

Of House & Home



Herringbone fabrics and floral accents set the tone in the living room of Ronalee DeNoble's Kinzie Island home; (opposite) the designer used painted coconuts and wood to create playful pelican checkers pieces.

An Island Oasis

Bright colors, unique furnishings, and lots of imagination pervade Ronalee DeNoble's Sanibel home

Nestled in a quiet spot on the east end of Sanibel Island is the exclusive enclave of Kinzie Island. A gated community located near the sparkling, shell-studded beaches of the Gulf of Mexico, this charming spot is the ideal place for a family vacation home.

When Ronalee DeNoble's grandchildren visit her Kinzie Island home, a fantasy playground awaits them. A fun-spirited interior designer, DeNoble has designed and built a unique play area beneath her spacious Sanibel residence. Armed with cans of paint and a lively creative spirit, and aided by the carpentry skills of friend Bill Rome, this resourceful grandmother turned a formerly dingy and unpromising downstairs area into a children's wonderland. Now her five grandchildren, who range in age from one to nine, have a dream-come-true play space in which to act out all their fantasies.

"I have always been a kid at heart and love seeing a child's imagination develop," says DeNoble. "Today we have so many mechanical, computerized toys that use no imagination." Her indoor playground boasts several different play areas, including a café, a schoolroom, a pretend beach and fishing spot, a building site, a play house, a shopping area, a basketball court, and a place to play hopscotch. There is even a casino with a poker table and roulette wheel for adults.

Perhaps the most novel element is the *Alice in Wonderland*-inspired checkerboard painted on the floor. Using bright oranges, yellows, pinks, and greens, DeNoble has fashioned large, three-dimensional pelican markers out of coconuts and wood. With polka dot-painted feet and contrasting-colored

ored piling bases, the whimsical pieces make playing checkers a unique experience. "The checkers are moved around by hand, and when they reach the other side they are crowned by homemade paper crowns," explains DeNoble. "I had quite a time searching for twenty-four coconuts to form the bodies of the pelicans!"

Aspiring young builders are drawn to the play construction site. Piles of crumpled paper bags double as "earth" that can be moved around in a miniature, yellow bulldozer. Stacks of empty, sealed cardboard boxes can be used as bricks to build walls and other structures. All it takes is a little creativity, and the possibilities are infinite.

For the academically minded, there is a schoolroom outfitted with wooden desks, art supplies, and anything else young teachers might need to instruct their pupils.

Large dolls can double as pretend students, if playmates are occupied elsewhere.

A café outfitted with brightly painted chairs and tables has a spot for making ice cream sundaes and a performance area suitable for young entertainers. The "mermaid market" has shopping carts, a cash register, and groceries for sale. Young fishermen who are not quite ready to venture out onto the high seas can content themselves with a painted water area where one can pretend-sail on a plastic boat and fish for stuffed-animal sea creatures.



BY PAMELA GILBERT WORTZEL
PHOTOS BY LAUREN DAVIES

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A fully equipped play home delights the domestically inclined, and for those who might tire of walking from area to area, an electric jeep and Corvette provide easy transport on a painted brick road. And just in case “fuel” runs low, there is a pretend gas pump fashioned out of a wooden compact disc holder. “The children love to get in the beach jeep or the yellow Corvette convertible and race around the roads,” says DeNoble. “It’s great for rainy days.” The enterprising designer, who rents out her vacation home when she’s not around, feels that the play area will appeal to renters as much as it does to her own grandchildren.

The playful, inventive spirit that inspired her to create her fantasy playground is also evident in the upstairs area of DeNoble’s Sanibel home. A love of transformation is a key element in the personality of this ebullient grandmother. She delights in scouring secondhand stores to find objects she can reconfigure into her colorful and eclectic design schemes. The Kinzie Island home is the third Sanibel dwelling that DeNoble has redone. The previous two have sold, and she is enjoying working on her current project.

