

island state of mind

After 30 years in New York, Margo Alexander thought Florida was too hot, too green, and too far away from LaGuardia.

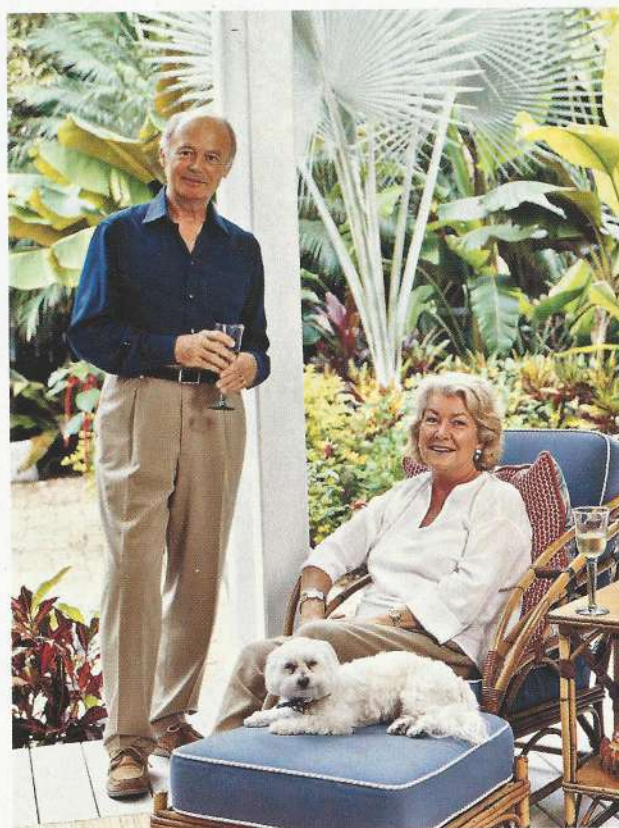
But after she retired from a career on Wall Street, her husband wanted to start a writing project in a warmer climate. "Bob has always loved the tropics and wanted to work there," Margo says. "So, I thought, why not?"

He searched the Caribbean for the perfect spot, but soon discovered that Internet connections were hard to come by in many locations. Ready to give up, Margo spied an ad for a rental in Key West, Florida. After verifying WiFi access, the Alexanders spent January in the Keys—and Margo caught a solid case of island fever.

The couple had to return to New York at the end of the month, but headed south again as soon as possible. When prospective buyers came to look at the house they'd rented, Margo thought, "No, it's mine!" She called the broker and signed a contract that same day.

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It only took a month for
New Yorkers Margo and Bob
Alexander to feel completely
at home in Key West.

