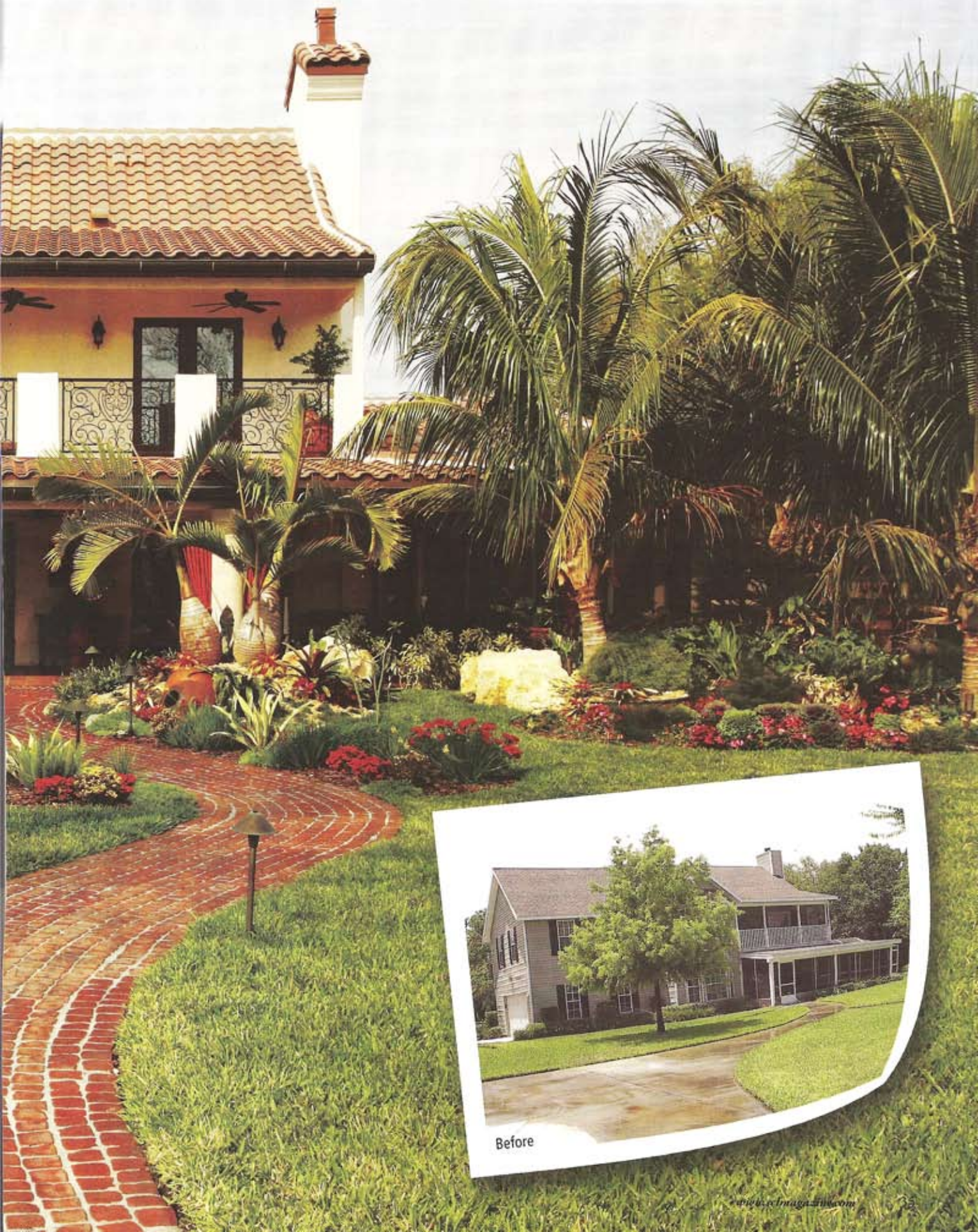


*Mexican Villa*  
meets *Villa*  
Caliph's Palace

by Nancy Koplioka  
Photography by Dominic Agostini





Before





The hand-carved cantera stone fireplace is framed by matching windows with elegant, asymmetrical swags in dual-tone blaze pleated silk. Jabots and swags are trimmed with six-inch amber beads. Iron cornices are from Orion Iron Art, California.

**O**pulent, vivid and perfectionistic are three words that begin—only begin—to describe the newly renovated Rockledge home of Yolanda Serrano and Xavier Mudavachery.

The Mexican villa is embraced by a lush, textural landscape of unusual ground covers, shrubs, flowering trees and palms. Colorful annuals spilling from handsome urns and pots embellish every pillar and post as well as provide focal points throughout the luxuriant gardens.

Inside are the dark millwork and beams, terra cotta tile floors and stucco walls visitors would expect to find, but window treatments of translucent silks and satins more typical of a Caliph's palace create an imaginative fusion of styles. It's hard to believe the 9,800-square-foot Mexican style home was once a 3,200-square-foot, vinyl-sided center-hall colonial.

