

# WEEKEND OASIS

A design team transforms a  
mundane Maryland rambler into a  
plantation-style riverfront home

*By Jennifer Sergent  
Photography by Gordon Beall*

Tall shutters and Chinese Chippendale  
accents give the front façade a classic look.



Umbrellas and chaises surround the pool, which sits back from the shoreline to comply with environmental regulations. A pavilion on the left provides shade during the day.



There wasn't much to the low-slung, '50s-era rambler beyond where it sat: on a point overlooking San Domingo Creek with easy access to downtown St. Michaels. But for owner Jeanne Ruesch, the dark rooms and aging, red-brick exterior didn't matter; after working with architect David Jones and designer Thomas Pheasant to transform her home in Chevy Chase, Maryland, she knew they could work magic on her weekend house.

"She and I had the vision that we could make enough changes to transform it," Jones says. While none of the rooms took advantage of the views, the house itself was sited correctly. From there, it was a matter of reworking the interiors and façade to make it as gracious as the surrounding landscape. "The layout was in the right position. The idea was for it to be open, clean and bright—with lots of water views," the architect says.

Working with Pheasant, Jones and architect Wouter Boer recast the humble rambler into a stately affair reminiscent of a Southern plantation house. The exterior boasts wide porches adorned with Chinese Chippendale accents. Inside, well-proportioned rooms are ideal for entertaining.

Jones and Boer evened out the home's footprint to give the house more classic dimensions. They designed a new second floor devoted to the master suite as a tall, central anchor for two "hyphens" on either side: One contains guest bedrooms while the other houses a new kitchen that links to the family room, situated in a perpendicular wing. "The challenge really was to make this house feel like an old house," Boer says. Full-length shutters across the front and curving mullions on the dormer windows help accomplish that goal. Thanks to modern technology that allows for bigger, better insulated windows, he adds, "We made a lot of openings to the outside so you could really focus on the view."

*Renovation Architecture: David Jones, AIA, and Wouter Boer, AIA, Jones & Boer Architects, Inc., Washington, DC. Interior Design: Thomas Pheasant, Thomas Pheasant, Washington, DC. Landscape Architecture: Jay Graham, Graham Landscape Architecture, Annapolis, Maryland. Contractor: Accent General Contracting, Rockville, Maryland.*





Meanwhile, Pheasant tackled the interiors. At its core, he explains, the owner “wanted this house to be an oasis from the city, a calm place where she could relax. Sometimes there are crowds, but sometimes it’s just her.” That meant breaking up large spaces with intimate seating areas—and making the second-floor master suite totally private, with its own balcony overlooking the creek—“the kind of space where you could just go upstairs and close the door.”

In their preliminary discussions, Ruesch mentioned using blue as one of the design elements. “She probably thought I would do it sparingly,” says Pheasant, who is best known for his neutral interiors, “but I just decided to go for it. Besides, it’s perfect for the water.”

With white and ivory tones as a foundation, pale and powdery shades of blue infuse every space, offering a natural connection to the waterway. Pheasant specified bead board for the tall tray ceiling in the family room as a



Establishing more classic lines, the second-story addition (top) houses the new master suite. A Rose Tarlow table, paired with a Formations pendant and flanked by custom upholstered benches (opposite), delineates the open-plan living/dining space. Vervain draperies frame French doors leading to the wide back porch (above), which spans the length of the house.

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—THOMAS PHEASANT

Ceiling beams formalize the living/dining room. With white and ivory tones as a foundation, pale and powdery shades of blue offer a natural connection to the waterway.





The spacious blue-and-white kitchen (above) opens into the family room (right), where seating by Jonas is upholstered in Manuel Canovas fabric with Great Plains ivory trim. The round library table and coffee table are by Formations. In the foyer (below), a gracefully curved staircase and crisp white wainscoting offer a backdrop for a George Smith settee, a Rose Tarlow table and a rug by Patterson Flynn Martin.



casual touch, while ceiling beams formalize the great room. A Rose Tarlow table, flanked by custom benches, acts as a soft room divider in the large space—and offers an extra dining option during parties.

Landscape architect Jay Graham curated the grounds to complement both the riverfront and the new architecture. In response to Ruesch’s desire to respect the shoreline

ecosystem, he replaced an aging bulkhead with a gently sloped “living shoreline,” covered in native grasses that invite more wildlife onto the property while serving as a natural barrier against rising tides. Graham also had an existing pool excavated and a new one built farther back, in deference to that sensitive area. “It was always with this idea of being responsive to the land,” he says.

Soft plant colors and native varieties keep the focus on the water. “Blue and white flowers are much calmer,” Graham explains. “I don’t like to put bright colors between somebody and their view.” Although he didn’t know it at the time, the landscape architect was using the same palette outside that the interior designer was using inside—not really surprising, given that the

team was working toward the same goal. “This house is very much a place to breathe and relax,” Pheasant observes. “It’s taking the beautiful elements from the outside and bringing them in.” ↕

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In the master bedroom, an upholstered niche designed by Pheasant for the custom bed imparts a feeling of intimacy and warmth. The seating, by Jonas, is upholstered in a Ralph Lauren paisley that was also used for the drapes. The coffee table is by John Boone.

