

In 1942, Nutting purchased the tiny gray cottage. During his lengthy tenure, minor changes were made, but the house remained much like it was when first built.

Three years ago, it was one of the oldest structures still standing in the area, albeit in a sad state of disrepair. When others had determined it too expensive to refurbish, and friends thought he was 'absolutely nuts' to consider moving it to salvage the dying structure, Busk was inspired to work his creative magic. "I knew there was enough to save because someone important once lived there," explains Busk.

"Essentially, I get handed the guts and the frame," says Busk, who has seemingly evolved as the point person for Southwest Florida historic homes that others have given up on.

This is his fifth such project, and Busk has established a 'retirement village' of sorts in Bonita Springs — in the vicinity of Tennessee Street and Pennsylvania Avenue — just off Old 41, for the dying homes he restores. It was one of the few neighborhoods Busk could find that still reflected something of Old Florida.

Uneven floors, moving the decrepit house to a new location less than a mile away, termites and the relentless round of permits were among the many challenges Busk faced with the remodel. Immediately after he purchased the home, there were more trials: Hurricane Wilma, rain damage and missing floors, windows and doors — pilfered by those who thought the home was surely on its way to a landfill.



renovated exterior



before renovation



porch

"I never dreamed of such happiness as this, while I was an ugly duckling."

From the classic children's fairytale by Hans Christian Andersen, 1844

Busk admits these projects, although providing little financial reward, are fulfilling quests for him. "They are not for the mild and meek. There is plenty of aggravation; I have a love/hate relationship with every project, and they seem to last forever," he explains.

The first questions Busk asks when faced with the daunting task of revitalizing an old home are: how was it and how do I want it? And: what can it be today?

In this case, the Nutting home was a simple tin-roof structure, around 1,000 square feet in size, constructed mostly of wood.

Along with the help of his builder, Terry Schmidt, and an architect's advice, Busk began tackling how best to raise the

ceilings — a second story was not an option. He wanted to leave as many items intact (in this case, the fireplace and some pine hardwood floors). He also wanted to deal with the visibly sloping roof of the 'scabbed on' porch.

For answers, Busk traveled to New England (Maine, in particular) to study how architects addressed remodeling vacation cottages and how they dealt with the challenges of secondary roofs and rooms added on over the years. His final solution was to dismantle the original porch and create a completely new one along the back of the home.

Busk had the ceilings vaulted — raising them to nine feet in height; he added a bedroom, laundry room and bathroom, taking the home to a total of 1,700 square feet. The salvaged



