

Tropic

FLORIDA LIVING & DESIGN

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The home's open plan is composed of three distinct wings, two of which are visible here; the prow-like, angled window walls are now restored and lit by architectural lighting.

THE MODERN PROW

A MID-CENTURY BEAUTY WITH A HISTORY GETS A THOUGHTFUL RESTORATION

Text John T. O'Connor Photos Myro Rosky





Vintage globe pendants in the recreation room, original to the house, were removed, restored and replaced.

THE JAMES BANTA RESIDENCE, designed in 1959 and 60 on the eastern side of the Middle River, has been catching eyes of passers by — whether by car, boat or waterskis — since its completion in 1961. The Banta residence brushed aside the direction the typical Florida ranch was careening towards in 1960... one that, while still ostensibly modern, was increasingly filled with Colonial Revival details like non-functioning shutters and red brick veneer. The architect for the Banta Residence was determined not to fall down that rabbit hole, instead creating a stunner that seems related to some of the later works of Frank Lloyd Wright. Not that it looks to any one design for total inspiration, but rather, aspects

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of the Banta Residence suggest an extreme fondness for the principles Wright developed over a long life, a life that ended just as the design for this home was being imagined.

While researching for this article, I came across connections that had been long lost. I had always imagined this house to be a Dan Duckham design. It made sense: Duckham's work was greatly influenced by Wright's, and he'd be the first to admit it. So, when I pulled up the original plans for the house and saw both Duckham's name as well as that of another architect by the name of Chester Warren Trowbridge, Jr., I called Duckham, who is very much alive and working to this day as an architect in North Carolina.

Duckham gave me the story, which archived newspapers confirmed. He and "Chet" Trowbridge, as Chester was known, worked side by side in 2nd floor offices on N. Ocean Blvd., just north of Oakland Park Boulevard. Trowbridge, who had nearly completed the designs and specifications for the Banta Residence, died in the crash of a small plane near Andros Island in The



The kitchen was scrapped for a more open version, featuring custom cabinets by Millan Carpentry.

Bahamas. Duckham agreed, at the request of Trowbridge's widow, to complete the few projects still on the architect's desk, the Banta residence being one of them.

Nearly sixty years old, it was time for a restoration, and thankfully the owners, sympathetic to the home's exceptional architecture, understood exactly what the home needed... and what it did not.

The progressive, "married to the land" design Trowbridge had nearly completed was right in Duckham's design wheelhouse. I imagine Trowbridge saw inspiration here and there, perhaps seeing Wright's design for houses like the Neils Residence in Minneapolis, completed in 1949. This single story home feels as if it has somehow emerged from the earth and features an asymmetrical, prow-like roofline and vast expanses of glass. It is also possible Trowbridge was enamored of Wright's work as his father had commissioned a family house from Wright, just 5 years before, in Illinois. Although the house had survived decades of Florida's storms and relentless sun, and has been in the



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The home's original outdoor "dance floor" was reimagined as an outdoor living and dining area, covered by a new pergola.



The high-ceilinged master bedroom suite is angled out to meet the Middle River views.

hands of the same family for years, it was time for a restoration, and thankfully the owners, sympathetic to the home's exceptional architecture, understood exactly what the home needed... and what it did not. That's where the second part of this fascinating story comes in. This house was originally designed for James Banta and his family. Banta owned no less

The homeowners hired Allesandro Potenit and Nick Terziev at Double P Construction to carry out their plans to meticulously restore and renovate the home with impact glass, a new, open kitchen, stacked stone detailing and large format, matte porcelain floors.

than 24 Arthur Murray Dance Studios, taking majority ownership from Arthur and Kathryn Murray, who stayed on as consultants, but retired to Hawaii. Banta, who loved dancing, created a house made for entertaining, with a huge recreation room looking towards the water as well as an outdoor, terrazzo dance floor that faced the pool. The homeowners hired Allesandro Potenit and Nick Terziev at Double P Construction to carry out their plans to meticulously restore and renovate the home with impact glass, a new, open kitchen, stacked stone detailing and large format, matte porcelain floors. The home's signature elements, like its soaring, beamed ceilings were



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Stacked stone reappears in the master bath, and the porcelain floor tile used throughout the house wraps the tub and shower wall.

repaired and refreshed and a period-appropriate roof of flat tile replaced an older roof. Where Mr. Banta had his dance floor, the new owners opted to keep the basic scale of the space, but have Double P Construction cover it with a custom-made red cedar pergola, its louvers cutting out just enough sun in the midday hours. Architectural lighting was added and original planters restored, making the house as glamorous as the day it was finished in '61.

The home's signature elements, like its soaring, beamed ceilings were repaired and refreshed and a period-appropriate roof of flat tile replaced an older roof.

The master bath was gutted and reconfigured using materials like stacked stone and matte gray porcelain for visual continuity with the rest of the home. Indeed, this continuity and respect for the home's original design are what make this rather minimalist restoration and renovation so successful. Period appropriate detailing, superb craftsmanship and an eye for the timeless side of Modernism make this project a complete success. ■



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