With a busy career as an interior designer, DeNoble divides her time between Sanibel and her native city of Peoria, Illinois. “Doing a home in the warmer climates is always exciting and so different than the design work I do up North,” she says. “Whether it’s town houses in Bonita Bay, condos at John’s Island in Vero Beach, retirement living at Shell Point, or homes on Sanibel, it’s always fun to make them distinctly Florida. And doing one’s own home is extremely challenging, as there are so many different design options available.”

“I’ve done a lot of renovation to this house,” she explains as she gives a tour of her Kinzie Island home. “And it’s still very much a work in progress.” Many of the pieces have been brought down from Peoria. Furniture from Peoria might not sound all that exciting, but DeNoble manages to give everything a new twist with bright colors and lots of imagination. In her able hands, anything old can become new again. She also likes to combine some of her heirloom pieces with contemporary finds.

In the front entry hall, a large credenza holding DeNoble’s Alaskan doll collection and an antique French *panetière*, originally used as a bread box, are paired with an informal sisal rug. “I had a wonderful time arranging the doll collection on the shelves,” says DeNoble. “My son Brad, an environmental lawyer in Alaska, finds great joy in helping me locate native art. This particular artist, Judy Walyer, creates all her dolls with an Alaska theme. They are done in breathtaking, island-like col-

ors, and if it wasn’t for their booted, not bare, feet, they would look like West Indies dolls.”

An adjoining den, painted a cool Williamsburg blue with a touch of green, serves as a media room that can double as an extra bedroom. For the den, DeNoble designed a wall unit that holds books, a flat-screen TV, and colorful vases in different shapes and sizes. “The former owners had left many base cabinets in the lower level, which I resurrected and painted an off-white color,” she says. “They became the base for this huge wall-covering bookcase.” Her son-in-law made the upper piece in three sections, and she had it shipped down to Florida. To

add more versatility to the den, she transformed a closet into a small work area with a desk. Brightly painted columns with wrought iron brackets that can hold hangers allow the work area to become extra closet space if needed. A striped area rug adds a bold accent.

Items that have special meaning for DeNoble are frequently integrated into the decor. “On the wall, I have my most favorite piece of art work, a pair of watercolors done years ago by my mother,” she says. “They are of native island folk in rich colors. My mother had never allowed them to be hung in any prime location in the house where I grew up, but I always felt they deserved a more prominent position. Now, every time I enter the room, I think of her and all the wonderful memories.”

High ceilings accented with an unusual dental molding, along with Palladium windows and a fireplace painted to look as if made of stone, give the living room a stately appearance. Wingback chairs upholstered in a floral Clarence House pattern contrast with sofas done in a contemporary, acrylic, red herringbone fabric. A large English secretary, painted yellow, is flanked by two country-style chairs. A glass coffee table holds chunky glass candleholders that bring together the colors of the room. The living room, which has a canal view, overlooks the pool area and a screened porch done in neutral tones.

In the kitchen, DeNoble painted the walls a maize color that complements the existing earth-toned granite countertops and white cabinets. The dining room features a large, new cherry wood table paired with old Chinese Chippendale mahogany chairs. “Even before purchasing the house, I had bought these dining room chairs,” recalls DeNoble. “I went with a dear friend to do some antiquing in Lexington, Kentucky, and found these chairs. They were in horrible shape, in desperate need of refinishing, but they just had something.” She had the chairs painted green and reupholstered in a green striped fabric.

Instead of using a cumbersome piece of furniture for a side-



Bright, tropical colors and accessories add flair to one of the house’s guest rooms.



A large credenza in the entryway holds DeNoble's Alaskan doll collection (above); kids can zoom around the downstairs play area in an electric jeep or Corvette (below).



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The durability of fabrics and objects is an important factor in DeNoble's design choices.



The master bedroom provides a relaxing escape with its pastel colors and floral fabrics (above); a checkers table in the living room fits right in with the house's beachy setting (left and inset).

board, DeNoble designed a sleek, white wooden serving bar. Above the serving bar, she has hung eight large, contemporary botanical prints and added wall sconces to complete the look. A green, red, and yellow glass 1950s-style floor lamp adds a retro touch.

