



a shore THING

What happens when a family transitions from a ‘town’ house to a sand castle?

words by KERRY SPECKMAN photography by ADAM COHEN

Jimmy Buffet may sing of “changes in latitudes, changes in attitudes,” but for one local family, getting a new perspective on life has had more to do with altering their longitude.

The Arnolds were perfectly happy living in San Jose. Their Old World European-style home was rustic, yet elegant, and fit their “townie” lifestyle to a “T.” It was familiar and comfortable, convenient to work and their daughter’s school, and ideal for entertaining (something they do a lot of). Suffice it to say, they had no plans to move.

As much as they loved their house, the Arnolds always had an affinity for the beach, so when a prime piece of real estate went up for sale in Ponte Vedra Beach, they snatched it up with the intention of making it a second home.

At the time, a house already sat on the property, but the cement block structure was clearly unsalvageable and had to be demolished, giving the the Arnolds the opportunity to start from scratch.

From the get-go, the couple had a very distinct vision of what they wanted their home-away-from-home to be. For starters, they wanted it to look and feel “completely different” from their existing home. Where their San Jose house is formal with dark-stained, hand-scraped wood and heavy furniture, they desired an ultra-casual beach house full of light and devoid of clutter. They wanted to limit the size to 6,000 square feet or less to create a home that was in keeping with its Ponte Vedra Beach environment. They also knew they wanted to work with architect and interior designer Michelle Balfort of Balfort Architecture in Stuart, Florida.

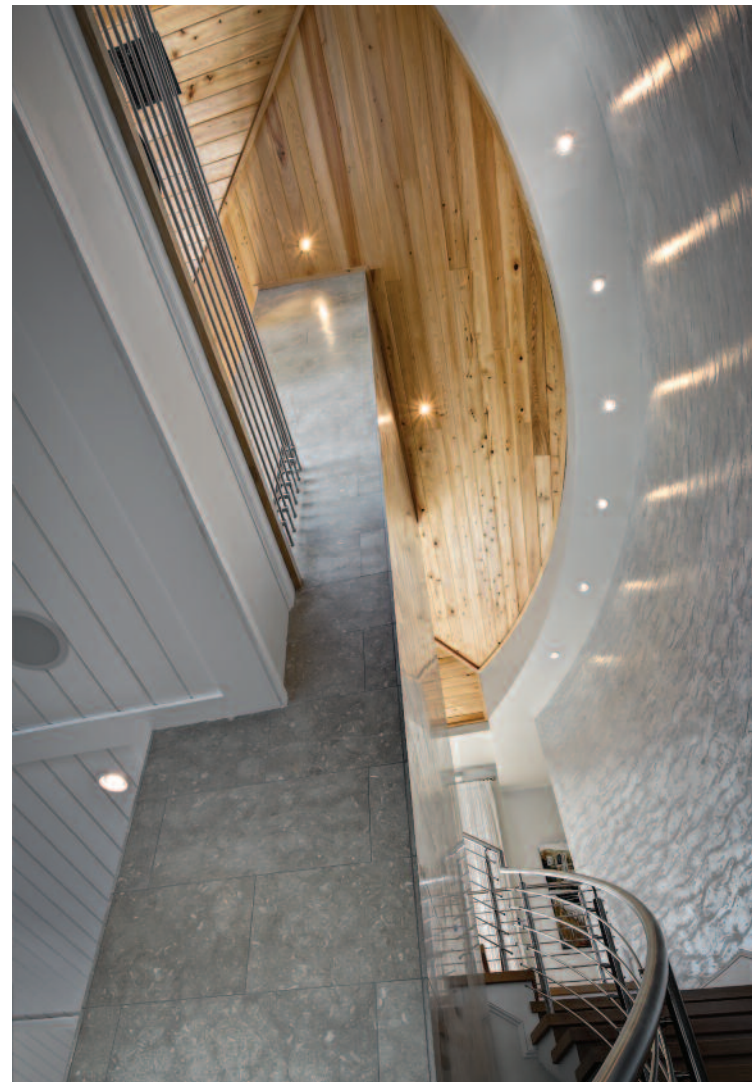


Having worked on a prior project with Balfort, the Arnolds knew she had the ingenuity, creativity and, most important, a similar vision as theirs, not to mention the skills to deal with challenges like fitting a five-bedroom, six-bathroom home—and a guest house—on the long, narrow site and altering a traditional floor plan to capitalize on its location relative to the beach.

