



Winter Park  
**home** <sup>SM</sup>

JULY/AUGUST 2006

## OUT OF AFRICA

The style is reminiscent of colonial Africa

The result is casual comfort at its best

**HOME SALES REPORT: WHAT SOLD & WHAT THEY SOLD FOR**

As seen in  
Winter Park HOME  
Jul/Aug 2006

# OUT OF AFRICA

When Varley and Shane Grantham decided that it was time to replace their old house on the shore of Lake Maitland, they knew precisely what they wanted to keep and what they didn't. Both loved the large back porch overlooking the lake. Both were fed up with the cracked windows, tilting floors and other symptoms of a house being slowly torn apart by the instability of the underlying land.

They turned to home designer Ray Wolters of Residential Designing and Drafting, builder Mike Brannon of Brannon Construction, and interior designer Ann Burst of Indies Landing to create the ideal house for their lifestyle. The Granthams wanted a house designed for casual living in a tropical or semi-tropical climate. They particularly wanted porches at the back of the house, where they could enjoy views of the lake. The couple also wanted a home they could live comfortably in for the rest of their lives.

According to Wolters, "When we initially met to talk about the house, the Granthams were very clear about what they wanted. They emphasized casual living, an open floor plan that facilitated lake views, and a large porch or verandah facing the lake."

*Photography by  
Peter Burg, Photographix*





Wolters took their input and set about creating a preliminary set of plans that he characterized as a cross between a typical island home and the tropical plantation houses of the late 19th century colonial period.

That initial set of plans turned out to be just what the Granthams wanted. "We met with Ray one time prior to starting the house. He came back with a set of plans that were close to perfect. I think we made one or two minor changes and that was it," said Shane. She went on to point out that, "Several of our friends who had been through the house building process warned us that just getting the design was going to be a long and frustrating process. It was neither! Ray seemed to get what we wanted right from the start and we were off and running on the building phase in no time at all."





The basic island style was refined to include some elements that suggest a colonial African plantation home. Dark wood floors and ceiling treatments, wood moldings, and other embellishments combined with the open floor plan, large windows, deep porches, and old fashioned tilt-out storm shutters give the home a decidedly tropical feel. Wolters designed the house to feature large verandahs on both floors overlooking the lake. His design also gave nearly every room a lake view. The home is slightly over 6,700 square feet, including the verandahs and a three-car garage.

It was then up to Mike Brannon to turn those plans into reality. The first and, perhaps, most difficult problem he had to overcome was the condition of the land itself. Like much of the lakeshore land in central Florida, the property consists of a lot of muck and mud that is relatively unstable. In fact, the old house was coming apart due to the movement and subsidence of the underlying land.

Brannon knew that simply laying a new slab on the unstable soil would only invite future settling problems. To assure maximum stability, he needed a piling system that reached deep underground, where the earth was solid enough to easily support the weight of the house. Unfortunately, the traditional approach of driving steel pillars into the ground would raise a very serious risk of further destabilizing the land beneath the adjoining properties. Instead, Brannon decided to use a unique helical pier system that essentially drilled screw-like metal pilings into the ground, eliminating the earth-shaking consequences of the traditional method.





The new house boasts a structural steel reinforced slab that rests on and is tied into 75 helical piers. The galvanized steel piers were drilled into the ground to a depth of 35 feet. "Even if all of the surface land beneath the house suddenly washed away, the structure would remain true and level, just like it is today," noted Brannon.

Brannon's attention to detail and the skill of his finish carpenters is reflected throughout the house in the form of expertly crafted woodwork and cabinetry. From the Brazilian walnut floors to the wood plank ceiling treatments, the millwork provides an interesting counterpoint to the light cream colored walls throughout the house.

While Brannon's crews went about the business of constructing the house, Shane teamed with Ann Burst to develop a distinctive living environment that would be geared to the needs of day-to-day family life; provide an ideal venue for casual entertaining; and, convey a sense of informal elegance.

As with any established family, there are many furnishings, works of art and other similar items that have become long-time family possessions. When possible, they must be woven into the fabric of the new home. One such possession is a zebra hide rug that Varley's father brought back from a long-ago trip to Africa. It spent many years tucked away in a closet until a friend of Shane's urged her to display the unusual item.

According to Burst, the colonial African motif seemed to evolve naturally. The Granthams had collected numerous furnishings, tapestries and works of art that had originated in Africa and Asian rim countries. "When we assembled them in this house, they all came together to evoke the kind of feeling one may have gotten when visiting the home of a colonial English or Dutch planter in 19th century Africa," said Burst.

The furnishings are an eclectic mix of old, new, and custom made, yet they all seem to work well together. Certain pieces were made to order. Others came straight out of manufacturer catalogs and showrooms. And, many more came from the Grantham's former home.

From the black wicker chairs and tables on the verandahs to the custom made living room chairs, Burst has done an excellent job of blending the disparate elements into a seemingly unified whole that conveys a central theme without being heavy-handed. Although the theme is African, it is very understated.

"Ann has a great sense of just how far to go in blending a lot of different things to create something that is both comfortable and beautiful," says Shane. She is also quick to point out that, in her opinion, "It's not truly colonial African. It's not island. It's definitely not Tuscan...It's us!"



RESIDENTIAL COMMERCIAL



**INDIES LANDING**  
INTERIOR DESIGN

407.740.8444

515 PARK AVENUE NORTH, #116 WINTER PARK  
LIC. # 1B0000846

Winter Park <sup>SM</sup>  
**home**

Our Advertisers Make This Magazine Possible