

KEYS HOMES & REAL ESTATE

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A COTTAGE BY THE SEA

The Yates family's Summerland home

BY JOANNA BRADY SCHMIDA

While tourists consider Key West as a place to get away to, the locals usually dream of a quiet spot where they can get away from this busy resort town. Back in the '40s and '50s, before the city became the chichi destination it is today, many Conch families wanted to escape the noise and hustle of a busy military town.

In 1954, when their children were still young, Key Westers Earl and Eva Yates bought a piece of land on the ocean in Summerland Key and built a simple rustic structure on it as their weekend getaway from Key West. At the time, they were the first to buy in that corner of Summerland.

Because it was not subject to the restrictions later imposed on new construction in the Keys, the cottage, with its ocean-side lot, is not up on stilts like the newer homes around it.

Instead, the structure the couple built in 1954 was a charming little seashore cottage where their five children could experience the joys of being right on the ocean. The cottage was frame, with high ceilings to catch the ocean breezes.

Many years have passed since then, and the cottage has undergone many changes, but it is still used frequently by the surviving family members of the Yates family.

Recently it was occupied by Eva and Earl Yates' two eldest daughters, who continue to enjoy the family getaway with children and grandchildren.

"Our parents bought the land from Mr. Hudgens, and our father built the cottage," recalled Anne Yates Burst, who lives in Winter Park.

"At that time, we didn't even have a telephone up here," added her sister, June Yates Artmeier, who makes her home in Mount Dora.

When the family is not using the cottage, they occasionally rent it. "Between us and our children and grandchildren, and the rentals, someone is always using it," said Anne Burst, who owns and operates an interior design business, Indies Landing, with her daughters Kim and Laura, in Winter Park.

Creativity seems to run in the Yates family. Their aunt, Norma Dopp, 94, still teaches the violin at her Frances Street home. The youngest of the family, Debra Yates, is a famous Key West artist who shows her work at Lucky Street Gallery. She is also



Special to The Citizen.

The Yates Family cottage on Summerland is decorated in Caribbean colors, and features early paintings by Key West artist Debra Yates.

known for her mosaic tile murals, and is a spatial designer here in Key West.

Another sister, Pam Yates Boynton, lives in La Jolla, Calif. (Their only brother, Stuart Yates, was a well-known athlete in Key West before his early passing on the golf course a few years ago at the age of 56.)

All too often when there is such a getaway cottage, family members who have spent many summers or weekends there as children or teenagers feel such nostalgia for the place that it causes heartbreak when the home gets sold by the grandparents or parents. So far, the Yates family has been able to avoid severing their ties with the home they have always loved. Instead, they have enhanced it over the years and made it more livable.

Yes, there is a phone there now. In 1990, the second generation added another story to what their parents had originally built, so that it is now a four-bedroom/three-bath home, with an updated kitchen, huge screened-in porch outside looking

out to the ocean, and plenty of floor space for little kids to set down their sleeping bags when there is more than one branch of the family vacationing there at the same time. The late Tom Szueter was the architectural designer of the new addition.

While the family has modernized the cottage, they have still managed to keep the rustic cheerfulness of the original home.

"It's a beach-side home, and we want to keep that look," said Anne Burst.

To do this, she and her daughter have decorated the home in glorious, happy, Caribbean colors. Board and batten walls downstairs have been kept white, while accent walls alternate between a vivid lime green and turquoise.

The stairway upstairs is white, but a strip of lime green paint in the center of the steps gives the illusion of carpet treads, and complements the lime colored wall along the stairway. Bright paintings done by Debra Yates during her early period turn up here and there for color accents.

Fabrics on the seating downstairs and cushions everywhere are in bright prints of blue, lime and tropical punches of red and yellow that Anne and her daughters designed for Bahama Breeze, a chain of restaurants. A table is set with coordinating linens and white wicker seating, and the Caribbean theme is continued through the master bedroom downstairs, just off the porch and the two new bedrooms upstairs. The beds upstairs have a south sea islands look, with bamboo furniture and grass skirts on the beds. The lime green and aquamarine colors turn up in the upstairs en suite bathrooms, as well.

A smaller bedroom/den downstairs has a less vivid theme, with faux animal skin cushions and more muted colors, like olive and sage, with palm prints and touches of neutrals, like tan and black.

While the interior of the cottage is delightful, it is the porch outside where the family spends most of their time when they visit.

"It's our living room, dining room, recreation room and where we entertain. It's simple and we've kept it rustic," said Anne, pointing out the 100-year-old bar surface, a single slab of lignum vitae, on which the saw marks are still etched. Outside, new decks have been built from the wood decking from the docks that were washed up on the shore after

hurricane Wilma.

For 25 years, their corner of Summerland was very private. Now, there are huge stilt homes all around them, the more visible since the storms of 2005 altered their landscaping. Nothing stays the same — except perhaps the love of a family for a special place that continues to bond them.

Fifty years after Earl and Eva Yates first built their beach cottage, their great-grandchildren still play in the sand, chase crabs through tidal pools, build railroads under the shady but-tonwood tree and fish off the end of the dock, just as their parents and grandparents did.

The ocean side home is a wonderful legacy the Yates family continues to share.

Joanna Brady Schmida is a Key West writer whose articles appear every Sunday in the Key West Citizen. Send her your suggestions at joschmida@aol.com marked HOMES in the subject line. The Citizen regrets that homes presently for sale cannot be considered.