

# From *starter house* to Dream Home

## Renovation with creativity, color and courage

By Lyla Haggard | Photos by Johan Roetz

DeAnna Harmon had recently started interviewing builders for her family's home renovation when she first met Marilyn Perez while getting her nails done—an insignificant luxury that led to a very significant partnership. DeAnna noticed Perez going over construction designs while her nail polish dried. "Are you building a home too?" asked DeAnna. Little did she know that Marilyn Perez, director of design and co-founder of HomeWorks Builders, had exactly the experience and creativity to turn DeAnna's South Tampa bungalow into her dream home. ♦ Attorney Tom Harmon, wife DeAnna and their kids Kendall, 13, Thomas, 11, Chandler, 9 and Lucas, 7, plus family beagle Charlie, were clearly outgrowing the starter house they had built in 2002. "Most people would just move to a bigger house, but we love our neighborhood," DeAnna says. "We've lived on this street for 11 years so we decided to expand our house, even though it was only six years old." Her original request of Tom was a game room over the garage so she could get her dining room back. "It kind of snowballed after that," she laughs. Snowballed indeed—from 2,900 square feet to almost 8,000 square feet under roof, and in only eight months.

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ABOVE: The dark walls in the dining room are perfect to showcase art as well as highlight the white upholstered side and patterned end chairs.

OPPOSITE LEFT: An arched front doorway is one of the only remaining elements of the previous structure.

OPPOSITE RIGHT: A unique bamboo desk from Thailand sits in the office. A handful of Thai pieces can be found throughout the house.

Marilyn's husband Ramón Perez, president of HomeWorks, had to be coaxed and cajoled to consider the Harmon project because he usually declines renovations, preferring new construction. When he saw the designs of architect David Balber and realized the complexity of the renovation (more than doubling the size), he came on board. As DeAnna remembers it, he said, "This is a big job. I think you need us," and the Harmons agreed. They rented a house down the street while their bungalow was reduced to studs and a few freestanding walls. Even the exterior of their house was re-designed for a more current Mediterranean look. The finished residence now includes the dining room that DeAnna wanted plus a spacious kitchen/family room, office, master bedroom suite, four additional bedrooms, five and a half baths, kids' playroom, men's den, exercise room with steam and sauna, pool and two outdoor lanais.



### The design process

Marilyn and Ramón Perez work as a team with their clients to ensure that their innovative designs are also user-friendly and reflect the personality of the family that lives there—that means planning ahead. “We had many meetings with DeAnna to be sure we understood what she wanted before any construction began,” notes Marilyn Perez. Design and budget, signed off on by the Harmons, provided clear and detailed guidelines for the decisions that lay ahead. During the next phase, Perez brought in Stephanie Hamilton, a designer at HomeWorks, to guide DeAnna through the maze of choices she faced such as appliances, wall colors, flooring, cabinets, faucets and other permanent fixtures.

Ramón Perez estimates that a client usually makes about 100 choices during the building of a custom home. DeAnna, an inveterate shopper, still needed help to focus. “I trusted Stephanie to know what I like, so I would tell her, for example, to bring me just three door handles to pick from, otherwise I would have gone crazy.” Selecting wall colors before new furniture was purchased was another challenge, but fortunately DeAnna knew which colors she didn’t want—no yellow or tan, and she knew that Tom really wanted a huge semi-circular red leather sofa in the family room. Marilyn had suggested some cool colors in the blue/green range, but DeAnna wasn’t sure until she happened to have din-

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ner at Sideburn's, a sophisticated South Tampa restaurant, and noticed the same color combo and loved it. The downstairs palette features various shades of blue and aqua with dramatic deep brown walls for contrast.

#### Family-friendly space

A heavy wooden arched front door, one of the few elements of the previous structure still remaining, opens to a delightful foyer with Plexiglas-mirror carnival glass ceiling. On either side of the foyer are a formal dining room to the right and an office to the left. In the dining room, the warm bittersweet chocolate walls provide a dramatic backdrop for a long expandable rustic walnut table surrounded by white upholstered side and patterned end chairs. A small detailed chest acts as a buffet. A stunning brass mirror over the chest and a long rectangular painting of a deep red rose liven up the dark walls. The home includes gifts from Thailand from DeAnna's mother who acquired them when her family lived there. In the office, some of her mother's other gifts continue the Thai theme: a welcoming Buddha, bamboo desk and wingback rattan accent chair. The white upholstered wingback chair at the desk gives a punch to the dark wall and matching chocolate drapes.

Dark, wide plank wood floors continue from the front of the house back to the kitchen/family room, where most of the activity occurs. "Spacious is the word I use for this area," says DeAnna. "I definitely wanted lots of space." With four children and a dog plus lots of family, friends and neighborhood kids dropping in all the time, DeAnna chose to have a few extra inches especially in the kitchen work area so she wouldn't be crowded while cooking. "You know how everyone always ends up in the kitchen," she points out.

Working with Kitchen Creations, who installed the cabinetry throughout the house, Marilyn Perez designed a custom work island that is dramatic and efficient. One of the Harmons' rules is that the family always eats together whenever possible. DeAnna wanted a large work island to separate the kitchen area from the family room, yet still be able to seat six for a casual lunch. Two pieces of White Fantasy granite were needed for this striking 13-foot countertop. Its unusual shape features a cut-out indentation with a lower level glass surface and file drawers to one side to use for computer work or paying bills. Sometimes the kids like to eat there too. DeAnna also found acrylic bar stools that adjust to varying heights to suit all ages and sizes.

