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*Flying in Style*  
*Marvelous Marinas*  
*This Old House*

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**ON THE COVER**

"Sailing home" from  
an original painting by  
Abaco Artist Alton Lowe

*Abaco Life*

Spring 2018  
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By Jim Kerr

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# This Old House

*How a Traditional Bahamian Cottage Was Rescued and Restored*

BY AMANDA DIEDRICK



*Modest homes on Green Turtle Cay replaced stately ones after the 1932 hurricane.*

The aroma of Abaco pine still permeates my childhood memories of a little house on Green Turtle Cay. I remember summer days spent fishing with my cousins along Settlement Creek's rocky shore, swimming from the concrete dock, and playing with paper dolls in the attic, where the pine scent is particularly potent.

My great-grandparents, Herman and May Curry, built this tiny cottage with their own hands in 1932, after a fierce Category 5 hurricane leveled their larger, more stately home in New Plymouth. They salvaged intact boards and undamaged nails from the rubble and cobbled together a small, unadorned saltbox. And in this house – with four tiny main-floor rooms and an unfinished attic – they raised three daughters, including my grandmother.

Even after Pa Herman and Ma May followed their grown children to Nassau in the late 1940s, they always returned here each summer, grandchildren in tow. Ma May continued her summertime visits to Green Turtle Cay even after Pa Herman died, toting baskets overflowing with plants and seedlings, and bringing members of the next generation, including me.

By 2006 both Pa Herman and Ma May had passed on, and their little house, having languished virtually unused for nearly a decade, was in a state of deep disrepair. My husband, Tom Walters, and I offered to buy it, but by then it was owned by a number of family members with differing visions for its future. Fortunately, around that time, our friends Mark and Carol Jean Lowe approached the family about renting the cottage as an office for their

golf cart business. Tom and I have no doubt that the work they put into it saved it from deteriorating past the point of no return.

But by 2012, we were finally able to purchase the house, christening it *Fish Hooks Cottage*, and we set about planning its restoration. First, we called in local contractors William and Neil Lowe to assess the structure. Their inspection revealed that – all things considered – it was in better condition than we'd feared. Turns out Abaco pine isn't just aromatic; it's also dense, durable and highly resistant to termites. Still, the cottage had endured more than 80 years of tropical sun, wind and weather. Its southeast corner sagged. Its rudimentary electrical and plumbing systems were inadequate. The window screens that had protected Pa Herman, Ma May and generations of their descendants from mosquitoes and sandflies were broken or gone altogether.

Tom and I knew we faced a big job. We had no idea how much bigger it would soon get.

"If this were *my* house," William Lowe said casually at the end of the inspection, "I'd move it back and add a porch." And just like that, the scope of our project expanded exponentially.

"Move it back and add a porch?" we pondered. Suddenly, I had terrifying visions of our sweet cottage collapsing into a million splintered pieces.

Still, the idea had merit. The property is twice as deep as it is wide, so we certainly had the space. Furthermore, since the land slopes upward away from the water, moving the house wouldn't just make room for a porch, it would also add several feet of

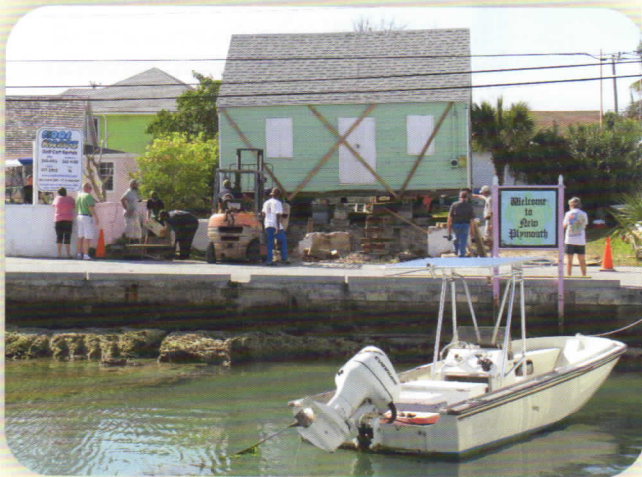
Looking forward...



The original cottage before restoration...



Getting ready for lift off...



The cranes, the cranes...



Street view complete...



The added porch is a great addition...



# A RENOVATION PRIMER

elevation – a huge plus given that our waterfront location leaves it susceptible to flooding during hurricanes.

A scheduling conflict meant William wasn't available to carry out the plan he proposed, so we hired contractor Oral Bethel and his son, Jason, to build a new foundation, move the house onto it, and add a porch.

We learned that moving buildings was once relatively common in the out islands. Several homes in New Plymouth today were actually built elsewhere on the cay

and moved to their current locations. And during the mid-1800s, a number of Green Turtle Cay residents actually dismantled their homes, floated the material all the way to Key West, Florida and reassembled it into homes that still stand today.

Traditionally, island homes like ours were set atop logs and rolled into position. In our case, however, given the diminutive size of the house, Oral and Jason recommended reinforcing it and lifting it by crane onto the new foundation. Not only

would this reduce the move time, it would, at least theoretically, subject the structure to less stress.