living room



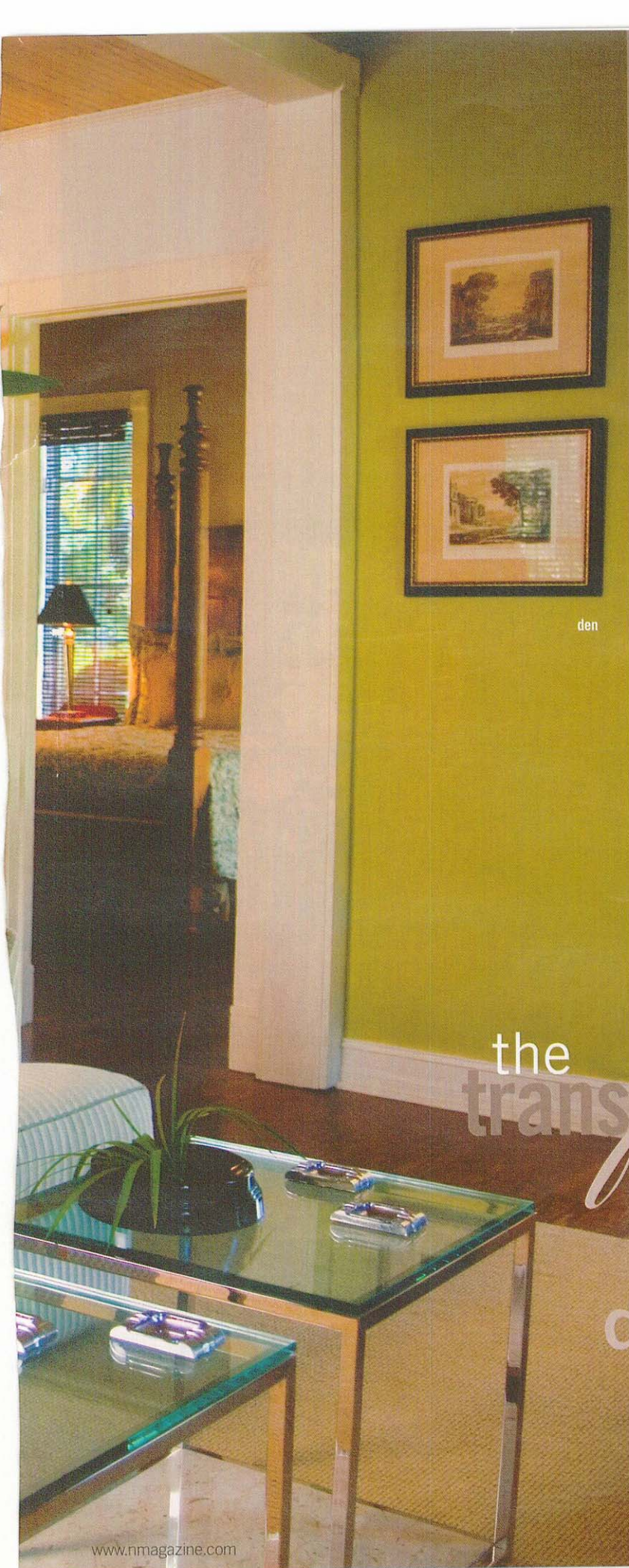
a work in progress



dining room

*"Essentially, I get handed
the guts and the frame"*





Once upon a time, situated alongside a bend in the Imperial River, a dilapidated, termite-infested home was destined for certain demolition.

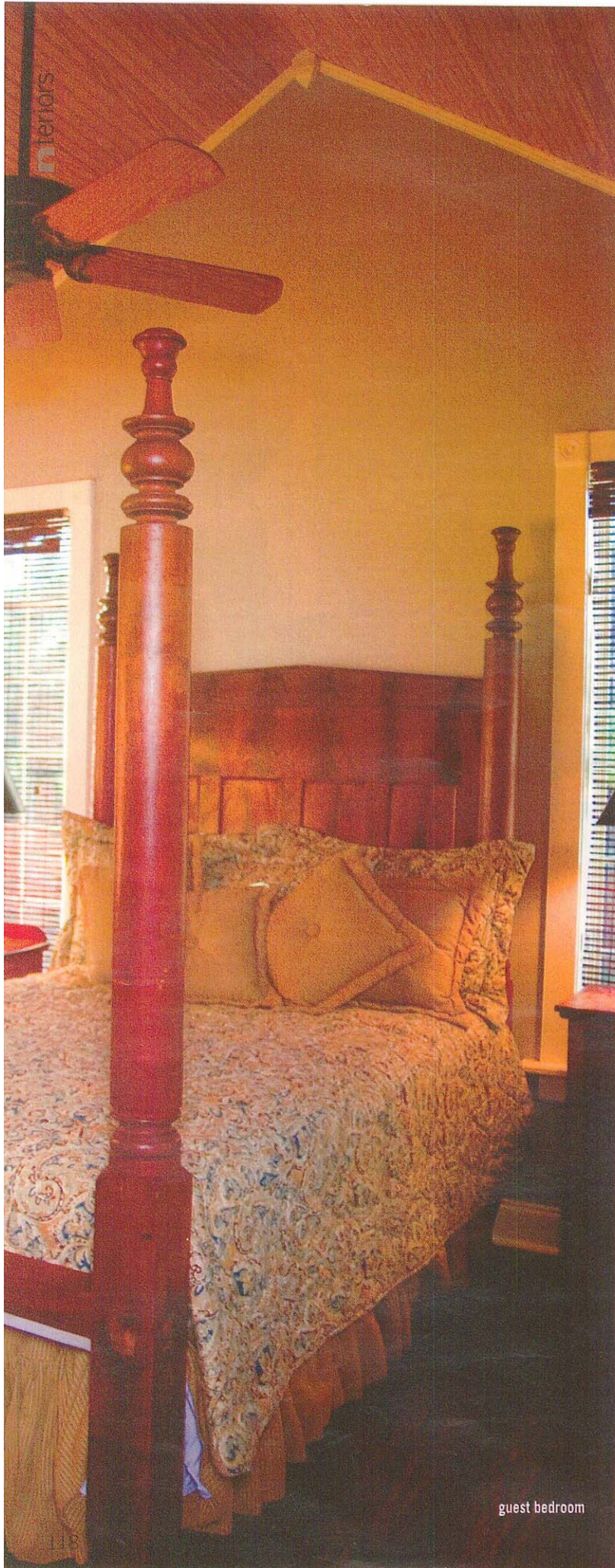
Three years ago, celebrated landscape architect Christian Busk happened upon the forlorn cottage adrift in a sea of new construction. Busk remembers well the sloping roofline, the peeling paint, the small flat ceilings — 6 ½ feet high — and the chopped little rooms. “It truly was a foreboding place,” he remarks. “It was ready for the dumpster.”

