

The ballroom where lavish parties happened throughout the years got a modern makeover with bright white paint. Strips of LED lights were installed



The ballroom at the house was transformed into working space for the couple's firm, Traction Architecture.



It took two years to renovate the house while researching its history.

in the crown molding and in a medallion on the ceiling. That replaced a clunky, brass 1980s-era chandelier. They also took down sconces that had lights meant to look like melting candles. "It reminded me of *Beauty and the Beast*," Beck said with a laugh. "We just wanted to use lighting that was all about the shell and the architecture, and the molding. It's modern and subtle and just lets the building itself sing and show itself off."

Another cool historic feature is the outdoor portico, where partygoers would retire to smoke cigars, according to Beck and Tisdale's research.

All of that hard work earned them an Honor Award of Excellence from the Florida chapter of the American Institute of Architects. "It's a nice landmark in the community," Tisdale said. "I feel lucky that we were able to shepherd this house into another generation and hopefully it will last many, many years. Tampa has a rich history, and it's nice when people can look around and see architectural heritage, whatever that may be."