



RELAX

# Cabana Boys

*A designer and builder look to the previous generation with the construction of their heavenly hangout.*

STORY BY LISA MARIE HART  
PHOTOGRAPHY BY DAN CHAVKIN

“So, this is my sanctuary,” designer Sean Gaston says of the cabana he created for his backyard. “The only space I have ever been able to completely shut down and take a nap.”

For a full two years after he and his husband, Jim Jewell, purchased the 1974 home by architect John Walling, they lived with an eyesore and an irritant: a larger-than-regulation-size tennis court and “the hideous 12-foot chain-link fence” that surrounded it. “We don’t play tennis,” Gaston says. “Every time we’d go out there, we’d talk about how great the view could be. Not to mention what a spectacular gardening opportunity for me, a succulent and cactus nut. Our best friends

said we were more interested in aesthetics over athletics. I guess that’s true!”

Gaston and Jewell work together to restore and resell historic homes through their firm, Bee Renovated. Aesthetics and functionality always share top billing. The court had to go, they agreed, and Gaston could begin planning for a cabana amid a desert garden.

His design followed Walling’s lead, taking explicit cues from the house. The angles, the roof, and the rough-sawn ceiling, down to a reproduction of its stucco style and support beams of the very same thickness, all honor the adjacent residence in a mindful, mid-’70s echo.

“I spec’d the whole design around the vintage



A. Quincy Jones screens,” Gaston says. “Jim was very excited to build it, and my father, who is 78, helped him from beginning to end.”

Once their crew had demolished the tennis court, they left the rubble in place and arranged it to create berms and hills. Soil and boulders were craned in by the ton to cover the rubble and allow Gaston to start planting. They wrapped up in time to host the PS Modcom Gala in early 2020.

“Of course, I invited John Walling and his wife to give him the credit he deserves and to celebrate his architecture and his accomplishments,” Gaston says. “Before the party, I told him I had a surprise for him and took him out back. He had nothing but high praise for the project and said he

would have done it exactly the same way. What a complement that was!”

Subsequent get-togethers followed along with the addition of a projector and screen to watch movies. The structure served as a “safe place during lockdown where we could see our friends outside but sheltered, a couple at a time, at a distance but feeling close and connected,” Gaston says.

Primarily, however, the cabana brings him peace. “I spend an enormous amount of time out there, being quiet and creative surrounded by the love that built it and my ever-growing garden. It was a deeply personal project and a great experience for us all. It’s my bit of heaven.”

— An avid gardener, designer Sean Gaston combined his need for an escape with his fondness for desert plants. A defining feature of the new cabana is the sunlight, casting slanted shadows on the wall when filtered through screens by A. Quincy Jones. “I brought them with me to our last three homes,” Gaston says. “Obviously, they are permanent now.”