

the flip-flop life

LYNN SHERMAN AND LEONARD REISS  KEY WEST, FLORIDA

Tucked away behind large Eureka palms and lush tropical foliage, this little Key West conch cottage feels private and secluded, even though it sits close to its neighbors. It's just a few blocks

to the water, but what Lynn Sherman and her husband, Leonard Reiss, wanted most was to be in the old part of Key West, "with picket fences, old houses, next-door neighbors, and windy roads," says Lynn. "Judy Blume once said that Key West isn't Florida; it's an island in the Caribbean."

Lynn and her husband had been living in New York City, but after Leonard retired, they were ready for a change. "We wanted to find the equivalent of Greenwich Village in a warm place—you know the Woody Allen line





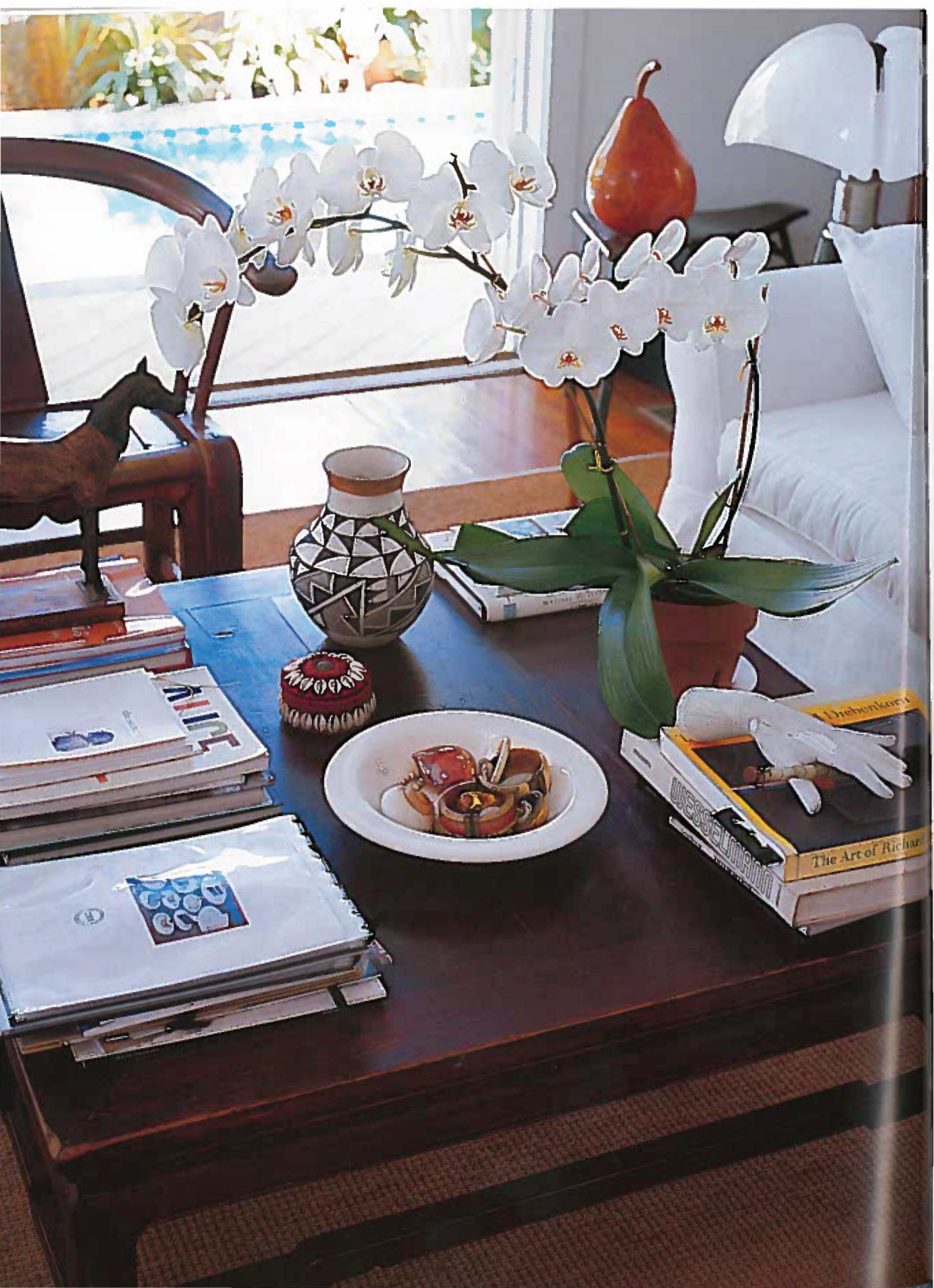
about needing to live somewhere where you can always walk home and get a sweater?" They visited Savannah, Sanibel Island, and Naples, Florida, but nothing grabbed them. "Key West came the closest," says Lynn, "but it didn't really win us over until we stayed there with friends and went to an AIDS benefit. We liked the diversity of people, of ages, of economic and

PREVIOUS PAGE ➤ Lynn converted the small one-car garage into a light-filled painting studio. "It's like a doll-house, but that's okay because I work small," says Lynn. Her pieces are shown at the Lucky Street Gallery in Key West.

ABOVE ➤ The artist at work painting her canvases, often portraits of houses or people that interest her.

RIGHT ➤ A long gallery runs along one side of the house, accessed by French doors, which shelters an outdoor dining table as well as wicker seating.





geographic backgrounds, and we loved the sense of community. It is a warm, giving community where it's easy to meet people."

