

Shabby to Chic

Friends team up to save washed-up beach house

By Whitney Joseph

Imagine having the good fortune to buy a second home near the beach — the perfect getaway for you and your family after a hectic week of work and other responsibilities. While that sounds dreamy, not every beach house comes wrapped with a bow. Just like primary residences, some may need updating to become an idyllic vacation home.

Such was the case with the Indiatlantic townhouse purchased by Jen and Brett Schwartz in 2021. The couple bought the nearly 2,800-square-foot, 4-bedroom, 4.5-bathroom unit on Coral Way on recommendation of Jen’s best friend Dana Devendorf — known as her “sister from another mister.” Devendorf and her husband also own a unit in the complex, which is just across A1A from the Atlantic Ocean. She encouraged Schwartz to consider the beach property, 165 miles north of their family abodes in Broward County. Turns out, Devendorf understood just what her bestie needed.

“I’m trying to think how to put into words: It’s like I’m going to my happy place,” says Schwartz of her Indiatlantic beach home. “It’s an escape, a nice getaway. You don’t feel like you’re in the heavily populated places of South Florida. It’s very laid back when I walk into the townhouse — it’s a great feeling. It’s like our own little paradise.”

But the townhouse didn’t always inspire those emotions. When they bought the unit in November 2021, Schwartz says it was “unlivable.”

“Hoarders lived there, and what was so surprising is they were professionals. He was a doctor and she a professor. You would not imagine. It was awful,” she recalls. “I said to my husband, and to >>



Jen Schwartz says she enjoyed redoing her Melbourne beach house and loves the results, as seen by the dining room, kitchen and upstairs loft space. One of her favorite pieces is the large fan that has sails instead of traditional blades, which mirrors the nautical theme in the Indiatlantic home.

JEN SCHWARTZ AND DANA DEVENDORF PHOTOS

Dana, ‘I am not even considering this unless we tear everything out — every toilet, every piece of tile — to its bare bones.’ So, we gutted the place because it was nasty.”

Then, she says, she told her friend, “We are only going to do this if you help me renovate this like you did yours.”

CONNECTIONS

Schwartz first met Devendorf in 2008 when she and her husband started house-hunting in Davie, hoping to move from their home in Hollywood, Florida.

“We looked at her house to buy it,” Schwartz recalls. “Our Realtor brought us to her house. We were knocking, knocking, knocking at her door. Dana opened the door with a towel on her head and she gave us a tour. Even though there was no pool at the time, we loved it. We put in an offer, but they declined it and decided to stay. So, we bought the house we live in now.”

Then, during their first Halloween in Davie, the Schwartzes ran into the Devendorfs at a community holiday party in their clubhouse.

“Brett said, ‘She looks familiar,’ but no connection was made,” says Schwartz. “Later we put two and two together: Brett’s sister, Stacy, and Dana were roommates in college at University of Miami. It’s such a small world.”

Following Halloween, the two couples became close and their kids became inseparable. Devendorf had two daughters; at the time, Schwartz also had two girls. She now has three — an event that solidified her bond with Devendorf.

“It’s a cool story,” says Schwartz. “She even took me to the hospital. She was freaking out because I was in, like, movie labor. She parked the car and was telling everyone, ‘Get out of the way. This woman is in labor!’ and took me upstairs to triage. And I [told her], ‘This brings our friendship to a whole new level.’”



Before starting the renovation of her Coral Way townhouse, Schwartz says her living room was not especially impressive — but that she knew it had potential.



Dana Devendorf, left, and Schwartz are best friends who tackled renovating the Schwartz family’s beach getaway in Melbourne, just doors down from Devendorfs’. The two are also neighbors in Broward County.

The years since have not always been easy. Devendorf was diagnosed with breast cancer in 2019 and began chemotherapy in 2020. That’s what compelled her and her husband to search for their own beach paradise.

GREAT MINDS

Devendorf, who is an accountant by trade, said she’s always reveled in home improvement.

“We consider Jen family — but yes, this is my first time doing a renovation outside of family,” she says with a chuckle. “I’ve always loved renovating stuff. Even in my own home, there’s always a project happening. I like the problem-solving aspect of it and seeing things come together, being built. In another life, if I ever wanted to do something different, that’s what I would want to do: I like moving things around, getting behind the walls.”

The women acted as their own general contractors, hiring the workers and sourcing the materials. Devendorf leaned toward the more concrete aspects of the project, literally dealing with sourcing hard materials, solving design dilemmas and budgetary concerns. Schwartz focused on the soft items and decor details. Of course, both women dipped their hands into the different project pots at various times.