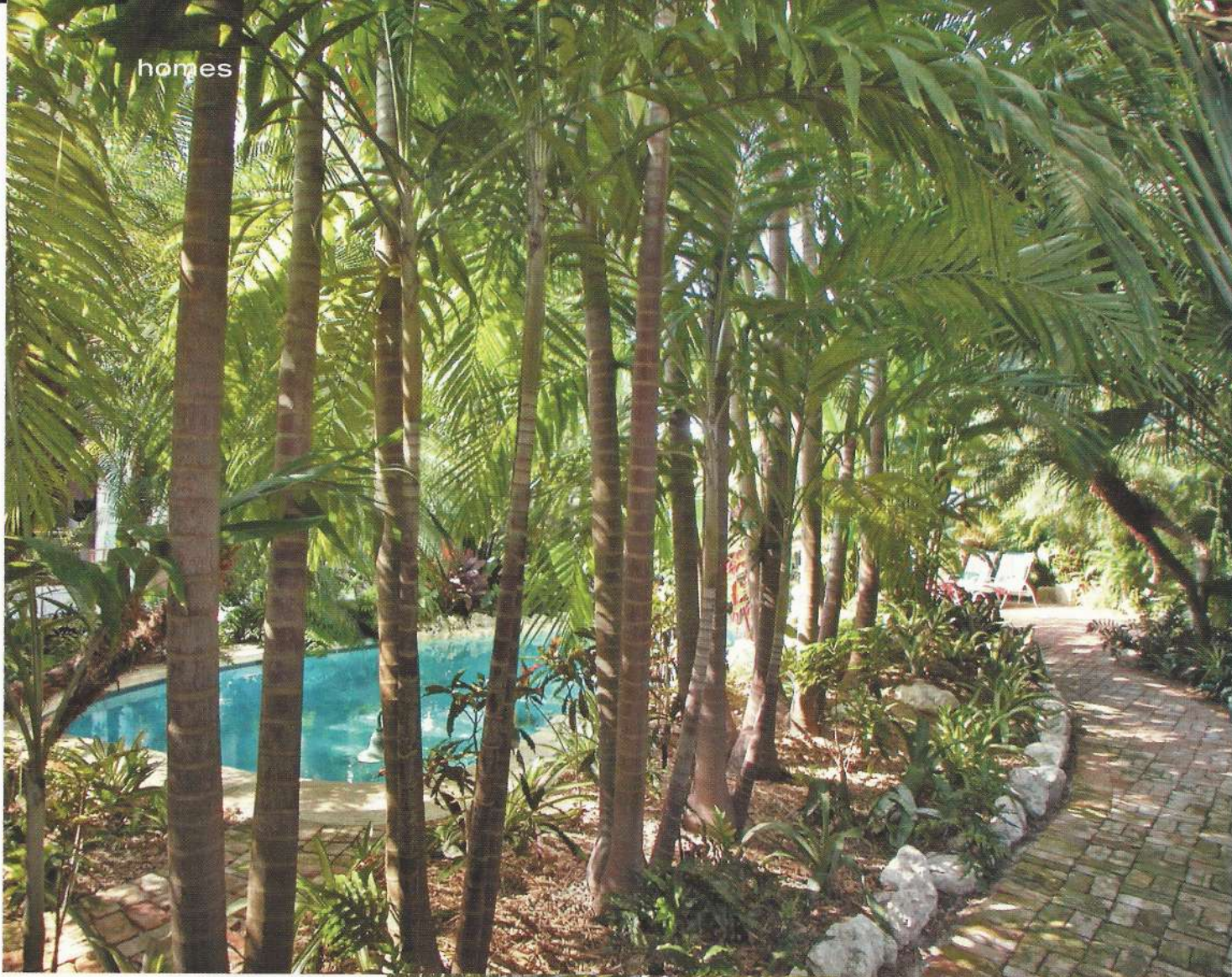


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Lush landscaping surrounds a lagoonlike pool. "Key West is a place where you envision beachfront houses, but it's very limited in terms of actually being on the water," says residential designer Guillermo Orozco. "That's why I like to bring the feeling of water elements in, and open the indoors to the outside as much as possible." Bob and Margo chose bamboo for the outdoor shower (right) because of its durability.



Trading in her black power suits for linen and florals, Margo decided to make over her home, as well. She enlisted Key West residential designer Guillermo Orozco and New York-based interior designer Zina Glazebrook to help. Thrilled to take on a project in a tropical locale, Zina says, "I've always been inspired by the romance of Key West. It was great fun working in that environment." Partnering with Guillermo was another plus. "He really understood the relationship between the garden, porches, and interiors," Zina says. "You truly feel enveloped by the garden." Formerly closed in, the living