Though the Arnolds’ home is located on the west side of Ponte Vedra Boulevard, the lot directly across the street is empty, allowing them a direct oceanfront view. Balfort wound up inverting the floor plan so that the family room, kitchen, dining room and master suite would be located on the second floor—affording the most spectacular views of the ocean—with formal living room and guest bedrooms taking up the first floor. Nearly every room in the house offers at least some view of the Atlantic.



This page from top: Among the many treasures in the Arnolds’ living room is a painting they commissioned from C. Ford Riley in the back wall niche; for those who prefer more tranquil waters than the ocean, a swimming pool with infinity edge hot tub and soothing water features should do the trick. **Opposite page:** Architect Michelle Balfort refers to the home’s design as “coastal modern.”



Referring to the home's architecture as "coastal modern," Balfort employed elements of the vernacular style (such as spacious porches with wide overhangs) with details that reflected the environment (such as the sky blue exterior paint and two-tone railings in white-washed and natural wood), then added architectural details like tectonic columns and decorative brackets under the eaves to create visual interest. Most important, she designed a space that maximizes two of its greatest assets.

"The east and west facades were designed to completely open up to allow prevailing ocean breezes to fill the space," Balfort says, "and deep Southern porches are perfect for filtering light and allowing natural transitions between the interior and exterior."

Inside, she kept the floor plan "open and airy," giving each room a "sense of lift," and skipped the idea of a foyer altogether to reinforce the home's sense of casualness. By incorporating cozy niches throughout the house, she managed to make the space feel capacious and intimate at the same.

This page, clockwise from bottom left: Interior decorator Amy Johnson felt it was important to give the den a more masculine feel, which she accomplished with a custom upholstered chair in "men's shirt fabric" and antique suitcases used as an end table; Originally, a banquette was planned for the dining room—until everyone realized they wouldn't be able to see the view, so Johnson had a tall table custom made of walnut to use with comfy bar chairs; the curvilinear second-story ceiling and winding railing soften the home's modern elements. **Opposite page, from top:** The Arnolds' 13-year-old daughter's room practically screams "sleepover" with its multiple bunk beds; With a guest room as luxurious as this one, done in shades of purple, it's a wonder guests ever want to leave; Sleek and sophisticated, the master bathroom epitomizes the home's modern design leanings.

As with the exterior, Balfort introduced unexpected architectural details throughout the house to create visual interest, from the white-washed, tongue-and-groove ceiling in the living room and select cypress, vaulted ceiling in the family room, to the use of wainscoting, bead board and ship lap siding in the guest bedrooms.

Balfort was very deliberate in her choice of finishes. Viewing the beach as a "tactile experience," she chose materials that evoked its many textures. Smooth surfaces like marble countertops and glass tiles capture the smooth and reflective nature of the ocean, while natural-finish oak flooring and travertine surrounding the pool suggest the roughness of the sand. Even the penny tiles in the guest house shower, she says, feel like "pebbles between your toes."

The design was also careful not to make overt references to the beach, opting instead for subtle nods as found in the gently curved staircase "to create softness and movement" and the unusual wall treatment leading to the second floor—a Venetian plaster finish, created by Gordon Meggison of Free Hand Studios, that mimics the undulating wave patterns of the ocean.

"The goal was to create a sense of place that not only defines this moment," she says, "but also imparts a sense of timelessness of all the collective beach memories of the past."

While Balfort and the Arnolds handled the design, space planning and selection of finishes, Amy Johnson of Beach Chic Design in Ponte Vedra Beach was brought in to handle interior decor.



