

Home

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Old World CHARM

PLUS: Local art and furniture trends for 2017



THIS PAGE: The exterior walls are done in a style inspired by the Basilica in St. Augustine. The terracotta pots are from Italy.

OPPOSITE: The vast iron chandelier was found during an antiquing adventure.



OLD *NEW* WORLD

Former NFL player settles into his dream home in Pablo Creek Reserve

words by JULIET JOHNSON // images by AGNES LOPEZ

TUCKED INTO A CUL-DE-SAC sits a large, mostly Spanish Colonial revival nestled up against a forest preserve. The property looks as if it has been there for years. The mellow stone pathways have yet to be covered over in growth and wear. The cypress trees have settled, but the bougainvillea has yet to rampage about. The home has only recently been completed, yet thanks to how it was built and styled, it is as if it had existed for centuries.

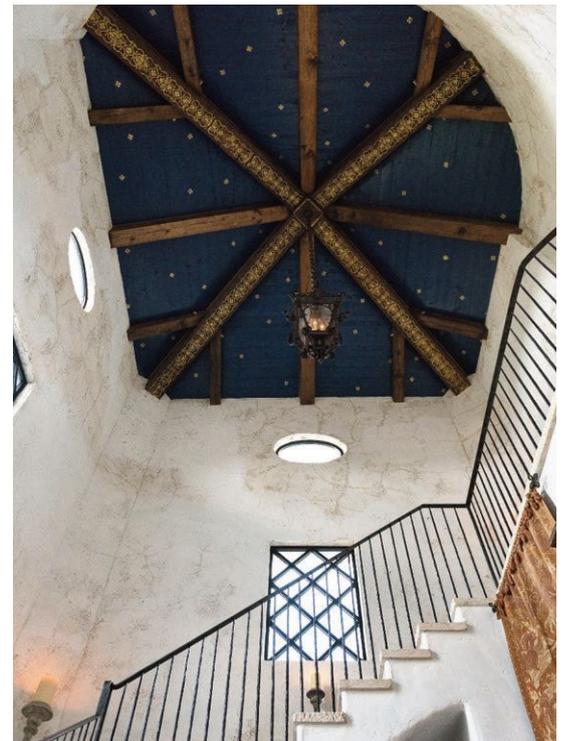
Formal front gardens center around a quatrefoil with an artful fountain made from three yellow large ceramic jars and scrolled iron pipes.

Parking is behind the house by a raised vegetable garden. The gardens to the rear include a sunken, walled garden around a Nike terracotta statue, a bocce court, an allée bordered by native holly trees, a long swimming pool and several outdoor rooms—the loggia, pavilion and the fogata.

This magnificent property is where retired Jacksonville Jaguars running back Montell Owens, his wife Lisa and their two children Selah and Simeon call home. “Mowens” graduated high school an honor student, a varsity player in football, basketball and baseball and a participant in the American Music Abroad program.



THIS PAGE: The foyer features a blue Gustavian chest that was held up in customs for ages. Stenciled ceilings and beams evoke a celestial sky on the dome, patterned after drawings from Montell, while antiqued candlesticks light passage to the upper floor. Below, cut velvet Roman shades from Zopfany provide shade while river stones from the Chattahoochee River (their original purpose was to filter out sediment) rest immobile on the desk table, a wry nod to Newton's Cradle.



Jacksonville Magazine: How did you choose football?

Montell Owens: "Football chose me. But my artistic side never left. Playing in cities all over the country, first as a Jag, then a Lion, a Bear and in two Pro Bowls. I traveled a lot. I used that travel as an opportunity to meet and talk to many different architects. There aren't many players in the NFL who wanna sit around and talk roof pitches, you know?" (He has an easy, rumbling laugh.)

"I've planned this house for a long time. I was awestruck by the buildings I saw on that first trip to Europe. Their ability to endure. And I find it interesting the way architecture came and went with the different rulers. Lines crossed over. What might have started in Spain, becomes the rage in France and a new vernacular in Italy. The layers of architecture. That informed my main intent with this house—I wanted it to look part American, part European and I wanted to incorporate the old style of building as well. My wife Lisa and I agreed we wanted a home as good as can be built in this day and age. Which took time, and many different kinds of artisans."

JM. How did you approach this project?

MO: "For me, it's about honest work. When I see an antique, like the 18th century blanket chest in the dining room, I see hands' work and that's what I wanted in my home. Nothing has been machine-made here. Every beam is hand-planed, every door is hand-made, every surface crafted by an artisan giving his authentic best to support the directive 'honest work.' There is no plastic, no machine-turned spindle, no dry wall. It is all stone, iron, wood and plaster."

JM: Give us an example of an old world technique you resurrected to build this home.

MO: "The coquina outside was fashioned using the old technique. When they were renovating the





Twenty-one panels of laundered French linen are draped so as to curve in the exact inverse of the arch. "It took a complicated calculation to get them just so," says Lee Kessell, Agnes Agatha designer.