The house in reference is the E.P. Nutting home — named after the man who owned it the longest. Originally built for Harvie Heitman in 1913, it was a one-bedroom fishing shack that no doubt once welcomed such noted historic figures as Thomas Edison and Henry Ford — fishing buddies who probably stopped by for a cold beverage on the porch after a day of catching mullet.

the transformation of an ugly duckling



BY gaylene salomons
PHOTOGRAPHY BY wendy castle



guest bedroom

hardwood pine from the ceilings was used to fill in the missing hardwood flooring (some new product also had to be added), and a bead board ceiling was installed instead.

Two gables were created alongside the back of the home, and the original stone fireplace, after being carefully moved, was lovingly rebuilt. The missing doors were replaced, and a tray ceiling in the master bedroom was added, as were sash windows throughout.

"The quality of the building back then was actually pretty darn good," remarks Busk. His goal was to maintain the home's inherent simplicity. His one big splurge was lighting — "and lots of it," says Busk.

For the past three years, Busk has been collecting art deco-style furniture, antiques and historic pieces to fill the place. It is a home Busk would certainly move into; except, his carpenter, Terry Schmidt, formed such a special bond with the quirks of the home over the year he spent refurbishing it, that he decided he and his family would like to enjoy it for a while.

As the home now sits on a tiny corner lot, Busk, who concerns himself with every last detail, both inside and out, is working on the landscape — his specialty. (He holds degrees in both horticulture and landscape architecture.)

Busk wants to keep the foliage simple and native: sable trees, pine trees and coconut palms. To provide a privacy screen in the front, he will use a variety of shrubs and bushes. A brick walkway with a planting space in the center, sits in the front yard; a small garden is planned for the back. "There is no room for a pool," says Busk, "but eventually, we will add a garage."

If eyebrows were raised when the cottage was first moved into the neighborhood, everyone is all smiles now. "The good news," explains Busk, "is that the renovated homes always end up better than I originally believed they ever would."

A perfect little lavender blue home with striking white trim is the result — the newest tenant in retirement row. Across the street sits the Williams-Packard home (built in 1915) restored by Busk in 2003; down the street, the Haldeman home (built in 1886) patiently awaits Busk's attention.

By infusing these dying homes with grace, love and poise, Busk gives them the self-confidence and fortitude to last another 90 years, keeping a sliver of history alive in Southwest Florida. **n**