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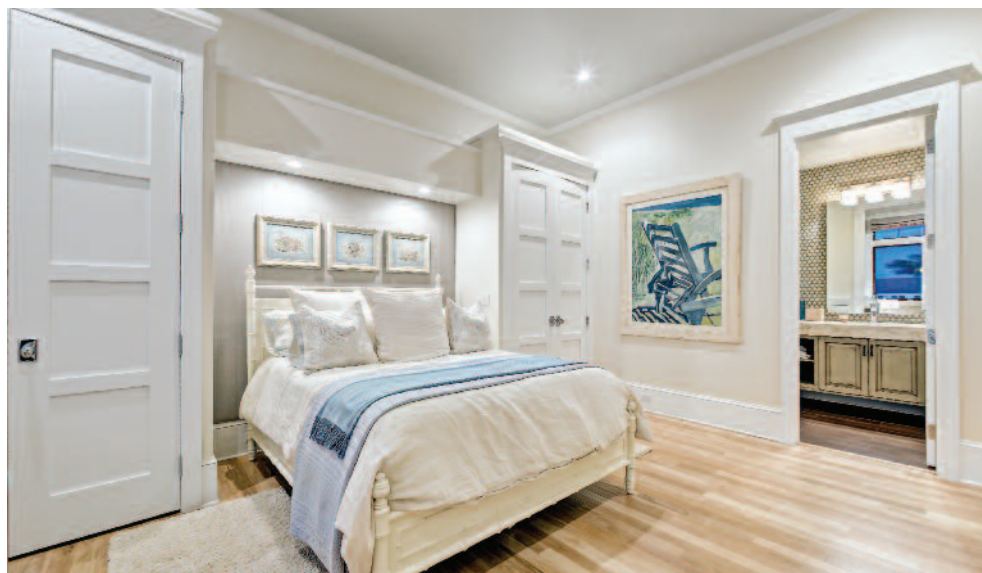
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This page, from top: The 900-square-foot detached guest house features an open floor plan with a kitchen, dining area and living room; the guest house bedroom and bathroom are every bit as open, airy and comfortable as the main house; with views of the ocean and pool area, the guest house is a vacation unto itself.

“The homeowners, whom I’ve known for years, came to me and said, ‘You live at the beach; you have three kids. You know what works,’” Johnson recalls. “They said they wanted a home that was casual, laid-back and livable, where guests could plop down on the couch, kick off their shoes and be comfortable—but still be beautiful.”

With “functionality and simplicity” as her mantra, Johnson selected furniture that was inviting and comfortable but also kid-friendly. In the living room, she chose a basic linen/cotton sofa and rounded-back swivel chairs, then covered them with white duck fabric slip covers. In addition to being machine-washable (which is convenient when someone spills red wine on the sofa, as happened during the Arnolds’ first party in their new beach house), slip-covers allow the homeowners to change the look of a room just by zipping on a different colored or patterned cover. The sectional sofa in the family room is similarly fresh and clean but durable.

Like Balfourt—and the homeowners—Johnson didn’t want the decor to be a literal representation of a beach house. “We

didn’t want flip-flops and shells everywhere,” she says. “Instead, we wanted it to be our *interpretation* of the beach: the feel, the colors, the textures.”

Johnson nailed the feel with her furniture choices: overstuffed sofas and comfy beds with fluffy pillows (most of which she designed herself) and cozy blankets that visitors want to dive right into. Color-wise, she represented the surroundings by sticking with neutral shades of white and taupe, which she accented with various shades of blue and gray and punches of green and purple. And with design materials ranging from linen and leather to sea grass and jute (even feathers and barnacles), she certainly captured the beach’s varied textures.

That’s not to say there aren’t remnants of the sea to be found in the home. Johnson incorporated whimsical pieces like a wicker starfish, seahorse wall hanging and tropical fish sculpture into the decor and gave the Arnolds a large glass display case with a driftwood finish in which to display shells, sea glass and sharks’ teeth collected on their own beach-combing adventures.

Johnson was careful not to overdecorate, choosing only select decorative items and artwork, including a piece commissioned from C. Ford Riley, to feature. “The architecture is so beautiful, I didn’t want to do anything to take away from it,” she says. “I only wanted to enhance it.”

The same can be said for the view. Decorative window treatments are kept to a minimum so as not to obscure nature’s own artwork. Roman shades, however, are installed in the bedrooms to block out the light and provide privacy—all of which adds up to the overwhelming feel of peace the homeowners experience every time they set foot in their new home. “We feel like we can kick our feet up and just stare at that beautiful ocean all day,” they say.

Sounds like the making of another Jimmy Buffett song. *

Credits:

Builder/general contractor: Charlie Arnold, Regional Development, LLC

Architect/interior designer: Michelle Balfourt, Balfourt Architecture, Stuart, Fla.

Interior decor: Amy Johnson, Beach Chic Design, Ponte Vedra Beach

Landscape architect: Kelly Elmore, Euthenics Studios, Atlantic Beach

Pool design: Parry Pools

Countertops: Belmarmi, Neptune Beach

Tile: Tile Market of San Marco

Cabinetry: First Coast Supply

Wood flooring: A&B Hardwood Flooring

Lighting: Stewart Lighting

Faux finish artist: Gordon Meggison, Free Hand Studios



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