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Interior designers Valerie McGreevy Tatalovich and Margaret Kaywell have been given the task of putting the finishing touches in the Seagull Cottage.

# Winding road leads designer Margaret Kaywell to Sea Gull cottage makeover

By JOHN NELANDER

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When interior designer Margaret Kaywell decided to return to work after her son started school, along came opportunity and fate.

Opportunity knocked when her husband, John, came home one night and told her: "I just met the nicest designer. You ought to go in and say hi."

Kaywell, who had already launched a residential interior design service — Kaywell Interiors — in Palm Beach, took the suggestion and looked up Valerie McGreevy Tatalovich of Valerie M. Interiors. They chatted, clicked, and in February formed a partnership in a new commercial design enterprise.

And here's where the fate comes in: Tatalovich had previously landed the contract for the interior revamp of Sea Gull Cottage, a storied treasure trove of Palm Beach history.

The 1886 house, the oldest in town, was in the process of getting a \$5.5 million facelift to better serve the nearby Royal Poinciana Chapel.

The task at hand: design the interior so it harmonized with the 19th century exterior charm, while still meeting the utilitarian needs of the chapel board.

"We had several large projects on the table already, and I knew Margaret," recalls Tatalovich, who's designed some Victorian interiors in her native Pittsburgh. "We hit it off like sisters. When she came on board, we both hit the ground running."

Kaywell arrived with a solid background in both commercial and residential design work. "I've had a lot of great commissions, but this one is right at the top," she says.

"I enjoyed doing the New York Life Insurance corporate headquarters, and I've also enjoyed working with hotels and country



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## Margaret Kaywell

**Occupation:** Kaywell has her own Palm Beach firm, Kaywell Interiors, which does residential work in the area. She is also in a partnership specializing in commercial interior design with Valerie McGreevy Tatalovich of Valerie M. Interiors.

**Quote to live by:** 'Live in the present moment wisely and earnestly.' Buddha.

**Most admired person:** The human spirit in all of us. The marvelous gift of human intelligence, our underlying strength and our great human potential.'

**Favorite book:** The Fountainhead, by Ayn Rand. (The 1943 story of a young architect.)



2000 Photo Courtesy of Margaret Kaywell

[\(enlarge photo\)](#)

Kaywell with her son, Jake, at 6 months old.

clubs. It's a great combination of the extra style you put into residential applications, but with a commercial environment. And I prefer working in commercial environments.

"It must be my economics background. I like the business aspects of working in commercial.

"Commercial space has more of a balance toward function than residential work does. But it requires just as much knowledge of how things work. For example, in a retirement facility you would never have a dining room table with a center column, because you need to know that older people will always get up and push off the table.

"Tables have to have four legs. You need chairs with arms instead of armless, because this is how people stand up."

The goal to create a comfortable religious and community space at Sea Gull — one that accommodates the building's Victorian exterior — has been achieved, says the Rev. Robert Norris of the Royal Poinciana Chapel.

"I think it's going to be a masterpiece, but a usable one. When the cottage was moved to this location, it was uncomfortable, very museumy. Margaret and Valerie have taken the period atmosphere and made it current.

"Margaret has been a dream to work with. She's always optimistic and was able to pick the right furniture for the right space."

The cottage will be primarily used by the chapel for religious education. But Norris says it will be open to community events on an occasional basis. There will be a "soft opening" in October, the chapel's traditional Christmas Boutique sale after Thanksgiving, and a dedication in January.

Kaywell didn't start her career with interior design in mind. She got her first degree in economics, and fancied a career on Wall Street going toe-to-toe with the country's top financial movers and shakers. Her first stop was in Dallas with a real estate firm.

"I found out that wasn't my niche. But the firm owned an historic hotel and they had me purchase and install all the renovations and adaptive re-use material, like we're doing now with Sea Gull Cottage. So I said, 'I like the other end of this.'

"I went back to school, got another degree and went to work for the firm I'd done all the purchasing for. That's what got me started."

She worked for a while as an interior designer in Los Angeles where her husband, John Kaywell, "had gone to be a rock and roll star." He played guitar with the '80s group Mr. Mister.

But John is also a fourth-generation Palm Beacher. And after their son, Jake, was born in 2000, the couple's thoughts turned to a quieter life on the Florida southeast coast.

Now, Margaret Kaywell says: "He's living an idyllic life in a wonderful place." (Jake is in third grade at Rosarian Academy in West Palm Beach.)

Creating the design scheme for the Sea Gull has been an elaborate process. When visitors walk into Tatalovich's shop, a quaint but tight space across from the Town Hall, they see a pair of "story boards," where fabrics, colors and imaginary renderings of future use for the cottage are on display.

In the back room, shelves of loose-leaf notebooks document the design and ordering history of the project. A small staff includes Tatalovich's shaggy Shih Tzu, Roxy.

Tatalovich, who opened her business in 2005, is a member of the Royal Poinciana Chapel. Nonetheless, the design process always starts with getting to know a client. Good designers, she says, have to be part-psychologist — they need to read people.

"It's very important to know people and how they're going to use the space," Kaywell adds. "You need to know what they want the space to say. Because it not only has to look good, it has to function."