Lynn and Leonard rented for a month one winter, then started looking around to rent for longer or buy. "When I walked into this house, I said, 'This is it,'" she remembers. "This" was a hundred-year-old cottage that had been subtly updated by Boston architect Charles Meyer, son-in-law of the previous owners. You enter into a long hall paneled with the indigenous Dade County pine, with a small guest room and study off to the side, "Then, 'ta-da,' you walk into a bright white room with twenty-five-foot-high ceilings," says Lynn. That one big, open room is an easygoing home to living room, dining area, and kitchen, and offers a view of the lap pool outside, its turquoise brilliance reflected on the white plank ceiling. French doors open to a porch

OPPOSITE ➤ Notes Lynn, "I can't resist a surface; I'm always making little tablescapes from things I love," like this arrangement on a Chinese table in the living room.

ABOVE ➤ The great room is the heart of Lynn's home, the "ta-da" room, as she calls it, with 25-foot-high ceilings, white-slipcovered furniture, and wraparound windows opening onto views of lush tropical foliage and a lap pool.



running along the side of the house with its own small dining table. "You can sit out there and listen to the wonderful sound of the rain on the tin roof," says Lynn. There are no screens, but miraculously "there are no mosquitoes." The master bedroom and bath are tucked into an upstairs loft space.

Lynn is an artist, and she was drawn to the light in Key West. "I felt like I could paint here forever—it's



like the light artists talk about in Provence or the Hamptons." She hired Charles Meyer to knock down the one-car garage and convert it into a studio for her. "We had to keep it the same size, so it's like a dollhouse, but my paintings are usually only nine by twelve inches, so it works fine for me," she says.

In a previous life, Lynn was an interior designer in Philadelphia. "I was the queen of white," she says. "All

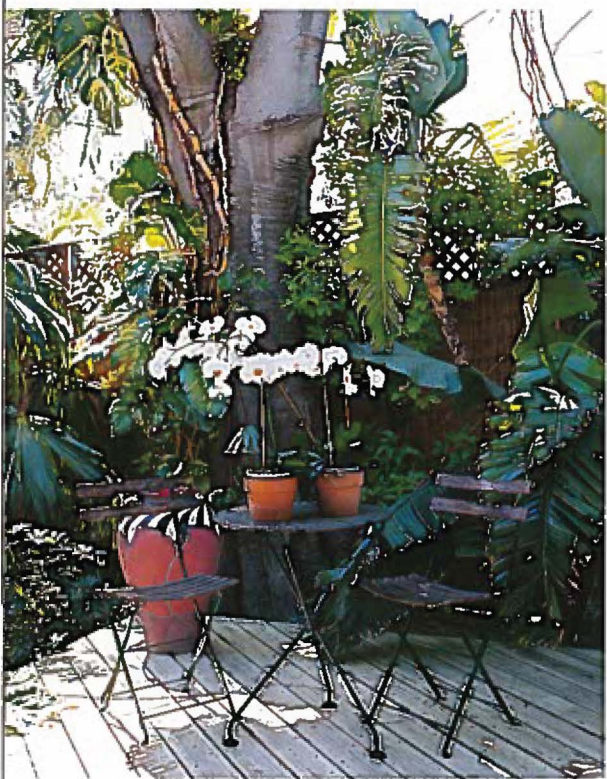
my life, I've had white walls, white sheets, white everything. If people didn't like white, they didn't hire me." Here, she took her cues from the existing house and kept the floors and some of the furnishings dark, "more like a British Colonial house in the islands," but her trademark white cotton slipcovers still keep the feeling airy and light. "I like for the paintings and the people to be the color," she says. Even her garden has white flowers only. A long wall of shelves and cabinets showcases artwork, books, and accessories.

In the summer, Lynn and Leonard head north to a home in Harvey Cedars, on Long Beach Island in New Jersey, where Lynn has been going her whole life. There, they live a quieter, more family-centered version of the beach life. The best part, says Lynn, is that "we wear the same clothes all year round now. I don't really have shoes anymore, just flip-flops. It's very freeing."

ABOVE ➤ A row of bookshelves and cabinets lines one wall of the great room; in the kitchen they become shelving for dishes and glasses. Baskets provide a textural crown.

OPPOSITE ➤ The airy white master bedroom tucked into the second floor "feels garret-like," says Lynn. Closets and cabinets are tucked into the eaves. Louvered wood shutters and a ceiling fan keep the breezes blowing.





ABOVE ✎ "I never liked orchids before I moved here," says Lynn. "Now I buy them regularly—only white ones, though." Her garden has only white flowers.

OPPOSITE ✎ A long, narrow lap pool surrounded by palms creates a lush, refreshing interlude in the tiny backyard, visible from the living room and master bedroom.

key west's conch cottages

What is a conch house, anyway? And where did it get its name?

Early settlers in the Bahamas and the Florida Keys did not have bricks or stone, but created mortar for their homes using sand, water, and lime. They made the lime

by burning conch shells, which were once abundant on the islands. Thus the term *conch house* was born, though it also came to describe the small clapboard cottages built by ship's carpenters and settlers. These cottages have multicultural roots that draw on building forms from both the Caribbean and the New England seacoast. Many have standing-seam metal roofs to reflect the heat

of the sun, deep porches or verandas, and louvered shutters to block the afternoon sun while allowing the breeze to flow. They are often built on piers in case of flooding and to allow air to circulate and cool the house.

Conch is also often used to refer to natives or lifelong residents of the Florida Keys and the Bahamas, and it is a term of honor, not derision. In the past, parents placed a conch shell on a stick in front of the house to announce the birth of a child. Newcomers are sometimes referred to as *freshwater conches*, and people active in the community are dubbed *honorary conches*.

