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THROUGH THE ARTS

page
56

THE
next
20T



STEP UP
The talented Jahmal Lara, 16, shows off his moves.

HOME



ABOVE Scout Wright 5, Alister Wright 8, and Fern Wright, 5, race around the backyard of their grandparents' house in Morehead Hill.
ABOVE RIGHT Jim Lewis, Corbett Robert Storyk and John Storyk stand together on the bridge that leads to the home's new addition.



HOME, REIMAGINED

Design duo transforms a historic Morehead Hill property into a welcoming, modern family retreat

BY COURTNEY HAYES

PHOTOGRAPHY BY JOHN MICHAEL SIMPSON

John Storyk and Beth Walters-Storyk aren't new to creating extraordinary spaces. The couple knows good design; over the past 35 years, they've worked on more than 4,100 projects all over the globe, both collaboratively and individually – ranging from recording studios to performance venues – through their firm, Walters-Storyk Design Group. ►



ABOVE Corbett, Beth Walters-Storyk, John, Keaton Wright, Fern, Scout, Alister and Emma Wright visit with one another around the oversized kitchen island - the perfect place for the entire family to come together.

LEFT Because the home is historic, much of the original exterior materials had to be preserved - but a fresh coat of paint gave it new life.



But one of their latest projects brought their talents a little closer to home. In fact, it is home.

The pair wrapped up a full transformation of a historic one-story, pyramidal cottage-style house in the **Morehead Hill** neighborhood in 2024, a long-imagined aspiration brought to life in the heart of Durham. They call it Casa Akumal, named after the Mexican town where they spend part of the year.

Beth and John's connection to the Bull City began 15 years ago when their two sons moved to the area. John and Beth bought the house adjacent to what would eventually become their current home in order to have their own place during visits. They often found

themselves daydreaming about the vacant property across the way – what it could be with a little vision (and *a lot* of work).

“When it finally came up for sale, the dream began,” John says. “A passion project to say the least. ... The historic structure was purchased with virtually no building inspections, a condition of the sale, and thus started a construction adventure unlike most.” The first step? Clearing out thousands of old magazines

The luxurious primary bathroom offers a peaceful retreat for the couple, with a sleek walk-in shower that adds a modern touch.





dark to light. “That was intentional,” John says, adding that he wanted the design to evolve in a more modern direction as the new structure connected to the old one. “So we switched [colors]. ...The building literally moves from 1910 to 2024 as it goes from north to south.”

Inside, a hallway runs through the center of the home. John’s office and a guest bedroom flank either side of it at the front. Continue walking, and you’ll pass by the primary bedroom and a living space, then the kitchen that Beth designed and the dining room. Beyond that are a patio, a screened-in porch and a breezeway that leads to Beth’s art studio and the garage below.

John and Beth orchestrated the space with aging in mind, ensuring they could grow old comfortably and spend more time with family in their home. An elevator, installed



ABOVE The street-facing entrance to the new addition. A breezeway seamlessly links the main house with the garage and Beth’s second-floor studio.

LEFT Alister, Scout, Fern and John spend some quality time around the piano. Designed as a welcoming hub, the home includes thoughtful, kid-friendly features throughout.



ABOVE LEFT Just off the kitchen, the sunroom offers yet another a light-abundant spot for the family to share meals or spend time together.

ABOVE RIGHT Beth’s favorite painting subjects? Her beloved grandchildren.

BELOW The spacious backyard is ideal for the couple’s dog, Kobe, and their grandkids to play. Beth’s raised garden bed sits between the original home and the new art studio-garage addition.



by Orthopedic Service Company, provides easy access from the garage to the main level – a feature that’s already handy for carrying groceries upstairs. John’s office includes a custom staircase crafted by **Ben Sheehy** of **Bampro LLC**, which leads up to an attic hangout that’s just for the grandchildren. “When the kids come over, this is where they go,” John says. “We never clean it up. It’s their space.” Outside,





ABOVE John’s office is where he can dream and strategize about his next project on the whiteboard and share creative space with his grandkids, who love to doodle.

