

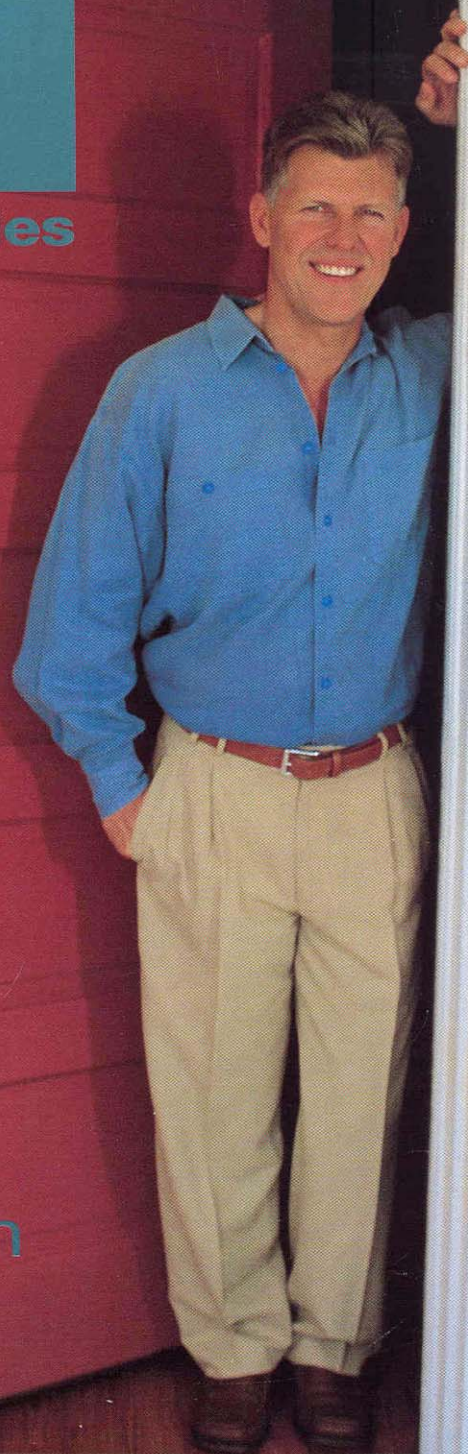
april/may 2003



the magazine of naples

historic home

men of distinction



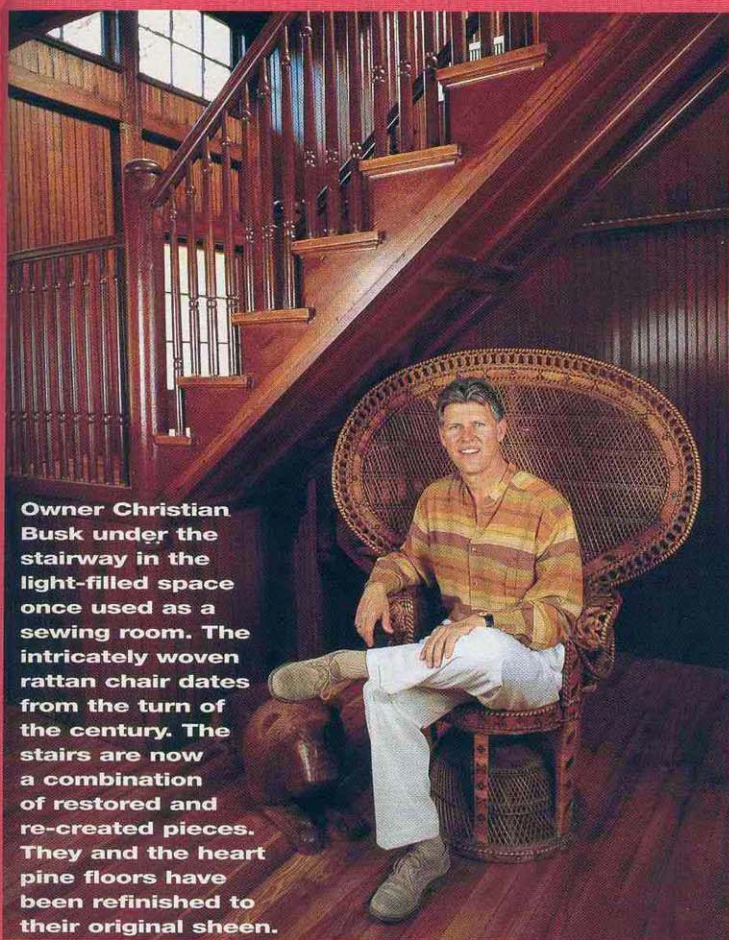




The 1915 home Christian Busk bought, moved and renovated looks right at home beside Oak Creek in Bohita Springs. The newly planted landscaping hints at the plans the landscape architect has for his new home.

