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The leaded-glass fanlight above the front door and the two-story columns supporting the portico's triangular pediment are among the few elements original to the home's exterior.



As part of the renovation, architect Jeffery Smith reversed the direction of the main staircase and replaced the wood stairs with marble.

HISTORIC RESURRECTION

James Harpel rebuilt his damaged 1935 landmarked home from the ground up — and was rewarded with the 2010 Ballinger Award.

By **DARRELL HOFHEINZ**
Daily News Staff Writer

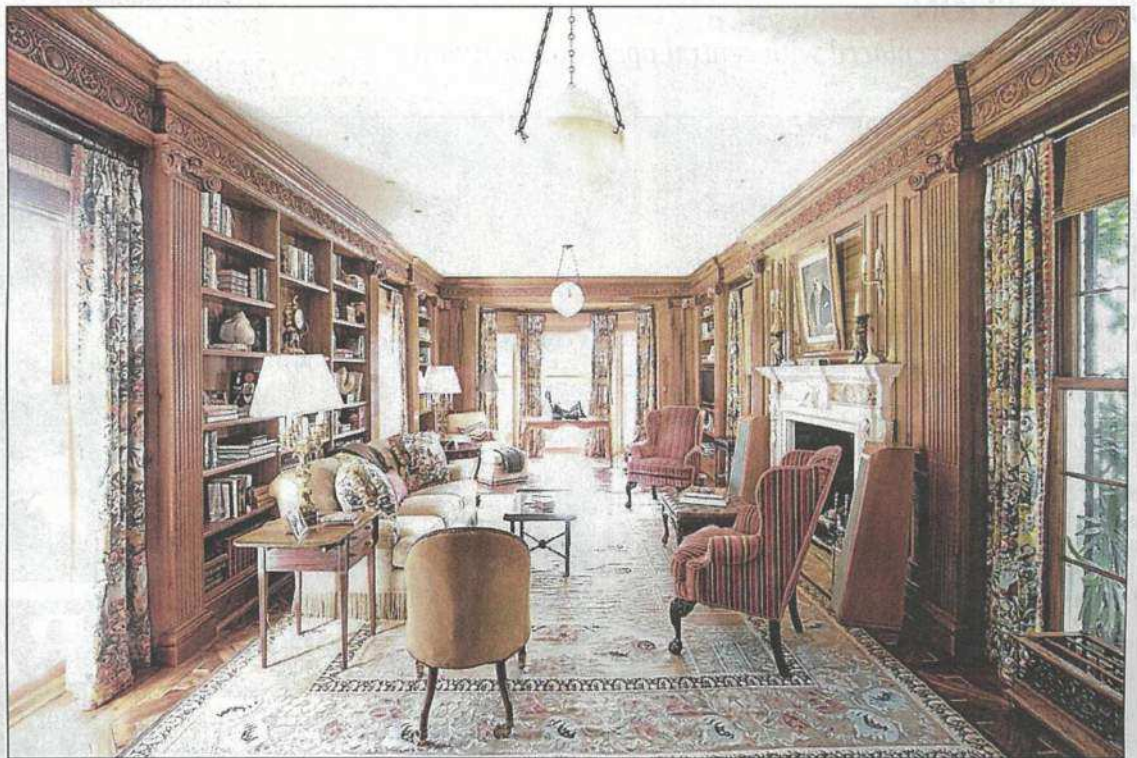
James W. Harpel's brown eyes have a mischievous gleam in them as he tells a visitor about the meaning of La Toneria, the name he has given to his 1935 home, which on Monday earned the 2010 Ballinger Award for sensitive historic renovation at the Palm Beach Preservation Foundation's annual luncheon at The Breakers.

"A tonteria is a foolish fancy, what Shakespeare would have called a 'conceit,'" Harpel says before pausing for a moment for dramatic effect. "This was a huge project."