Once the new concrete footings were ready, Oral, Jason and their crew attached wooden supports and braces inside, outside and beneath Fish Hooks. The electricity and water were disconnected and the house was ready for moving day.

But then, our restoration hit a giant obstacle. We learned that the crane we were counting on was out of commission and nobody knew how long repairs would take. The entire move was in limbo, and like the house itself, our project wasn't going anywhere.

Fortunately, serendipity wasn't finished with us. If that casual conversation with William had set us on this path, another casual conversation was about to clear the roadblock.

That Saturday night, at a community cookout at the local basketball court, we met our friend, Wade Cash of Sunset Marine. Having heard about our crane predicament, Wade – who owns several pieces of heavy equipment – agreed to come by the following Tuesday to see if there was anything he could do.

Early Tuesday morning, Tom left me at our rental home and went down to Fish Hooks to meet Wade. By nine o'clock, the phone rang. It was Tom. "You'd better get down here," he said, "or you're going to miss it!"

Slowly, meticulously, and with just two small forklifts, Wade, his son Adam, and crew members Benny and Brandon lifted the house, shoring it up with wooden blocks as they went. When Fish Hooks was nearly six feet off the ground, they inserted two steel I-beams front-to-back beneath it. And there it sat as night fell.

The idea of my grandmother's childhood home precariously perched so high in the air kept me awake. I'm the fourth generation in our family to own the house. I did not want to be the first to drop it. Bright and early on Wednesday, however, Wade and his crew arrived with dozens of one-foot lengths of metal pipe, which they placed across the I-beams before lowering the house onto them.

Using these makeshift rollers and two forklifts, they rolled the structure back about 20 feet. But because the property

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boundary runs at an angle, we also had to move it 20 inches to the west, and this shorter trip proved more difficult.

For the lateral move, the metal pipe rollers no longer rested on steel I-beams, but were now on wooden supports instead. And as one of the forklifts eased the house to the west, there was a sudden, jarring shock and a chorus of alarmed voices.

One of the wooden supports was soft. The metal rollers were sinking into the wood, binding, and pulling the beam out of position. The front of the house looked like a train on a twisted track. Jason pounded furiously on the wayward beam, while others straightened the rollers and got the house moving again.

Then, shortly after lunch on Wednesday, *Fish Hooks Cottage* was lowered gently and precisely onto its new foundation.

From the outset, two principles have guided Tom and me on this venture: first, to preserve as much of the original house as possible and second, to remain true to the unadorned simplicity of Pa Herman's original structure.

In light of this, we wrestled with the idea of a porch. Eventually though, we concluded that Pa Herman and Ma May would approve. After all, my grandmother had described in detail the broad, breezy porch they'd enjoyed on their original home. And had my great-grandparents not been severely constrained by time and resources, we felt certain they would have added a porch to this house.

In retrospect, that porch was the best and worst decision we've made. On the one hand, it cools the house and increases our living space. Aesthetically, it makes the cottage seem larger and more welcoming. And it's the perfect spot to read, write, relax and enjoy a front-row seat to life on the cay.

On the other hand, Tom and I now find it far more difficult to motivate ourselves to work when the porch is forever calling us.

Beyond the porch, however, another advantage of moving *Fish Hooks* was that we now had a fantastic new front yard. The bad news was the view. It was little more than a gaping hole filled with debris, broken concrete and centipedes – as unsafe as it was unattractive. We pondered the situation. After all, our little cottage is one of the first things visitors see when they step off the ferry, and we felt obliged to make both

house and garden as welcoming as possible. Garden soil is virtually impossible to find on Green Turtle Cay, so we arranged for some sand and fill from Wade Cash, who always manages to far exceed expectations. Instead of the plain, rocky fill we anticipated, he turned up with a truckload of rich, dark earth from a site he happened to be excavating that week.

In that fertile soil we planted *Zoysia* grass, which is not just resistant to salt, sun, drought and weeds, but is soft and

comfortable, like carpet beneath bare feet.

With so many tasks vying for our attention and budget, we figured that the lawn would be the extent of our yard work for a while. But before it was even planted, my cousin, Alton Lowe, arrived one afternoon with clippings from his amazing garden – sisal, aloe, bromeliads, yellow frangipani and pink shrimp flowers, all of which his friend, Mike Donovan, generously planted.



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Then our neighbor, Eileen Hodgkins, offered us a pot of flowering plants she'd grown from seeds, as well as clippings of dwarf poinciana and neem. Another neighbour, Winkie Wilson, brought a handful of baby coconut trees, and a friend, Fanny McIntosh, came by with a young frangipani tree she'd rooted from a clipping.

Our electrician, Donnie Adderley, contributed a lily plant and our gardener, Charles Smith, added a small mango tree, a chenille plant and several croton clippings. Not long after, my uncle, Jeffrey Albury, sent an entire pallet of plants, including desert roses, bridal bouquet and oleander bushes as well as small key lime, sour orange, avocado, guava and soursop trees, on the mailboat from Nassau. And our friend Matthew Lowe soon arrived to loan us a sprinkler for our oasis-in-the-making.