The durability of fabrics and objects is an important factor in DeNoble's design choices. For a beach- and bathing suit-friendly look in the family room, she combined a peach-colored, floral acrylic fabric with a large, round, green plaid ottoman. A French Art Deco chair adds to the interesting mix of periods and styles, and an old wooden cabinet has a history of its own. "This painted armoire was an old English piece that used to be all leather with nail heads," says DeNoble. "For a former house, I had resurrected this piece by removing all the tattered leather, painted it yellow, and used white nail heads for the decoration. I couldn't bear to remove all the nail heads, so we just painted it this wonderful, soft coral color, and it is very handsome."

The guest rooms offer DeNoble more opportunity to display her versatility, creating environments that are suitable for children or adults. When grandchildren visit, she spells out their names in colorful wooden letters. When they arrive, they rush to see which room displays their names. In one room, twin beds are covered with bedspreads that combine a Monet-inspired print with blue and white stripes. Beach ball-shaped pillows are a child's delight, and above the beds hang beach cottage-themed collages. Periwinkle blue wicker furniture completes the look.

For a second bedroom done in coral colors, DeNoble used a white wicker chair that belonged to her grandmother and repainted lamps she found in a secondhand shop. Striped and fringed envelope-shaped pillows are mixed with bolsters to help create a warm, cozy atmosphere.

The master bedroom is done in lighter pastel tones. Green drapes are topped with floral-printed valances, while the lamps have been painted with stripes. A white wicker love seat provides an old-fashioned touch, and a white baker's rack holds an array of objects. A birdhouse painted in lively island colors adds a whimsical accent to the room. One of two large master bedroom closets is outfitted with a crib so it can be used as a baby's room if needed.



Made partially by DeNoble's son-in-law, a wall unit in the den holds books, vases, and a flat-screen TV.

Decorating places in Florida gives DeNoble a chance to work with a different color palette than she is used to in her more traditional Peoria home. But each home she decorates for clients is different. "I like to reflect the personality of the client," she says. "I like all styles and all colors, although sometimes it's just fun to do things in neutrals."

If clients have some existing pieces they just love, she enjoys integrating them into her design.

"A few exquisite pieces are nice, but one can find many less expensive pieces that do just fine," she says. "I have always liked my clients to be part of the search if they wish. It's amazing what wonderful ideas many of them have that I like to use. Making one's home personal is very important to me as a designer. You don't have to toss out things they love and cherish. Many times we put them in a new setting, with different items, and it all turns out well."

An optimist by nature, DeNoble loves decorating houses. For her, life is an ongoing treasure hunt. She's always searching for the next object she can transform into something new, creating a kaleidoscopic vision of forms and colors and infusing each environment with her own unique spirit. 🌿

Pamela Gilbert Wörtzel has been writing about Southwest Florida for nearly twenty years. She currently divides her time between Florida and Arizona.

FEATHERING THE NEST

Homeowners redecorating or moving into a Southwest Florida home have a new local resource to turn to for interior design ideas. The International Design Center (IDC) in Estero opened its exquisite, custom copper doors to the public on May 20, much to the delight of president and CEO of Miromar Development Margaret Miller, who headed the center's creation. "The International Design Center has been a dream of mine, and seeing it brought to fruition is incredibly gratifying," Miller said in an IDC press release.

The IDC meets all the home-decorating needs of any style-conscious consumer, with seventy-four high-class showrooms, both public and private, and an innovative "Designer on Call" program. Phase I of the design center has been completed, providing 250,000 square feet on three floors for showrooms as well as restricted professional floors. Upon the completion of Phase II, the building will consist of 400,000 square feet, allowing more space for showrooms and professional design offices.

—Emma Kalka

The IDC is open to the public Monday through Friday from 9 a.m. to 6 p.m., and on Saturday from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. Contact the main concierge desk for information on future events and programs.

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239-390-5111 (IDC office)
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