

PLUS More reader favorites M8-M9

1. The rear patio 2. A riverfront view of the Queen Anne-style home. 3. Former owners George and Nancy Corbett spent seven years restoring and expanding the home. 4. They expanded the home to 7,000 square feet and successfully petitioned to add it to the National Register of Historic Places. 5. New owners Rick and Aly Yohn with their daughter Anna and family dogs. 6. A bedroom 7. The house sits on a waterfront plot on the Little Manatee River in Ruskin, Fla. 8. The house was built for guests; both its former and current owners run evangelical Christian retreats.

BY STEFANOS CHEN

AFTER BUYING IT FOR \$1, George and Nancy Corbett ferried a circa 1910 Queen Anne-style home 25 miles across Tampa Bay, by barge, in one piece, to save it from demolition. They expanded the home to 7,000 square feet, created a ¼-acre man-made lagoon on the new 5.2-acre site, and, despite the changes, successfully petitioned to add the home to the National Register of Historic Places.

Years later, as sometimes happens when owners invest heavily in a home in a relatively low-price market, the Corbetts wound up selling their house for far less than they were originally seeking. Listed for just under \$5 million in February, it sold for \$1.15 million in November, 2014, a 77% reduction, according to public records.

The couple say they have no regrets. In fact, they say they found the perfect buyers: Rick and Aly Yohn who, like the Corbetts, run an evangelical Christian retreat.

The home's unusual back story and design won over WSJ.com readers. In WSJ.com's annual House of the Year contest, readers voted for their favorites among 52 homes for sale that were profiled over the course of 2014 in the online House of the Day feature. The Corbetts' home, profiled in March, when it was still for sale, received 63,916 votes, out of a total 632,489 votes cast.

The home was originally in Palmetto, Fla. In 2006, the four-bedroom, 3½-bathroom home was being eyed for demolition by developers, who instead sold it to the Corbetts for \$1. The catch: The Corbetts would need to move it to a new location. They paid about \$250,000 to ferry the house to a waterfront plot on the Little Manatee

River in Ruskin. They had paid \$230,000 for the land in 2003, according to public records.

The Corbetts, both 67, a retired couple who made their living restoring historic homes, spent the next seven years restoring and expanding the home and making it amenable for guests. They made additions to the mansion, now 25 rooms, and filled the space with antiques relevant to the period. They also added modern amenities such as an elevator, a home theater with a tin ceiling and gaslight sconces that they converted to electricity. Outside, they created a 110-foot-long, 5-foot-deep lagoon with palm trees and a waterfall.

For almost 30 years, they have run a Christian retreat in Lake Toxaway, N.C., called Canaan Land, which hosts as many as 100 people. In Ruskin, they hosted an additional five or six people at a time. In late February, they decided

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AN HOMAGE TO THE BARBIE PENTHOUSE

An L.A. real-estate investor buys the apartment once owned by the original Barbie. After a \$3.5 million makeover, the condo flaunts both contemporary style and kitsch; guests get their own doll from the Barbie closet.

BY NANCY KEATES

GROWING UP poor in Shreveport, La., as the daughter of an alcoholic mother and a father who had moved to Hawaii, Nicole Sassaman says she developed a strong attachment to her Barbie. She would spend hours making furniture and accessories for dollhouses she created from shoeboxes.

"Barbie helped me learn design," says Ms. Sassaman, 43, now a successful home designer and flipper with celebrity clients. "It was a way to create a whole different world."

In 2012, Ms. Sassaman paid \$2 million for her piece of the Barbie dream: a penthouse apartment in the Century Towers, a luxury condo building on the Avenue of the Stars in Los Angeles.

The condo was being sold by Barbara Segal, the real-life namesake of the Barbie doll created by her parents, Mattel toys founders Ruth and Elliot Handler. Ms. Segal had inherited the condo from her parents.

After the deal closed, Ms. Sassaman

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Edham Pines for The Wall Street Journal

DOLLHOUSE Nicole Sassaman's Los Angeles condo—once owned by the founders of Mattel—underwent a yearlong, \$3.5 million renovation.

INSIDE



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\$30 million price tag on L.A. spec home M2



REVVED UP
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FUNNY BUSINESS
A TV comic forged in the Steel City M11