# his old house





**Owner Christian Busk under the stairway in the light-filled space once used as a sewing room. The intricately woven rattan chair dates from the turn of the century. The stairs are now a combination of restored and re-created pieces. They and the heart pine floors have been refinished to their original sheen.**

It looks like it has been there forever. The lemon yellow cottage on a busy corner in Bonita Springs sports a freshly painted red front door, newly planted palms, sod and hedges; just the sort of changes a homeowner would make when updating an older property. But these cosmetic changes merely hint at the scope of this unusual renovation project. This old house was built in 1915, and, until very recently, stood in sad disrepair miles from its present proud location.

STORY BY JANE SULLIVAN  
PHOTOGRAPHY BY TIM STAMM

Landscape architect Christian Busk first saw the house on the front page of the *Bonita Banner* along with a story that caught his imagination. Developer Roy Evans had just bought the property across from the school on Dean Street and decided that, rather than demolish the house, he would offer it for sale for one dollar—with one condition. It must be sold to a qualified buyer who would move the derelict structure. Initially intrigued by the story, Busk waited a day before he called and was the 20<sup>th</sup> person Evans interviewed. What Busk saw amid the ruins was “Ideal spaces. I could see the rooms. I saw the wonderful proportions that referenced a grander scale. I wanted to see the house restored—but to a state better than it ever was.” After a 15-minute conversation about his professional experience and prior renovations, Busk was told, “Ok, it’s yours.” Then came the hard parts—where to move the house and what to do with it.

In an area as rich in history as Bonita Springs, it was surprisingly hard to find a lot suitable for the house. Busk’s goal was to find a neighborhood that still reflected something of old Florida, a place that came before Mediterranean became synonymous with style. He found it in a neighborhood of tree-lined streets that crossed and re-crossed Oak Creek. Oak Creek has its origins in the nearby spring on the grounds of the old Shangri-La resort—the spring that some say gave Bonita Springs its name. The lot that he chose backs right up to the creek and its overhanging trees, ensuring a view from many windows of a scene largely unchanged for the past 100 years. His initial plan to use the structure as an office for his firm, Christian Busk Landscape Architects, was soon scrapped in favor of reinventing the old house as a comfortable present-day home. After many twists and turns along the way, that plan has been realized.

In a feat of engineering magic, the Fort Myers firm of Flint and Doyle moved the structure during two nights, then other craftsmen, including carpenters from Viking Construction, eagerly moved in to lend their diverse skills. Barry Reardon of Island Construction says, “This house is beautifully proportioned and is now well-situated. The original construction is remarkable for its time. The project presented us with a wonderful challenge and also gave us a welcome change from the sort of construction we do every day. The goal was to bring the house up to present day standards without compromising its original integrity.” For the builders, that meant finding ways to introduce lighting, plumbing and air conditioning into a structure never designed for those conveniences. Busk credits teams from Aero Plumbing and Excel Electric for their work in finding creative solutions to those practical problems.









**(top)** Period style bath fixtures and a claw foot tub make it hard to believe this bath is brand new. Reclaimed and new beadboard lines the walls and ceiling.

**The master bedroom includes the original counter-weighted window mechanisms, which are clearly visible beside the double hung windows—some with original panes of blown glass.**

the master bedroom, sits next to a hidden cupboard where he kept his ammunition dry in a space built in next to the chimney. Busk half-seriously wonders if Williams is trying to tell him something every time he finds more tiny buckshot on the floors. "We can't understand it since these floors have been redone, sanded and sealed so many times. I usually step on the buckshot when I am barefoot."

A hunting and fishing guide from Maine named Packard, who kept the property in use as a winter home, next owned the house. Unnamed families then lived in the house, adding on as their clans grew. More clues to the house's structural past came when a dormer was removed and the original roof of the house was revealed. The same style of cedar shakes discovered now tops the rebuilt roof.

The home is furnished with the same care as the construction. For many years Busk has pursued his passion for collecting mid-century modern furniture and here he has masterfully placed a blend of old and new. The graphic black and white barstools in the kitchen are from the 1920s, studded black leather chairs from the 1930s look right in front of the fire, and the classic line of the Pace International sofa from the 1980s looks right at home against the glowing golden walls of the living room. The Barcelona chair by Knoll sits beneath a colorful large canvas Busk purchased from the artist, Brazilian landscape architect and artist Roberto Burle Marks. The gleeful corner sculpture titled *He Loves Me* is by Tom Maley and was purchased from the artist on Martha's Vineyard. Throughout the home, the very personal collection of furniture, artwork and accessories was acquired by years of diligent and dedicated hunting through antique shops, thrift stores and auctions. Here, each piece has found a fitting home. Upstairs, the bird's-eye maple furniture in the attic bedroom blends beautifully with the warm wood tones under the eaves and a caramel leather sectional echoes the theme in the airy front lounge. The new clawfoot tub in the upstairs bath is outfitted with heavy brass reproduction hardware and looks out into a wood fire in the bedroom fireplace. In each room, artwork has found homes between the wall studs and under the angled eaves.