Indeed it was — a project that stretched on for more than 3½ years, racked up plenty of unanticipated bills and required architect Jeffery Smith to throw out his initial plan after Town Hall rejected it. Smith then came up with an entirely new version — adding a north wing and expanding the house to 13,000 square feet — before it finally got the official green light.

Originally designed by noted society architect John Volk,

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The walnut paneling and millwork in the detailed library were designed by Smith Architectural Group and manufactured in France.

CONTRIBUTORS

La Tonteria, 1102 S. Ocean Blvd., Palm Beach
Owner: James W. Harpel
Architect: Jeffery Smith, Smith Architectural Group
Project Architect: Laura DiGregorio, Smith Architectural Group
Project Manager/Owner's Representative: Nevin Bauman, The Bauman Group
Decoration: Katherine Shenaman, Katherine Shenaman Interiors
Decoration consultant: Dan Clancy
Landscape architecture: Mario Nievera, Mario Nievera Design
Contractor: Hugh Davis, Davis General Contracting

ABOUT THE AWARD

The Ballinger Award, first presented by the Preservation Foundation of Palm Beach in 1987, recognizes a renovation or restoration project that best reflects the history and traditions of Palm Beach architecture. The award is named in honor of the late Robert I. Ballinger, former chairman of the town's Landmarks Preservation Commission.



For the formal dining room, decorator Katherine Shenaman oversaw the restoration and installation of more than 10 French Chinoiserie painted panels dating to 1754 — and raised the room's ceiling a foot to accommodate them. The parquet floor is new but was intentionally designed to look older. The formal living room is through the door at the left. The French doors open onto the covered loggia and courtyard.



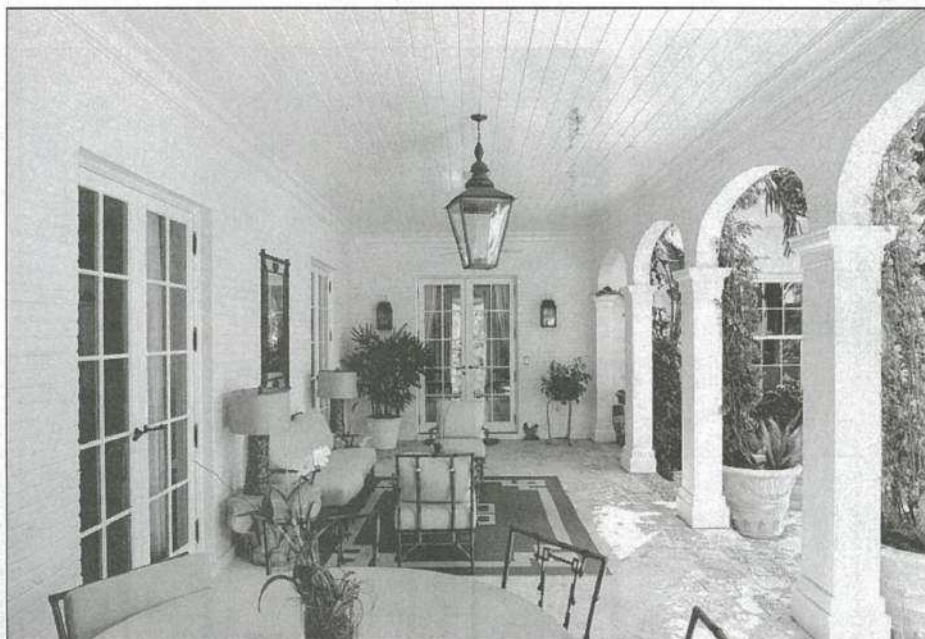
For the oceanfront facade of 1102 N. Ocean Blvd., John Volk's original Colonial Revival-style architecture called for classical elements that include double-hung windows and shutters.



Daily News Photo by Jeffrey Langlois

Interior decorator Katherine Shenaman, home owner James Harpel and architect Jeffery Smith in the library of the 2010 Ballinger Award winner.

Architectural Photos by Stephen Leek, Courtesy of the Preservation Foundation of Palm Beach



The loggia is comfortably furnished for seating and dining. The French doors at the far end open into an intimate reception room in the south wing.