Guests enter a soaring reception area, which links the old and new sections of the home, through stunning, 10-foot arched mahogany double doors embellished with wrought-iron grillwork. At the far end of the room, matching doors lead to a private courtyard with pool, fireplace, outdoor kitchen and party area.

Back in the reception room, water falling gently from tier to tier of a hand-carved, cantera-stone fountain adds music to the space's other sensory offerings. Moisture from the fountain and strategically located grow-lights nourish delicate orchids in chest-high pots in four arched nooks along the wall.

Off to the left is the new wing with the dining room, kitchen and pantry, master suite and theater.

Off to the right, is the old wing. The first door leads to a Southwestern-inspired art room. Just above it, a

Romeo and Juliet balcony offers a peek at an upstairs sitting room, brightened by a skylight.

Beyond the fountain lies the entrance to a cozy wine room. Guest bedrooms are upstairs.

When Yolanda Serrano, a native of Colombia, and Xavier Mudavachery, from South India, purchased the home they wanted to create a Mexican villa with a two-story reception room added to the back. But they didn't want anything about their home to be ordinary. As the couple's ideas took shape, they "trashed three designs before we found Renée," Serrano says.

When they saw Renee Clary White's vision—creating a grand new entrance on the south side leading into a reception room that would become the access point for an entire new wing—they happily agreed to the project.

Renée Clary White and her brother Charles Clary are principals of Clary Residential and Commercial Contractor. The Serrano-Mudavachery job was only the second big client for the team, who had just begun doing business on their own after working many years for their father, Steve Clary. This second-generation design and build team, who pride themselves on delivering what others deem "impossible," was in heaven.

## Plan and Process

"The house was to be, for the most part, an old Mexican villa. Everything else was open for discussion, but everything was to be unique," Clary White explains. "It was my job to bring the most authentic of pieces—no matter how far my research would take me—to the project and make them right at home.



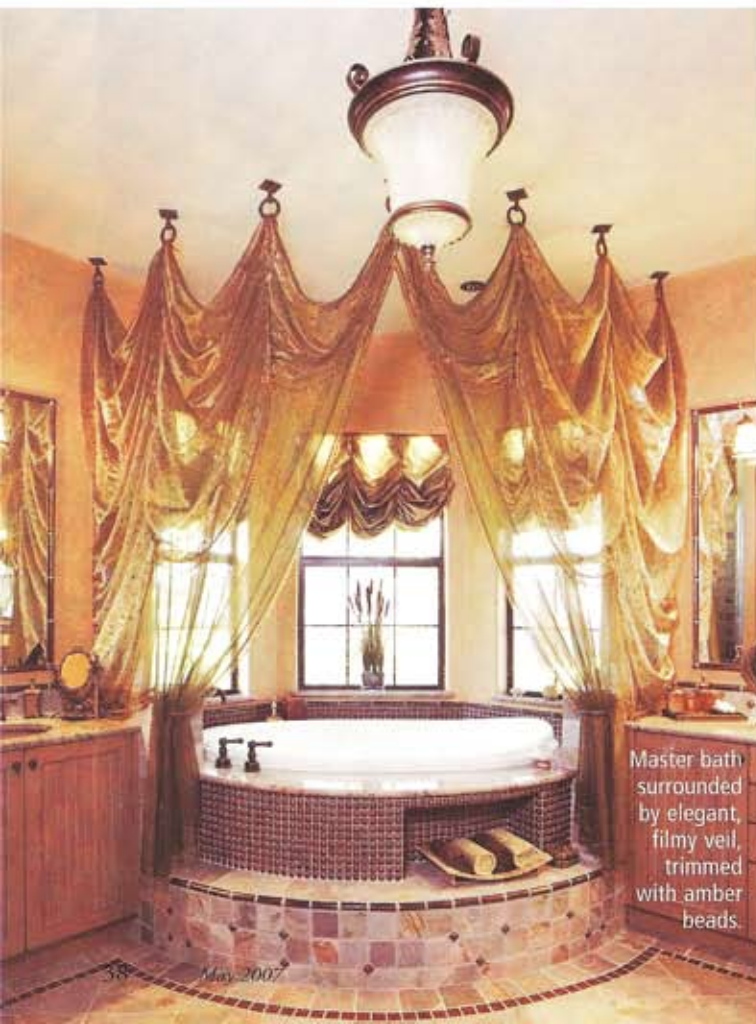


Iridescent pool tiles were hand-mixed by Dal Tiles in Mexico. The fountain, designed by Susan Hall, of Hall Bell Aquil, spills water from terra-cotta pipes onto walk-on-water pedestals. The water source is framed with split-faced travertine surrounded by porcelain slate.





French doors topped with contoured cornices in coral silk with contrasting swags and cascades. Fabric is repeated in side panels. Two additional layers provide privacy or simply a sheer accent.



Master bath surrounded by elegant, filmy veil, trimmed with amber beads.



Pool bath with sauna and roomy shower.