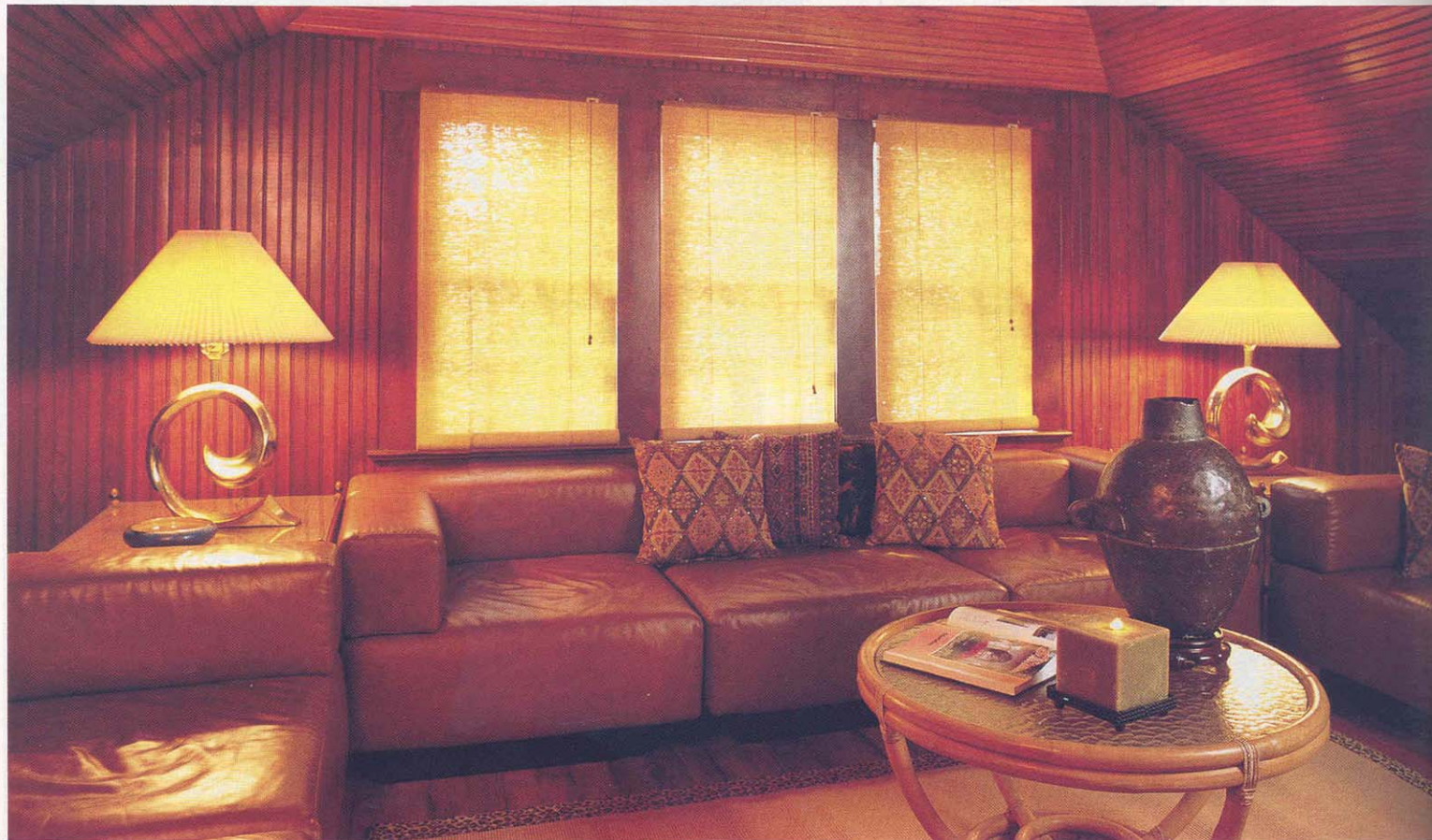
Busk insists that the house's evolution is far from over. Each day of living in the house brings new discoveries and new ideas. As a landscape architect, his plans for the surrounding land are carefully planned out and eagerly anticipated. The newly planted Queen Palms help to visually ground the home on the lot and line a welcoming brick-bordered parterre garden in the front yard. Views of the house will eventually be filtered through shade trees planted for privacy and the white crushed shell drive will lead to a garage. The pool and terrace, complete with entertainment areas, will border the creek and be easily reached from the kitchen and dining areas.

When Chris Busk vividly describes his plans for the future of his old house, you instantly believe he will make it all happen. After all, the man has a great imagination.





The sunny kitchen has lovely proportions, now accented by clean-lined modern appliances and cabinetry. The square vaulted ceiling was exposed in the renovation. Windows on the left look out onto Oak Creek.



Under the eaves over the front porch, this intimate sitting area has been tucked into a space that glows with the warm tones of the refinished woodwork.