Basilica in St. Augustine, I went down to talk to the artisans working there. I got the technique from them. While two guys on scaffolding applied the mud, a man stood underneath with a bucket of shells. He would throw the shells up onto the fresh mud and wherever the mollusks landed was how the wall would be."

JM: The house feels large, yet each room is compact.

MO: "It is about proportion and the roof pitch. Our rooms are sized according to how we intend to live in them. None but the great room is large and that's only big because it's in two halves. Our experience is that is how people naturally behave. The one half is open to the kitchen, where friends and family can chat or interact with the cook, and the other is centered around a hearth.

We gather here in front of the hearth each night after dinner. It's our routine. We discuss the day's random question. I get to pick the topic. Lisa has cooked dinner from scratch, mostly vegan, starting each day around 4 PM. They can be anything from 'What's your favorite color?' to 'Which do you prefer, up or down?' It isn't long before the family is laughing and sharing their thoughts, their day and life's big questions. Communication is as important to us as deciding how you want to live and intentionally being that way all the time."

Q. How did you approach the interior furnishings of the home?

Lisa: "Montell had a vision. We discussed everything together but it was his artistic sensibility that informed every decision made."

MO: "We worked with Lee Kessell of Agnes Agatha, who immediately understood the 'well-traveled' feel we were after. That for us, patina trumps shine, and that imperfections in materials gave them authenticity. We love antiques and have been collecting for years. In fact, the dining room chairs I bought a long time ago, knowing they would be perfect for the house I would one day

THIS PAGE: The custom hood was designed by Montell. The French blue LaCanche range with brass trim sits opposite brass faucets and a deep hammered copper sink. The dining chairs are from an estate sale—bought in advance of the home he knew he would have one day. Even back then, they showed wear and tear. Montell loved the fabric, then and now, and appreciates the worn tatters of full life.



build. Lee sourced fabrics like the laundered French linen you see in the Great Room—those 21-foot-tall curtains—and on the chairs and five-foot-square ottoman. Those are an old Navaho weave from the archives in the Museum of New Mexico.

Q: What is your background?

MO: "I have a good life skill: I learn quickly. My dad had a career in construction—I grew up around all that, so it was logical for me to be the general contractor on my own build. My mom was a fashion designer—I get my drawing skills from her. I love to draw and I found it very useful during the construction. When someone asked what the hood was supposed to look like, for example, I could say, 'let me think a minute' and then go draw it up. And that became my pattern for whatever detail was needed next."

Lee Kessell: "We would often communicate via drawing on napkins."



THIS PAGE, CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: The twin tubs make for peaceful togetherness; most often the couple reads, and soaks, in quiet companionship. The brass and porcelain chandelier from Spain was discovered while antiquing in Michigan; Lisa's closet; Unlike the rest of the house that might feel somewhat masculine, the master bedroom is deliberately lighter and softer. Mirrored chests and custom Sanderson fabrics from Agnes Agatha provide a traditionally feminine refuge for Lisa. Drapery, while an elegant backdrop behind the bed, adds a warm, protective layer from the thick plaster exterior wall.





Montell, Lisa, Selah and Simeon

JM: Do you have a favorite color?

MO: Blue! My wife and I both like blue, so there is a pop of blue in each room. In the foyer, the Gustavian chest is turquoise, and the ceiling of that turret is blue. We have some blue and white china displayed on the shelves in the kitchen. In the dining room there's blue silk drapery and the study has blue and black checkered tile. It's like *Where's Waldo* with finding blue in every space."

JM: I hear you don't have a TV.

MO: "We have one laptop and one TV. Both sit in the school room. We homeschool our children and use it in there. Otherwise, we don't need them. We read and converse; I guess we're pretty boring!"

JM: Because the design holds together, with proportion and patina in perfect balance, the space feels almost sacred. There's a palpable purity there; does that factor into your life together?

MO: "Lisa and I are both driven, focused people. We had done busy, loud, full-on before. When we met, we decided to slow it down and focus on building a foundation without today's noise. We did this in our relationship—which started, by the way, as a two-hour phone call like a job interview. The friends who introduced us thought we were crazy, but we didn't want to waste time on something that wouldn't work out. We wanted to do it right from the start. That's how we live now. With this house, with the kids' education, Lisa and the kids are vegan, we are both fanatical about working out. It's how we choose to live. I recommend it.

We have built this home to last for hundreds of years. We see it as a work of art, something to be enjoyed by generations to come. We are grateful to have this life. We have earned it, and strive to stay worthy of it every day." ✨



THIS PAGE FROM TOP: Two vintage doors have been repurposed into a long dining table in the loggia; The Bocce court looks straight out of an Italian villa. Stone walls in the Cotswold style surround a terra cotta Nike, or Winged Victory as she's often called.