

**ON THE  
WATERFRONT**

*The exterior of the de Ravenel home, which was built partially on pillars. The lower level is an open grotto constructed mostly with rock-faced coral stones.*



# Down by the Sea

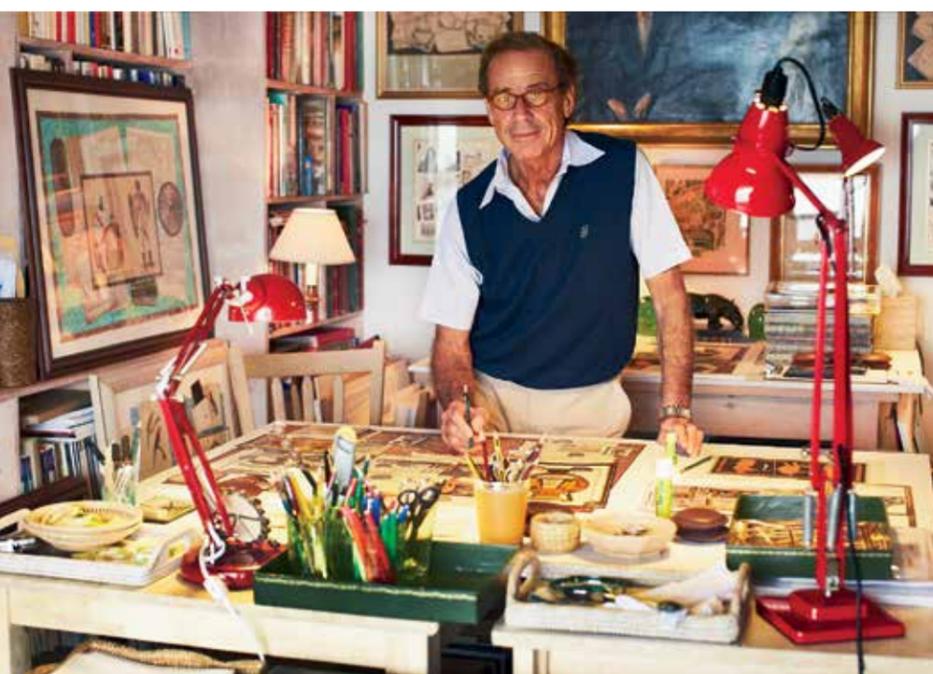
The Lyford Cay house of Jean-Charles and Jackie de Ravenel is

both inspiration for his art and the perfect setting for her interiors.

By Alex Hitz Photographs by Noe DeWitt



# Far from his native Paris, artist and collector Jean-Charles de Ravenel



assembles the new society portrait: handmade collages that are 18th century and trompe l'oeil in their inspiration yet modern at the same time. Now in the collections of friends who include the Catroux, the de la Rentas and Sir Christopher Ondaatje, among others, Jean-Charles's montages of abstracted documents, drawn accents and found images underscore the mood and chosen subject matter. "I try to put some form of order into a chaotic ensemble of things to create a harmony of disparate elements," he says.

Jean-Charles creates this harmony in a studio by the sea at Lyford Cay in the Bahamas, in a narrow, single-story house with a shingled roof, cantilevered over a rock wall that abuts the Caribbean. He and his wife, Jackie, built the dwelling in 2005, on the property of a grander compound that had been their vacation home since 1981. "It was a luxury we no longer needed," says Jean-Charles of the 12-bedroom residence, which they sold when the new one was completed. With their five children grown and out of the house (including 31-year-old daughter Rebecca, founder of traveling pop-up shop Goombay Bazaar), the

couple (who *do* have three formidable wirehaired miniature dachshunds, Smartie, Loulou and Lollipop) wanted a simpler life: closer to the water and its breeze. The sea's influence can be felt immediately; the dominant color of the house is blue in all its iterations. Inside or out, there's no escaping the cerulean, azure or turquoise of ocean and sky, from the 18th-century Chinese vases that were purchased at auction (and adorn the living room) to the custom upholstery on the headboard and the lampshade with Brunswig & Fils fabric (the master bedroom) to the window shutters that accent the white-stuccoed house itself. "Our last house was pink," says Jackie. "This one *had* to be blue."