“I had no problems working with Jen, none whatsoever,” says Devendorf. “We work and we think very much alike.” >>

One of the biggest challenges was the distance between the Melbourne job site and their home base in Davie. “But we had confidence and trust in the people we hired,” says Devendorf. What made life easier was that many of the vendors and suppliers Devendorf used when renovating her townhouse were called back for the Schwartzes’ project.

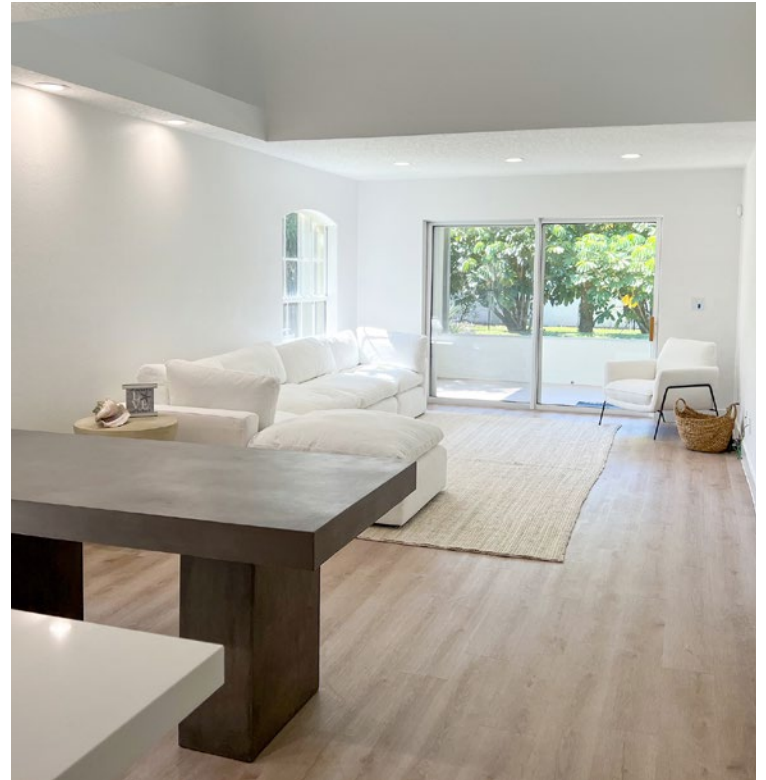
The design motif was recycled as well.

“It’s very similar, because what I had in mind when I did mine was ‘beachy’ coastal — but it was more chic coastal and not shabby,” says Devendorf. “That’s why we went with white and wood tones, and natural fibers. I knew [Jen] liked it very much so I emulated the same concept. As far as soft elements, Jen has a lot more and she was a lot more active in making those selections. Once the fixed features were completed, I handed that off to her. She would ask for my opinion, but she made most of the selections on the furnishings.”

The details are especially lovely and some highly dramatic, despite their simplicity — the living room fan modeled after sailboat sails, for instance.

“The fan is beautiful,” Devendorf says. “We choose it for a dual purpose: as a fan and as an art piece.”

The best part of the whole project, she adds, was that they “had an excuse to go do girls’ trips up to Melbourne often, just her and I, and it was awesome.” >>



Following the renovation, which Schwartz undertook with Devendorf, the living room and dining room are now bright, breezy and beachy — exactly the effect she had hoped to attain and that she now enjoys with her family as often as possible.



Taking a shower or soak in the master bathroom of her freshly renovated Melbourne beach house is an absolute pleasure, confirms Schwartz, who also acted as general contractor and designer. Schwartz was aided by her best friend, Devendorf, who helped the project after redoing her own townhome in the same complex a couple of years earlier.



There's a stark difference between what the kitchen of the Schwartzes' Melbourne townhome looked like before the renovation began and now that it's completed, with new floors, countertops, cabinetry and hardware.

HAPPY ENDING

Nasty no more, the breezy beach house is the epitome of a summer getaway. It's the perfect escape for this family of five, which frequently expands exponentially due to the children's large network of friends.

Knowing her best friend is now cancer-free has allowed Schwartz to really relish her Melbourne beach house, this year. Of

course, she's happiest when Devendorf is visiting simultaneously so they can enjoy the fruits of their labor together.

The two families love the Melbourne area, with its gorgeous beaches and attractions like the Kennedy Space Center.

"It's a great location," says Schwartz. "[My daughter] wants to be an astronaut, astronomer or scientist — she's always

been interested in that — and the Kennedy Space Center has a space camp."

But the Space Coast has more than extraterrestrial activities for the whole family. It also has the resources, materials and experts to design and build living environments — whether a primary residence or vacation getaway — that are simply out of this world. ▲