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OPPOSITE AND ABOVE LEFT: Kitchen Creations designed a funky yet functional kitchen space that allows the room to be a great family gathering spot. ABOVE RIGHT: The kitchen is open to the family room which is highlighted by the large red leather couch.





DeAnna loves her new kitchen appliances, especially the Five Star six-burner gas range that allows her to simmer on the front burners and the super wide side-by-side refrigerators. "I first wanted a separate freezer," she notes, "but now I really like having the two large drawers better." As for the unique faucet over her sink? "I just had to have it. No dithering. I knew right away."

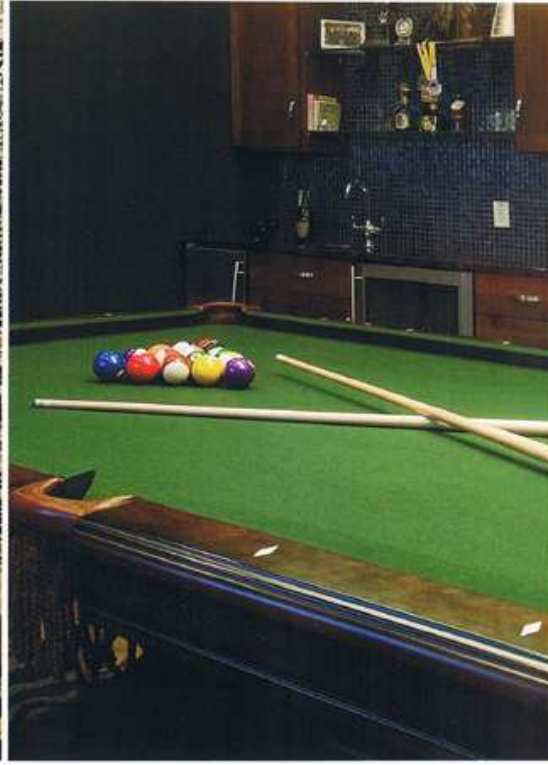
Tom's comfy red leather couch dominates the colorful family room. The hues of the yellow upright piano, blue side chairs, and sleek Le Corbusier pony lounge are repeated in two abstract floral paintings on either side of the flat screen television. A white Flokati rug adds texture. The family room is light and airy, overlooking the pool and back yard, which features a playhouse and three magnificent traveler palms. A side door opens to a gracious, quiet lanai with arbor overhead and hammock below. A great spot to relax.

Both Tom and DeAnna are triathletes, which means they need somewhere in their home to work out daily. In addition to space for their exercise equipment, HomeWorks incorporated a steam shower and sauna plus bath just off the home gym, which is also open to the pool area.

Another special room, "The Men's Den" as DeAnna refers to it, allows Tom and the kids to play pool or watch sports on TV. DeAnna's favorite room is one she decorated herself: the downstairs guest bath. "It's kind of a shock, especially the red ceiling, but I really adore the black and white wallpaper and fanciful light fixtures," she says.

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A sleek metal stair rail leads to the second floor. Framed photos of the kids in their pre-school years line a wall on the second floor which emphasizes that the Harmons are a family-oriented bunch. The master suite and four other bedrooms can be found upstairs. "We thought about keeping our bedroom on the first floor, like many new houses do, but I wanted to be upstairs with the kids—just in case," notes DeAnna. For the master bedroom, DeAnna found the Hollywood regency style headboard on eBay and finished the room with two Art Deco chaise lounges she found on sale at Goodwill (originally turquoise, now reupholstered in a sophisticated gray.) The adjacent bath area includes a dual-head rain shower with tiles made of tumbled glass over porcelain. The raised Kohler basin is set in a white Carrera marble countertop. The tub, a Japanese design from Origami, is a soaker, with no spa jets. A Thai light fixture hangs overhead and completes the look.

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OPPOSITE LEFT: DeAnna designed the downstairs guest bath herself choosing black and white wallpaper and a red ceiling for drama. OPPOSITE RIGHT: "The men's den" allows Tom and the kids to unwind with a game of pool. ABOVE: DeAnna found the headboard in the master bedroom on eBay. The room comes together perfectly with two Art Deco chaise lounges. RIGHT: The tub in the master bath is a soaker with no jets and is perfect for relaxing.







Each child got to choose his or her bedroom wall color, resulting in bright greens, blues and yellows. The rooms come to life with the energetic burst of color. There's even a full-wall mural of Yankees Stadium for Lucas, the youngest of the group. The two girls and two boys share Jack 'n Jill baths. They also have a shared computer station and library plus a fun room full of air hockey, Foosball, Wii and other games.

#### A house became a home

DeAnna and family love their new home. "This is our dream house," she says, "and we couldn't have done it without the HomeWorks team. The whole process was great...I actually enjoyed it and Marilyn and Ramón not only came in on budget, but also two months early!" Designed and built to meet the needs of the Harmon family, this HomeWorks residence reflects the Perez' dedication to quality, personal service and a positive homebuilding experience. As Marilyn Perez claims, "Happy clients make us happy." 🐾

#### RESOURCES

**Architect:** David Balber; **Builder:** HomeWorks; **Designer:** HomeWorks; **Interior decorator:** Doreen Bissonnette; **Cabinetry:** Kitchen Creations; **Tile and stone:** Tile Concepts; **Granite and marble counterops:** Ramos Granite; **Interior and exterior paint:** Morella Painting