The home was designed with an open-air grotto beneath it—a series of outdoor enfilade rooms (aligning with one another in the style of formal buildings in Europe) furnished with plain teak chairs and tables that the de Ravenels purchased



## MARINE LIFE

Custom-painted teak chairs and table from Lyford Cay on the limestone-tiled floor. Opposite, from top: A 19th-century Irish blue lamp sits next to Chinese vases from the 1700s, retrieved from the wreck of a ship. A black-and-white portrait of Jean-Charles and Jackie's daughter, Rebecca, by Bruce Weber, also sits on the Pen Work English desk. Jean-Charles in his studio, flanked by red Anglepoise lamps. The master bedroom, with a headboard and lampshade upholstered in Paris in Brunswig & Fils fabric, and a Dash & Albert rug purchased at Nassau's The Island Store.



**WORK OF ART**

Jean-Charles's desk, with a Hellenistic-art-inspired collage in progress. The 18th-century French print is of an antique Etruscan vase. The coins are mostly old European mementos and Indian rupees that Jean-Charles uses as paperweights. On the left is a tray of paper cutouts used to frame items in his collages.

## THE AIR IN THERE

One of the family's dachshunds, Smartie, stands guard as natural light bathes the home's hallways and living room. Travertine-marble flooring is found throughout, as well as naturally finished beams and moldings carved from pecky cypress. Opposite, from top: Blue-and-white ceramic sea horses from The Island Store sit on the casual outdoor teak dining table. Two deck chairs on the stone terrace (with custom waterproof Sunbrella cushions) allow the de Ravenels to take in the sun and sea without leaving the property.



locally and then had painted a specific shade of cerulean blue. Here, they hold casual luncheon parties, where guests sit on cushions in waterproof Sunbrella fabric, or read in the stone seating area (also outfitted with Sunbrella-covered cushions), which is shaded thanks to the cantilevered terrace above.

At one end of the grotto lies Jean-Charles's atelier, a book-lined square artist's studio of pickled pine and French doors that open fully to the water. He can spend as many as eight hours a day behind his large worktable. When he began constructing collages several years ago, he tackled one topic at a time: the Grand Tour, prerevolutionary Russia, the voyages of Captain Cook in the South Seas. In antiques stores he found travel photographs from the 1860s, menus from the last czar's Winter Palace and a telegram from Princess Galitzine and combined them with images he loved, like an 18th-century portrait by the Italian painter Pompeo Batoni. Soon friends were commissioning Jean-Charles to tell their stories, bringing him personal documents, letters and images to use, and the bespoke collage was born. During our visit, he was hard at work on a Hellenistic-art-themed collage—his desk was littered with 18th-century French prints of an antique Etruscan vase, glue sticks, scissors and cutout paper frames.

The master bedroom, guest rooms, living room and kitchen are all cohesively conceived in blue and white—duvet covers and chair upholstery in printed cotton, table decor and rugs purchased from the Nassau shop The Island Store—which combines with a through-line of pecky cypress moldings and beams to bring to mind a super-luxury yacht. The nautical conceit can even be seen in the house's horizon-oriented layout, which yields a seamless transition from indoor to outdoor; there's a view of the ocean from every room.

The look of the house—which was inspired by Babe Paley's stucco enclave at Round Hill (it likewise reinterpreted the relationship between interior and exterior and played heavily with an azure color scheme)—is a combination of Jean-Charles's and Jackie's influences. Jean-Charles's eye is the result of a rarefied youth. "I went to Château de Groussay as a child and have always been fascinated by the positioning of things," he says. In particular, the French castle's iconic library—which was hung floor-to-ceiling with a mix of paintings, medallions and mirrors—is reflected in the de Ravenels' interior, though perfectly pared down for its tropical milieu: Graphic seashells hang next to family portraits from Europe, above a fan made of coral, alongside a whitewashed Brighton Pavilion mirror.

Where her husband notices placement, Jackie has a deft hand in the decor, crafting livable spaces inspired by friends like interior designer Alberto Pinto and Paris couturier Andre Oliver—a mix of furniture local to Lyford Cay and well-edited heirlooms from Europe. As refined as the house feels, there's no do-not-touch, museum quality that can define so many homes. At its core, the retreat was constructed for living a real life, from the grotto where Jean-Charles dozes off to the sound of the Caribbean to the locally made and painted deck chairs where guests sunbathe. And ultimately, the de Ravenels know who the true masters of the house are. "To be honest," says Jackie, "our home is ruled by the dogs." ♦

