

Renovated house is priced at \$18 million

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REAL-ESTATE

Listed for \$17.95M in Palm Beach: Home on Barton Avenue undergoes sophisticated update

Betsy Sorrel's renovation completely reworked a 1950s-era home at 245 Barton Ave. by rearranging the layout for modern living.

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Special to Palm Beach Daily News



It's seven and counting for Elizabeth "Betsy" Sorrel, a Sotheby's International Realty agent and serial renovator who is selling her latest residential project, a Georgian-style home that was renovated under Palm Beach's program for buildings deemed "historically significant."

The house at 245 Barton Ave. was designed in 1952 for James Turner by noted architect Gustav Maass.

“We redid the whole thing. It’s basically a new house reconfigured to be workable and livable for a large family,” says Sorrel, who bought the property in late 2020.

The house marks the seventh Palm Beach property Sorrel has renovated, and as usual, she moved in after the work was completed. She particularly enjoyed the time she spent in the residence, she says.

“I love that the rooms are light and bright. All the rooms, except for the office, have double exposures so (the interiors are) really sunny. And there’s lots of room for guests.”

The house also served her needs for entertaining.

“I had a ton of people for the holidays. It’s a perfect family house or for big families getting together, but it’s compact — not a huge house,” she says.

Sorrel is co-listing the five-bedroom, five-and-a-half bath house — with 4,685 square feet of living space, inside and out — with agents Lisa and John Cregan, two of her colleagues at Sotheby’s International Realty. The price is \$17.95 million, and the furniture is available separately.

Sorrel’s experience with renovating in Palm Beach began in 2000 with a North End house on North Lake Way.

Her second project, as it turned out, was another house on Midtown’s Barton Avenue. “There’s one house between that one and my current house,” she explains.

Each project, she says, has brought her “closer to (the heart of) town, and Barton is one of my absolute favorite streets.”

Her latest project is on the street’s middle block, between Cocoanut Row and South County Road and about a third of a mile north of Royal Palm Way.

“I call it a ‘signature spot.’ You are within walking distance to everything,” she says.

Her renovations generally involve buying an older home and taking it down to the studs, she explains.

“This one had such great bones, but all the rooms were in the wrong places,” she says.

She looked carefully at how the interiors could be reconfigured “for today’s modern living.” The result, she says, is that the floorplan “really works.”

Houses with five bedrooms are unusual on Barton Avenue, she says, and this one comes with a bonus — an office that can serve as a sixth bedroom.

"I needed a home office, but I have a pull-out sofa bed in there," Sorrel says, noting that the room has built-in cabinetry.

Three Palm Beach firms were involved in the project. Michael Perry of MP Design & Architecture designed the renovation, while Environmental Design Group handled the landscaping. Sciame Homes was the contractor.

Sorrel, meanwhile, developed the interior decor, concentrating on fine materials and finishes.

Ceilings in some of the rooms are cypress. The floor in the foyer and stair hall is a checkerboard of marble. Engineered wood covers the floors downstairs, while the original hardwood floors upstairs were refinished.

From the foyer and stair hall, the living room is to the west and adjoins what Sorrel calls "the Florida room," which accesses the covered loggia overlooking the backyard pool. Among the living room's features is a wood-burning fireplace with a wood mantel.

The Florida room, meanwhile, has a built-in bar with a SubZero beverage center, Sorrel notes.

"It's like a second family room — you can walk out to the covered loggia and be directly at the pool."

To the east of the foyer is a bedroom suite, and to the north is the dining room, which features chair-rail molding with wallpaper above.

"We also put in a bay window that overlooks a tree, so you have a pretty view," she adds.

A block of rooms east of the dining room includes the kitchen, the family room, a den, a bedroom suite and the two-car garage.

The layout of the eat-in kitchen centers on a work island topped in calcite, while the other counters are covered in quartzite. The backsplash is glass tile, and the appliances are by Wolf and SubZero.

On the second floor, the main bedroom suite presides over the north side of the house, with two guest bedroom suites on the south side.

The main bedroom suite comprises two walk-in closets and a bathroom with double vanities and a walk-in glass-enclosed shower. A terrace off the main bedroom overlooks the pool, which is set into a stone deck.

Bathrooms in the house are finished in marble, with most of the fixtures by Waterworks.

The residence also has a security system and full-house generator.

Sorrel's renovation was carried out under a relatively new program created to help protect the town's so-called "historically significant" buildings — those that officials believe contribute to a neighborhood's architectural character but don't necessarily qualify for the more stringent "landmark" designation. The latter generally protects the exteriors of landmarked buildings from any significant alteration without the permission of the board.

The program for historically significant buildings, on the other hand, offers qualifying property owners incentives to renovate their homes rather than to replace them with new houses. Owners like Sorrel who voluntarily participate in the program can renovate with more leeway from the town's strict zoning rules than if they were starting from scratch.

Once Sorrel's house sells, the new owner would not be bound by the program's guidelines if more renovations were in the offing.

With her own renovation complete, Sorrel has cast her eyes to the future.

"I will miss this house because it's beautiful," Sorrel says. "But it's sort of exciting to be going on to the next chapter of my life, and I am looking forward to my next project."

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For more than 20 years, Christine Davis has written about Palm Beach real estate in the "On the Market" feature in the Palm Beach Daily News.