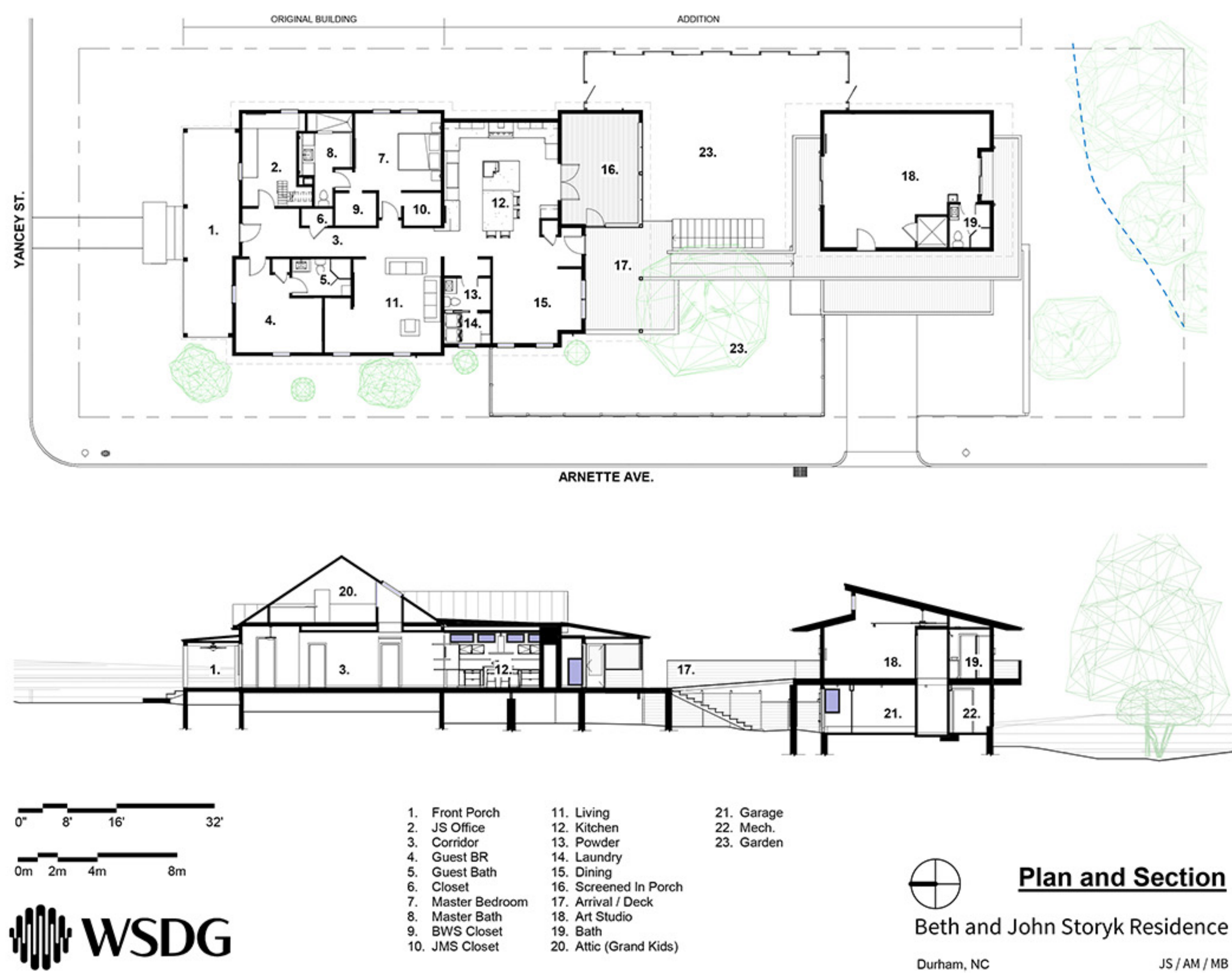
BELOW Affectionately named “Casa Akumal,” the home honors the Mexican town where the couple spends their winters. “Akumal means home of the turtles,” John says. “[There are a] lot of turtles in that part of the Caribbean Sea – I go scuba diving with them most days.”

the children’s handprints pressed into the cement add a lasting family signature to the property that John is proud to point out.

And at the heart of the house is the kitchen, which Beth approached strategically with both beauty and function in mind. “Kitchens are always a challenge,” Beth says. “They’re a major puzzle.” Her previous one had limited space, so she designed this kitchen to accommodate a crowd. The massive island – nearly the size of a full slab of granite – includes an L-shaped corner sink with ample space for prep and cleanup.

Of course, no renovation project goes completely according to plan. John and Beth dealt with a number of setbacks and obstacles, like discovering a lack of insulation in the home and needing to get creative with retaining walls for the garage. Thankfully, they had a dedicated team of creative problem-solvers to help bring their vision to life: Structural engineering support came from **Andy Takla** of **Takla Engineering**; Sarah Menser of Soil Services PLLC took care of the site and stream analysis; Julian Bick of JBick Electrical Services handled the wiring; **Maynor Service Company** managed the mechanical aspects; **Eliseo Castro Orozco** of **Castro Plumbing Services** took care of the plumbing; and Jose Pereyra led the concrete work. Framing came together under Rodrigo Rodriguez of Rodriguez Construction, while Carlos Ramirez of ANR Construction handled siding, boxing and finishes. Cruz Lozano of Lozano Roofing oversaw roofing, and **Eugene Marquez** of **Marquez Painting** completed the drywall, painting and staining. **Jorge Benitez** of **Benitez Hardwood**





A custom staircase crafted by Ben Sheehy of Bampro LLC rises from John's office to a playful upstairs retreat designed for the grandchildren.

Floor LLC installed the floors, and building materials came from **Talbert Building Supply** and **Adams Products**.

Coordinating all those moving parts required strong, trustworthy leadership, and John and Beth knew just who to turn to for support. Construction was managed by longtime friend **Jim Lewis** of **Building Information Solutions** – who John met in New York four decades ago and reconnected with years later – with on-site supervision from both. The Storyks' son, **Corbett Robert Storyk** of **CRS Contracting LLC**, served as the licensed contractor on the job. "It was a labor of love to build this," John says. Now, Casa Akumal stands as a testament to intentional design that honors the past, embraces the present and welcomes the future. 🐮