RESTORATION

Original L-shape replaced with central open-air courtyard

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the white brick house stands on a prominent lot, with two of its facades easily visible from North Ocean Boulevard, thanks to the fact that the road there jogs to the east to follow the shoreline.

The south facade is graced by a two-story triangular-pedimented portico supported by four slender columns with classical capitals. The east facade, facing the sea, has a handsome bay window that looks into the breakfast room, a row of double-hung windows on the second floor and graceful pairs of French doors — all flanked with black shutters — along a classic Georgian-style chimney that adds a strong vertical element to the exterior.

To look at the outside and interior of the house today, an observer would be hard-pressed to discern that the home was rebuilt from its foundations, a drastic step necessitated by extensive water damage discovered behind the bricks after Harpel bought the house in the fall of 2004. But because the home had been landmarked by the town, keeping the look of the original walls was a necessity.

"This house needed TLC — a lot of it," Smith noted wryly, referring to the acronym for "tender loving care."

As part of the reconstruction, all the original bricks were replaced with reproductions cast from the original concrete versions. In addition, crews were forced to raise the elevation of large portions of the property to accommodate the new parts of the structure.

Volk had designed the house in an L-shape for Edward J.S. Donovan, and it was that design that Smith and Harpel originally sought to preserve. On the north side of the property, their plans called for demolishing a much more recent pool house to give them room for an addition.

As it turned out, the pool house did get demolished. But the original design for the addition, which town officials said violated setback requirements, morphed into a full north wing that juts toward the west from the front corner of the house.

Gone is Volk's original L-shaped floor plan. Instead, the home today has a central open-air courtyard, enclosed on three sides and viewed from many of the rooms. An oval-shaped swimming pool anchors the west end of the courtyard, opposite the original arched loggia with a sleeping porch — now enclosed — above it.

Beyond the pool to the west, the property steps down to tennis courts. Noted Palm Beach landscape designer Mario Nievera created the gardens on the property.

Inside the house, Smith reversed the curve of the main circular staircase so that it would allow a second floor to be added above the existing study for guest rooms. Smith also designed a second set of stairs with an intricate banister on the other side of the house to access the new wing.

For the interior, Harpel, who has a keen interest in art and interior design, was intricately involved in decoration.

"I wanted it to be warm, welcoming and beautiful, without it being ornate. I wanted it to be comfortable," said Harpel, a senior partner in Palm Beach Capital Partners, a private-equity firm, in addition to his other business interests.

Smith's firm devised drawings for the extensive, intricate Georgian-style millwork found throughout the house, including pilasters, crown moldings and paneling.

West Palm Beach interior decorator Katherine Shenaman, meanwhile, turned those drawings into reality and also fulfilled Harpel's wish for plenty of color throughout. Traditionally styled furnishings complement the homeowner's collection of antiques.

Harpel credited his ex-wife, Jane, for her extensive involvement in the early stages of the design, and design consultant Daniel Clancy. Hugh Davis of Davis General Contracting was the contractor.

The fact that the main rooms in the original part of the house open directly onto one another was a particular challenge during the decorating process, Shenaman said.

"When you don't have a hallway, you have to be very conscious of how the rooms flow together and how the colors work together," Shenaman said.

A variety of shades of blues and greens, for instance, link the living room, the dining room and the breakfast room, said Shenaman, who once worked in Smith's architectural office and today has her own interior-decorating firm.

As he led a visitor on a tour of the house, Harpel said he is honored that his finely detailed home was recognized with the Ballinger Award. Obviously proud of how the years-long renovation turned out, he acknowledged that he has preserved a piece of Palm Beach's architecture for future generations.

"The foundation was caving in," he said. "It would have fallen down."

— dhofheinz

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The bay window in the breakfast room faces the east lawn and gets plenty of morning light.



The addition of the north wing and a new guest area above the library provided room for a variety of new bedrooms, including this one.