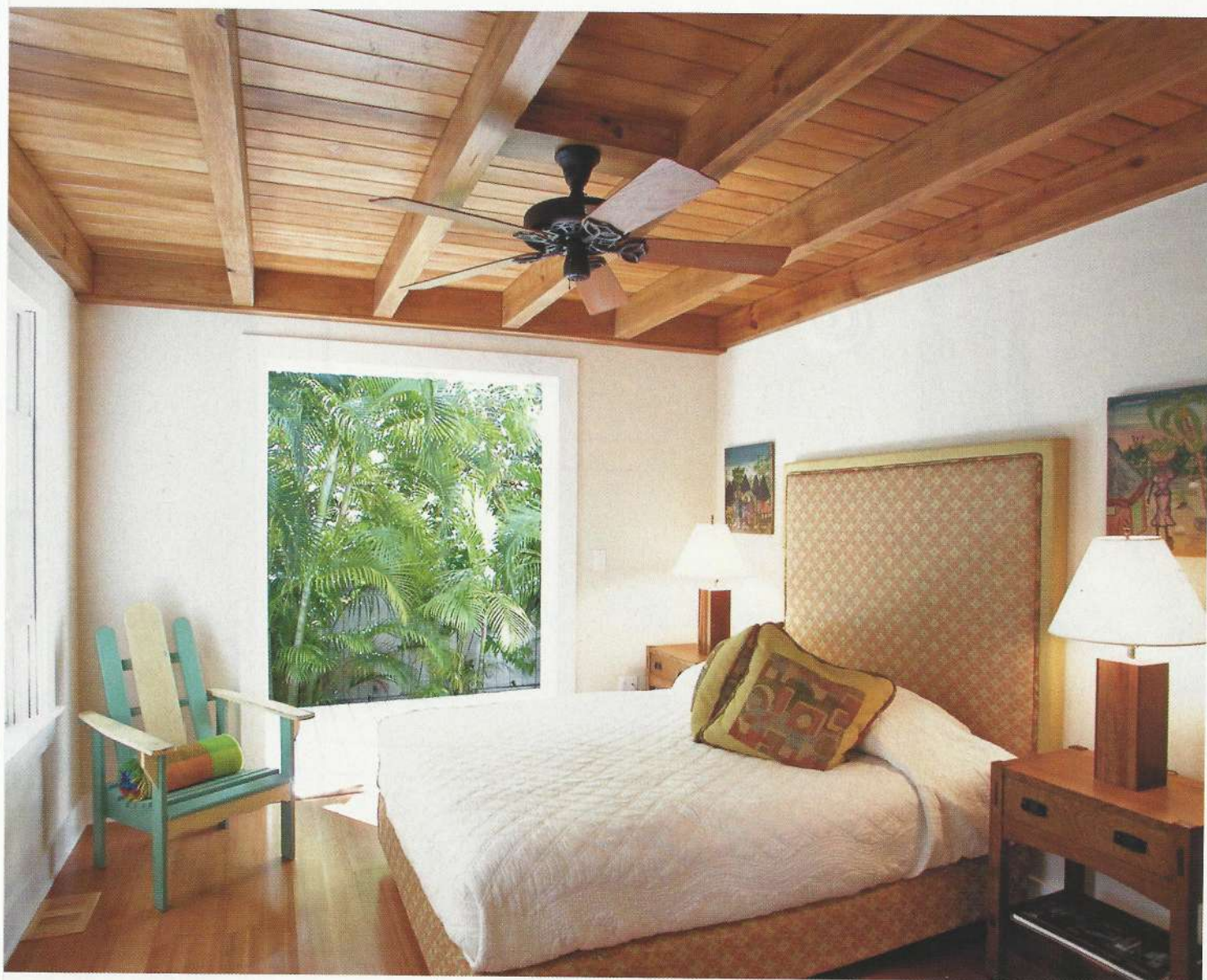
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"Changing the floors from ceramic tile to heart pine made an enormous difference in how the house feels," Margo says. "And I think the ceiling, glazed to resemble antique heart pine, is one of the home's most beautiful features."



room and kitchen now open via folding doors and windows onto an L-shape porch. There, a pavilion-like roof shelters an outdoor living room complete with sofa, armchairs, and a rug. "Relocating the kitchen to the center of everything and opening it up makes a big difference in the relationship between inside and out," Guillermo says.

As workmen replaced tile floors with wood and glazed the ceilings,



Zina and Margo got to work on the interiors. Online shopping sprees yielded secondhand furnishings and accessories, mostly from eBay. Margo asked stylist Victoria Lesser to update the bargains with new upholstery. Wagon-wheel furniture became cool with a new plaid/stripe fabric combo, and a vintage Heywood-Wakefield bamboo set became even cooler with marine-blue fabric and white piping.

Island artists added finishing touches: a mosaic of beach glass, broken china, and tiles for the kitchen backsplash; river-rock flooring in the bath; and original artwork from local shops in all of the rooms. "It was easy to support Key West artists," Bob says, "because they do such fabulous work."

After long, relaxing stretches in Key West over the past four years,

the Alexanders now feel like locals themselves. "It's been such an easy community to become a part of," says Margo. Even their Maltese, Oliver, loves Key West. "He can run around in the yard, go to most restaurants with us, and get snacks from most stores," she says. "When we return to New York, he mopes around for days." 🐾

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A custom-upholstered bed in the guest room adds a contemporary touch to the retro interior. Zina brought in Danish lamps, a brightly painted antique chair, and Haitian paintings to enhance the modern aesthetic.