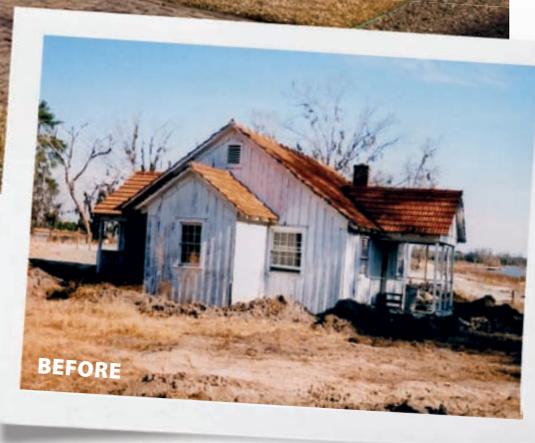


rescued from ruin

A Georgia couple scraps new construction plans in favor of restoring a sinking marshfront cottage once owned by auto magnate Henry Ford



When Vanita and Harry Morgan travel, they prefer to stay in historic B&Bs rather than in new hotels, and they frequently tour landmark homes. They love to visit old relics, but that didn't mean they wanted to live in one. At least that was their thinking until they saw a rundown, 800-square-foot, late-1920s cottage that once belonged to auto pioneer Henry Ford. It sat in a watery depression at the perimeter of a lot they were considering for the site of a new house. Visiting from Atlanta, the Morgans were touring the Ford Plantation, a private sporting club and development near Savannah, Georgia. They were told the building would be torn down; the place had been sorely used, and the wood was riddled with rot. "It was in terrible shape, but it tugged at my heart," says Vanita. "How could we let one of the structures Henry Ford built be torn down?" The house had more than mere history on its side. With its terra-cotta roof, board-and-batten siding, and livable floor plan, the little place oozed charm. All it needed was loads of TLC: updated fixtures, fresh (not decaying) siding, a little more space. So the couple scrapped their plans to build from scratch and, instead, decided to rescue the historic cottage. >



BEFORE The tiny farm manager's cottage, one of only four original structures from Henry Ford's 1930s plantation, sat in a low, wet area and was used for storage before the Morgans saved it.

AFTER Charmed by the home's history, cozy size, and unusual combination of board-and-batten siding plus tiled roof, the Morgans renovated the house after relocating it to higher ground (atop brick piers) with expansive marsh views.



what they did The first step was to determine if the impulse to save the house was realistic. The Morgans' friend Jim Strickland, founder of Atlanta architectural firm Historical Concepts, examined the structure for soundness and approved of the plan with some qualifications—including moving the cottage to higher ground, on new brick piers that raised it 3½ feet to protect it from flooding. Extensive rot had ruined the original cypress siding, which all had to be replaced. Many of the terra-cotta roof tiles were broken, so Vanita tracked down a place in Ludowici, Georgia (where they were made in the early 20th century) for replacements. Vaulted ceilings in the master bath and kitchen give the once-cramped rooms an airier feel; a new bath off the guest room and a new screened porch make the tiny home much more pleasant when Vanita and Harry entertain.

what they learned In overseeing the details of the renovation, Vanita learned some hard lessons, starting with the extent of the cottage's water damage. "Expect the unexpected; it's usually worse than you'd guess," she says. "The only silver lining about replacing all of the siding was that it gave us a chance to spray in foam insulation, which makes the house much more energy-efficient." Vanita also discovered how useful the Internet can be when it comes to finding >

ABOUT THE HOUSE

STYLE Late-1920s board-and-batten farm cottage with handmade terra-cotta roof tiles

SPACE 1,150 square feet, which includes the guest bath and screened porch added by the Morgans, the kitchen and master bath added in the 1940s, and the cottage's original four rooms

SETTING The Ford Plantation, a private residential and sporting club 20 miles south of Savannah on the Ogeechee River where Henry Ford owned a farm in the 1930s

VIEW Ducks flying over wild rice marshes and making skid landings on Lake Clara, which feeds into the Ogeechee River

ALL BEFORE IMAGES COURTESY OF HISTORICAL CONCEPTS



BEFORE The kitchen was dated and dingy, with Formica countertops, low ceilings, and mouse-infested cabinetry.

AFTER Reclaimed heart pine counters, open shelves, and a vaulted ceiling exude vintage charm. Vanita found the 1952 double drainboard sink at a Georgia roadside antiques stand. **SHOP THE LOOK:** Stool, South of Market. Cabinetry in Palladian Blue (HC-144), Benjamin Moore



In the dining room (below), French doors open to a new screened porch with water views, replacing three small windows and a wood stove that heated the cottage before central heat was installed. **SHOP THE LOOK:** Chairs, TecnoSedia



BEFORE Rotten window frames and peeling paint made the house look sad and gloomy.

AFTER The stripped original poplar tongue-and-groove boards, heart pine flooring sealed with a clear polyurethane, and beeswax-polished pine mantel lend a warm, welcoming glow. The off-white trim is a crisp touch. **SHOP THE LOOK:** Walls in White Dove (OC-17), Benjamin Moore. Lamps, Restoration Hardware. Sofa, Acquisitions Interiors



BEFORE The cramped master bath was full of rotten and dilapidated fixtures.

AFTER Vaulting the ceilings and lengthening the room by three feet gives a light, airy feel; the claw-foot tub lends old-school appeal. **SHOP THE LOOK:** For a similar tub, try Waterworks.

space-saving specialty products, such as large-capacity dishwasher drawers. Creative planning, like moving the range

and oven to a kitchen island so that she could have a long stretch of countertop and cabinetry storage, allowed Vanita to make the most of her limited square footage. After she treated the original interior poplar-paneled walls with a nontoxic borate spray to rid them of borers, she worked with two helpers to strip and scrape the boards of more than 70 years of paint layers in different colors. Not settling for the quick fix required patience but gave her the look she wanted. "Every now and then we'd stop and look and I'd point out an area and say, 'This is it!'" says Vanita. "The process was incredibly tedious, but essential for the patina I was after."

how they live now What started out as a leap of faith—making a coastal landmark livable in order to save it—became a lesson in devotion. And for that, Vanita and Harry are richly rewarded. "Our friends and family enjoy it as much as we do, especially because it's a reminder of how people from earlier times worked and lived," says Vanita. "And when the sun sets, the reflection of golden light on the walls' mottled colors is like artwork." **Sources:** page 110



The new 264-square-foot screened porch added extra dining space (read: the kids' table!) and a sitting area that helps the cottage live larger when extended family visits.

the quick list

THEN	NOW
sat in a watery depression on the lot	moved to higher ground and positioned on brick piers, with a tranquil water view
rotten cypress board-and-batten siding, no insulation	new cypress siding, spray-foam insulation between walls
original single-pane windows, no air-conditioning	double-pane replacements, more efficient at containing AC
layers of peeling paint built up on interior poplar tongue-and-groove walls	paint layers partially stripped, scraped, and sealed to create a charming mottled finish
one bath for the two bedrooms	original bath replaced and enlarged by three feet; 6-by-8-foot guest bath added
dilapidated kitchen with dated Formica countertops, no island	counters rebuilt with reclaimed heart pine boards, new island



The Morgans swapped out a window to create a doorway leading to the new 6-by-8-foot guest bath.