"It was also my job to find the best person for each phase of the construction, and then allow that person the same freedom of creativity, and give that person the same level of trust that had been bestowed upon me," she explains.

The way it worked is the clients discussed their hopes and dreams with her. She would refine the ideas and "hand them off to my brother, whose job it was to make it work," Clary White laughs.

The design and execution of the wine room provides an interesting example of how the team collaborated, according to White. The room, shown on page 36, was nearly completed when Serrano made a trip to India. Upon her return, she found the room somewhat lacking. "What she had seen in India was a domed ceiling," White recalls.

Since the room was on the first floor of the old wing, it wasn't really possible to create a domed ceiling. Eager to please her client, however, Clary White worked on the problem in her mind, and then inspiration came in the form of a photograph of a wine cellar with a domed, brick ceiling.

Could a brick ceiling work? They ordered a shipment of antique Chicago bricks and had them sawed thin for use as a facing. Charles Clary agreed to create a framework so the bricks could be mounted a foot or so below the ceiling at the front and back of the room to create the illusion of a curve. The result: a domed ceiling that really isn't.

That and a new paint treatment turned out to be just what the client wanted.

## Finishing Details

The Mexican look was achieved through dark woodwork and doors, terra cotta tile floors and iron light fixtures. All 43 interior doors were custom made by Architectural Traditions in Arizona from incense cedar with a Santa Barbara distressing and a red mahogany finish. Some doors have wood panels, others, glass inserts. Hardware came from MKC, a French Canadian company. All hardware has the same finish but lever styles vary throughout the house. All casings and headers are knotty pine with an aged copper wire finish, according to Clary White.

Satillo tiles from Mexico were used to achieve a



Rustic beams, Mexican terra-cotta tiles and iron balustrade add authenticity. Urns from Rockledge Gardens, and potting by Merrideth Compton.

character of age and distressing that would be found in an authentic Mexican villa. Hardwood floors distinguish the bedrooms, dining room and wine room.

Romantic embellishment is seen in the elaborate and unique window treatments created by Debbie Marple, drapery designer at Blinds of All Kinds in Rockledge. Marple's previous experience designing wedding gowns was a good starting point for the types of window treatments Serrano had in mind. "Everything had to be unique, embellished, and something she hadn't seen before," explains Marple. "It wasn't that she didn't like something, it was always a matter of adding more and more."

## Key Rooms

The master suite located in the new wing consists of a large bedroom, an adjoining office, a small, colorful bed-sitting room,

enormous closets and a bath with separate tub, shower and water closet.

The bathroom tile is a mud-set natural slate called white gold from Ceramic Matrix in Vero Beach. The slate displays an array of colors from greens and grays to browns and coppers. Amber glass bar liners and decorative bubbles are used as accents, Clary White says.

The neutral-toned master bedroom has two sets of French doors that lead to the courtyard. The doors are topped with contoured cornices in coral silk with contrasting swags and cascades. The latter fabric appears again in flip-back side panels. Beneath are turquoise privacy panels and sheer accent panels of a similar shade.

Color is very important to Serrano, who favors vivid blues and shades of terra cotta. And she defends her efforts to get the exterior paint colors right, even though it took six unsuccessful tries. "Some people would just let it go, but that says something about you," she says. She felt vindicated after viewing a TV documentary about the design and building of the Venetian Hotel in Las Vegas, which is surrounded by a man-made river.

"After the riverbed was painted and it was filled with water, the owners didn't like the color of the river," she recalls. "The program showed how they ordered all the water removed so they could do it over. If it can happen on that level, you cannot be afraid to change things in your own home to get it

the proper way... Your home is a place to enjoy," she affirms, "not just a place to stay."

## Achieving the American Dream

Serrano and Mudavachery, who come from vastly different cultures, met while working on board a cruise ship. There, they were responsible for everything from helping guests with their land tours and problem-solving to scrubbing restrooms. "The only thing I didn't do was food service," Mudavachery says.

In 1992, "when we decided to get married, we obtained green cards so we could stay in the U.S.," explains Mudavachery, because neither homeland was suitable for both. Titusville was their first home. Every four years or so they sold and moved on—first to Rockledge, then to Orlando, back to Rockledge and then to Merritt Island before purchasing the current home.



Xavier Mudavachery and Yolanda Serrano

The couple still invests in real estate and Xavier also owns convenience stores. Yolanda is an accountant for a petroleum company. Yolanda's mother lives with the couple while Xavier's adult son lives in Dubai. Both have large families in their homelands who visit for extended periods, so the second floor of the home's original

section is devoted to guest rooms. Both are presently looking forward to a visit from Xavier's parents, who have not visited in a while. "I don't think they realize I have such a house," he says proudly.

As the job winds down, contractors feel an equal measure of pride. "Serrano allowed and sometimes forced people to create the most intricate of visions, and in doing so she taught us all that we were better than we thought," says Clary White. "For everyone involved, it established a sense of pride and effort and collaboration like none other before." ❧