

A bronze bust of a woman's head and shoulders, shown in profile facing right. The woman has her hair styled in a large, thick, circular braid that arches over her head. Her face is adorned with a large, teardrop-shaped earring. The bust is mounted on a circular wooden base. The background is a soft, blue and orange sunset sky, with a white lattice railing visible in the foreground.

Paradise Found

An Atlantan finds solace at
her vacation compound in Jamaica



In the spring of 2000, Atlantan Brenda Isaac found herself with her hands full. She had just purchased a 7,000-square-foot vacation compound in Jamaica when she brought in an inspector from Atlanta who found a laundry list of problems in paradise.

"There had been a bunch of Band-Aid fixes to the villa since the 1960s," says Brenda. Structural complications and plumbing issues pushed her to re-mason each wall containing an electrical outlet and also to install new plumbing fixtures in the bath and kitchen. And renovations weren't just limited to the interiors.

"When I bought the house, I replaced all the roofing with handcrafted Canadian shingles," she adds.

With renovations complete, the time was right for her to leave her own stamp on the property. While the villa is steeped in Jamaican history and tradition, it also is a fusion of Brenda's life both in Atlanta and on the island.

She started by bringing over local Atlanta artists to the house. "Tommy Taylor created the beautiful mosaic work on the bathroom counters and on the columns by the pool," says Brenda. Jeff Thor, another Atlanta artist, flew down and helped with faux finishing projects throughout the house—from the bathroom cabinets to the tortoise finish on the dining room table.

Delores Matich, owner of 20th Century Antiques in Virginia-Highland, was instrumental to the interior design. Matich says most of the design was inspired by the house's surroundings. "The inspiration for the downstairs suite came from





Jamaica," says Match. "We rode down into Montego Bay and these school children were getting off the bus and we were struck by their uniforms. We ended up tracking down the maker of the uniforms to find out about the fabric." There are little stories like that for each and every room, according to Match. "Dorothy Hammerstein (former owner of the house along with husband Roger) had draperies up in one room, and like Scarlett O'Hara, we took them down and made accessories for the house out of them."

Since completion of all the remodeling and decorating, the villa now serves as a place of quiet reflection for Brenda. "My favorite place in the house is on the terrace overlooking the view of the bay," she says. A U-shaped couch is built into the terrace, complete with plush pillows for lounging and a coffee table to prop your feet on. "When I first started coming here, I found myself going to bed early and therefore getting up earlier.



There have been a few occasions when I awoke at that twilight time just before dawn. Everything is so serene." Gone are the days of needing a vacation after a family vacation, says Brenda. "I used to go on vacation with my extended family and we would rent a condo on the beach

in Florida," she says. "By the time I got back from vacation, I needed another one to recover. It's completely different with Jamaica."

But, as much as Brenda loves life on her island retreat, she still longs for city life from time to time. "When I come back to Atlanta, the very first thing I do is buy the paper and head straight to Fellini's. It's great because there I realize I can go shopping, go to the movies—do all those things I don't do on the island."

Brenda considers herself lucky to be able to have two drastically different homes. "I'm fortunate that the time I spend in each place just adds to my appreciation of the other." —Scarlet Lawrence

Highland House is available for rental, offering guests the full spectrum of spa services. See Resources, page 90.



For more history and general information on the house, log on to atlantahomesmag.com