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In Brazil, a Five-Year Renovation



André Vieira for The New York Times

Susan and Matt Marshall bought a waterfront property in 2003 on Ferradura, one of the 23 beaches in the resort area of Buzios, about 100 miles east of Rio de Janeiro. [More Photos >](#)

By SUE CHESTER

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The TV lounge on the house's main floor. [More Photos >](#)

once I stayed here a few days, I wanted it and signed on the dotted line right away.

The property, which the Marshalls bought six years ago, overlooks a rocky channel that leads into the sweeping, sheltered bay.

Ferradura — Portuguese for horseshoe — is an exclusive location on Buzios, which is a peninsula with a total of 23 [beaches](#). [Patricia Judice Araujo](#), the sales director of the Rio-based real estate agency [Judice & Araujo Imóveis](#), says [Buzios has both high and low price points for properties](#).

[“It’s possible to buy a very small two- to three-bedroom house for \\$80,000 at Rasa, on the mainland at the end of the peninsula,” Ms. Araujo said. “Or \\$1.4 million would get you an oceanfront property at Manguinhos on the peninsula,” with 20,000 square meters \(215,280 square feet\) of land, a 600-square-meter \(6,460-square-foot\) three-bedroom house, two guest houses, a housekeeper’s house, two pools, an indoor pool and a fitness room.](#)

The Marshalls paid around \$360,000 for the 1,100-square-meter (11,840-square-foot) property and another \$55,000 on various taxes and fees related to the purchase. The renovation, which took five years, was around \$2 million (twice their budget). They gutted the house, replaced the electrical system, plumbing, floors, roofs and walls.

The added expense also was due, in part, to Mr. Marshall’s landscaping, which included a labyrinth of terraces, paths, decks, waterfalls, caves, streams and pools spread over five levels on the way down to a cove.

The three-story house has terracotta tiles, which keeps the interior cool, essential in the tropical heat. Large glass windows allow light to flood in while providing ocean views.

The 630-square-meter (6,780-square-foot) house has a total of eight levels, across which are scattered five bedrooms with baths, a large open-plan living area, kitchen, office and a self-contained two-bedroom apartment for the live-in housekeepers.

The outside space includes two large veranda areas, one with a pool, and six terraces, one with a Jacuzzi and another with a small pool and waterfall. The Portuguese word for waterfall prompted the name for the guesthouse, the Cachoeira Inn.

Inside, the house is cozy despite its size. “We used as many natural Brazilian products as we could,” Mrs. Marshall said. There is bamboo, coconut, cork, local stone, white crystal granite and wood found throughout. “That’s what I love about the tropics; the bamboo and coconut feel. It’s lovely and warm when you use it in a house,” she added.

The couple’s hobbies include [kayaking](#) and [snorkeling](#) in the bay, and Mr. Marshall enjoys [surfing](#) at nearby Geriba beach, where the high waves are host to an annual national surfing competition.

Although local real estate agents have offered them \$3 million to \$4 million for the house, Mr. Marshall said they won’t sell.

“I think there are three prices on this home: the price of the actual land, of the actual structure we have put here and the price of our hard work,” Mr. Marshall said. “The time and effort we put into this dream — that’s the priceless part, and it has no price tag.”

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