Before long, we had dozens of plants and trees, all gifts from family and friends – except for one avocado tree I sprouted from a pit. Ours is truly a community garden, a living, growing reminder of the friendship and kindness extended by so many to Tom and me throughout our Fish Hooks journey.

Today, four years since we began, we've achieved a number of other major milestones. Our electrical system has been upgraded and the house has been re-plumbed. Last year, we had both windows and air conditioning installed, which has made more comfortable. And we've fenced in the front yard.

Our "to do" list is far from complete. Upcoming projects include building cabinets in the kitchen, finishing the fence, adding front steps to the porch, and painting the house inside and out. The next phase includes insulating and finishing the attic to create a master bedroom and bath. Perhaps we'll even add dormer windows, like those my grandmother and her sisters remembered from their first house.

As our work at Fish Hooks goes on, there exists a constant reminder of why we do it, of what makes this project a true labour of love. It's there with each drill hole and saw cut, permeating the new memories we're making.

Like the smell of Abaco pine. ↓

*Amanda Diedrick is a ninth-generation Bahamian and author of Those Who Stayed: The Tale of the Hardy Few Who Founded Green Turtle Cay. She documents the restoration of Fish Hooks Cottage on her blog, [www.LittleHousebytheFerry.com](http://www.LittleHousebytheFerry.com).*

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## Our tips for restoring your own island cottage

1. Before you begin planning, check with your contractor and/or town council, as there may be local rules and regulations governing your intended changes. For example, we were required to obtain permits for our porch and fence. Your contractor can help when it comes to submitting plans and permit applications.

2. Remember that many of these homes were built freehand, without blueprints. Angles aren't square and openings may not be standard-sized. Be prepared to custom-order windows and doors.

3. Get all quotes in writing, even if it's just a brief email or hand-written note. Yes, things are pretty laid back on the islands. But taking time to ensure everyone is on the same page when it comes to job details and costs can help avoid later misunderstandings.

4. If at all possible, be on site – or at the very least, on the island – when work is being done. If issues come up, you can be there to see them firsthand. And work won't be held up waiting for your decision on judgment calls that inevitably arise.

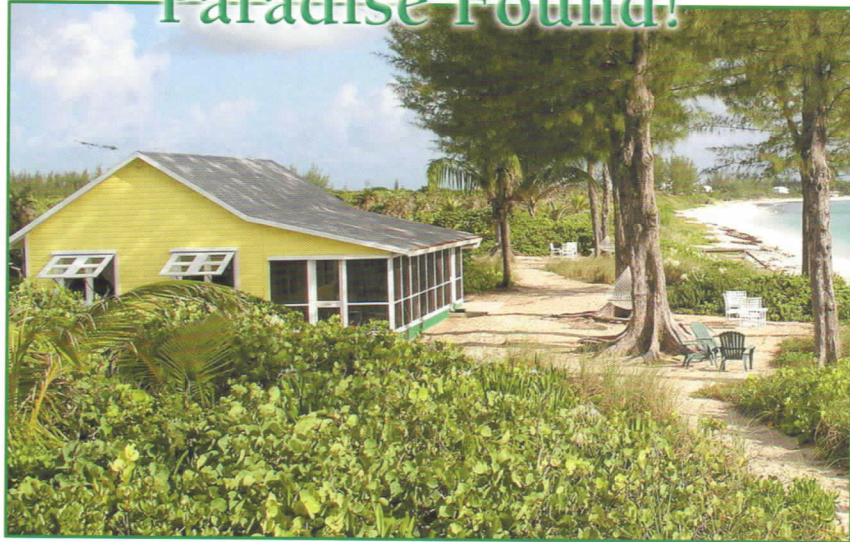
5. Patience and a sense of humour are vital. Very little will happen at the pace you planned. The freight boat will be late. You'll be shipped the wrong part. And you'll almost certainly have rain at the most inopportune time. All you can do is roll with it and keep your end goal in mind.

6. Don't be too patient. Though many vendors and workers are meticulous, some definitely work on "island time." Sometimes you have to push a little, or take the initiative to follow up with suppliers. It's true what they say about squeaky wheels.

7. Recognize that sometimes mistakes are blessings in disguise. Though we ordered a bathtub with the drain at the right end, what arrived was a tub that drained to the left. Not keen on the delay involved in returning it, Tom and I brainstormed ways we could accommodate the left-draining tub. What resulted was actually a more efficient bathroom layout than we originally planned.

8. Remember that nothing is impossible. It just takes patience, persistence, flexibility and ingenuity. And if all else fails, call Wade Cash.

## Paradise Found!



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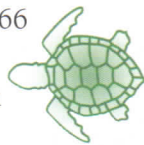
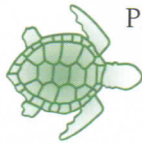
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