

# Health Home & Garden

JAMAICAN MAGAZINE



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Jamaica's indigenous people, the Tainos, called the island Xaymaca, meaning "land of wood and water". Portico Limited, an architecture firm in Kingston, specializes in creating tropical homes that "blur the line between inside and outside." The design story of the renovation of an upscale townhouse took those natural, national elements of wood and water as the motif for a home's incredible bespoke transformation.

For banker Septimus "Bob" Blake, a self-described "country man", Elizabeth Newman, architect/designer, was the perfect match for his project. "She's more than an architect and brings a kind of passion and creativity into her architecture."

Blake is also a lover of art and design who actually discovered Newman's work in HHG Magazine.

He was impressed by her process, "The first day she came, she looked around and absorbed, and then she went to work. She was saying everything I wanted to say but didn't know how to say. She put it into order and structure."

Newman was thrilled with the residence's potential, located in an older upscale development, "The house has great bones. Its spaces were ample. It had large windows, nice doors that went out to some existing spaces."

The plan for the house was to optimize both outdoor and indoor areas without imposing boundaries. Newman explained in her thorough way, "As we pulled the gardens into the house, we created living spaces outside of the house. It allowed us to get rid of grill as well, which always confines that boundary. We brought planters into the house. We opened up a number of walls in different areas and really made features out of two patios and a third space that was an internal courtyard."

# Home of WOOD & WATER



Blake's wife, Marguerite, worked on the project closely with Elizabeth, who has a preliminary interview process that helps her understand her clients' needs and likes. For example, questions about the most prevalent colour in one's wardrobe help to inform her design choices.

"Eventually, it was as if we were family. She seemed to just understand our taste. She was always just on target in terms of what we like. It was seamless. Even when shopping for tiles and such, we didn't waste a lot of time. She just knew and understood our taste and what we wanted."

The allusion to Jamaica's key natural features was introduced as what the designer calls "the flavours for the interiors. What we started with literally was one sample of wall covering--the dining room accent wall. This wall covering was really the inspiration for the whole interior. It has this very soft, rain-like, misty tropical feeling. A soft, neutral, almost like light coming through raindrops with a little glimmer of silver, which led us to expand on the garden theme and the soft cooling environment."

A strong structural feature was enhanced. "There was a generous entry vestibule with a nice skylight space, so we really wanted to make a focal point out of this staircase. Literally cascading it down into the vestibule to create more places for art focal points and plants to really warm up that entry."



*Powder room*



*Dark timber panels beautifully line staircase, adding warmth to entry*





*LEFT: The new backyard with water feature*

*BELOW: The Atrium*





The large living room with a view of the atrium and the outside











There's a lot of rectilinearity  
in the design.



Blake loves how she pushed back security grills and turned patios into extensions of the interior with lovely gardens.

"The place is fantastic. I work in a very intense environment, so it's like an oasis for me. The light, the airflow are just fantastic, and then the colours . . . I trusted her and I continue to marvel at the vision she has. It can open up, and there are so many spaces I can retreat to. Sometimes I just sit on the patio and absorb the greenery."

Additionally, planters were also built inside the home. One planter separates a slight level change in the living room and of course brings that garden element in.

"There's a lot of rectilinearity in the design. Lines, horizontal, vertical-- the line of the wall paper in the dining room, and we wanted to counter with some soft elements. The light fixtures have not only this soft champagne finish, but they brought in this circle motif. The chandelier was a complementary piece, and the pièce de résistance was the mirror."

More timber panels enhance the striking dark wood dining set. Most of the furniture was from the couple's previous home and was integrated into the fresh makeover with upholstery changes.

Part of the structural changes included opening up the kitchen to the living and dining areas. "Clean and crisp" is how Septimus describes it.

The large space with floor to ceiling storage is white on white with the cool backsplash of aqua teal ceramic accent tile and unique pickled timber accent around the stove hood.

Both homeowners attest that the master suite bath is their favourite room in this fabulous home. "It's a masterpiece."

Newman was pleased with the discovery of an obscured, original feature, "Buried way in the back of the master suite was this beautiful louvered skylight feature. By taking down some walls, creating an open space, we transformed it."

*Dining room with accent wall highlighted by soft, rain-like wall paper*





...structural changes included opening up the kitchen to the living and dining areas.







*Calm master bedroom*

An incredible, huge chandelier of daisies is a perfect fit both physically and thematically.

Again the detailed vision included the entry from the lovely master bedroom's double glass French doors where a dresser console is the perfect place for a flower arrangement.

The home's now signature blue is on the open shower wall and more planters have been brought in, even backlit to celebrate the natural ambience.

The working relationship between Elizabeth and Marguerite was also integral to these fantastic results. Newman commented on the partnership, "Marguerite was a great client. She and I worked together very well. She was so helpful, open to ideas and guidance. She's like the interior—very soft, gentle and fresh."

It is a mutual admiration situation, as Septimus shares his view of his architect: "Her style, for me, is a good blend of the technical, but she infuses it with passion and creativity. I am enjoying this space. As my mother once said, 'a home is somewhere to live, not to look at.'" **HMG**



*Exquisite master bathroom with huge chandelier of daisies hanging from skylight*