

Shell Game

How one interior designer was challenged to create a home based on the contents of a cardboard box



(Clockwise from left): Pool designer Brian Van Bower designed the infinity pool, made even more spectacular with a view of the Atlantic Ocean; believe it or not, an outside fireplace does come in handy when living adjacent to the ocean; though the architectural style blends well with the vernacular of its Ponte Vedra Beach neighbors, the house also features interesting details like shake cedar shingles and louvered doors.



There's no telling where an interior designer might find her inspiration for a particular job—a photo in a magazine, a fabric swatch, a color chip. Her creativity might be sparked on vacation or walking around a furniture market. But in her 20 years of residential design experience, Kathleen Franza of KMH Design in Jacksonville Beach had never been challenged by a client to create an entire look for a house based on what was found in its backyard.

Top (top): Linen side chairs in living room and dining room, as well as linen draperies, set the natural tones of the setting. (bottom): At the center of the living room is a custom-designed coffee table designed for the space.



includes a sink), the homeowner would have plenty of room to prepare meals, while still leaving space for family and friends to pull up a stool and eat at the counter or just watch the action. Beneath each of the islands Franza planned plenty of storage for pots, pans and small appliances with added conveniences like a spice drawer and espresso station. As further evidence of the homeowner's interest in the culinary arts, the house features a back kitchen, adjacent to the main kitchen, with a second oven, additional prep space and a book shelf overflowing with cookbooks.

Design-wise, Franza chose natural materials such as Calacatta marble on the islands, Caesartone quartz on the perimeter countertops and a mix of Calacutta marble and sea-grass limestone tile as the backsplash. She chose oak for the range hood and as accents on the islands, but used her own special technique which includes wire brushing and glazing. The texture and appearance of the wood are reminiscent of European finishes and fit right in with the home's lived-in vibe.

Glass was also used as a design element, as seen in the glass-front refrigerator, glass-front hutch and

Juliska column pendant lights (which, coincidentally, matched glassware the clients already owned). To add further visual interest, Franza selected sleek Kohler fixtures (though, with the homeowners' being from Wisconsin, that was a given) and lift ring drawer latches like those found on a yacht.

Just off the kitchen is the homeowners' favorite room. Originally designed as a breakfast room, it was transformed into a cozy lounge area with custom-made U-shaped sofas in walnut and custom maple-wood nesting tables where the family can still enjoy a meal or chat, read or enjoy



(From top): Because of its importance to the homeowners, the kitchen was the first room Franza worked on; (bottom) the homeowners' favorite room, however, is the lounging area just off the kitchen with matching walnut U-shaped couches designed by Franza.

"[The homeowner] came to me with this cardboard box with about 10 seashells in it and she said, 'You're going to think this is really crazy,'" Franza recalls. "But these are the colors I love, the colors of nature, and they're all out our back door on the beach. I want this to be the inspiration for the house."

Franza loved it. Not only did the basic color palette of gray, white and cream blend in with the natural environs of a house situated on the ocean, but it also fit perfectly with the atmosphere that the homeowners envisioned for their home.

Originally from Wisconsin, the homeowners, who wished to remain anonymous for this article,

told Franza they wanted their Ponte Vedra Beach home to reflect its location. They mentioned words like "comfortable," "relaxing" and "simple"—eschewing anything "fancy or overdone." And Franza agreed completely.

One of the very first decisions the designer and the homeowners made was choosing the flooring. Because the same flooring would be used throughout the majority of the home, they needed a material that would work in a variety of rooms—from the kitchen to bedrooms—and be suitable and durable enough for a home on the ocean. Above all, it needed to capture the casual, laid-back feel of a beach house.

Franza knew more traditional wood, like

mahogany, wouldn't work and opted for reclaimed oak in six-inch planks from an old barn in Savannah. Reminiscent of a European gray wash, the wood matched the gray, white and cream palette already established by Franza and the homeowners. More importantly, its distressed, well-worn look captured that casual, laid-back beach house aesthetic.

With the flooring as her jumping-off point, Franza began work on one of the most significant rooms in the house to her clients—the kitchen. As important as interior design decisions were, however, Franza knew the room had to be ultra-functional as the lady of the house loves to cook and bake. By opting for two islands (one of which



he spectacular view. Because Franza designed the sofas to be deeper than typical sofas, they can also double as beds for extra guests—or anyone wanting to stretch out while watching nature’s TV.

The dining room replicates that same simple elegance and relaxing atmosphere with linen-covered parson side chairs and woven leather dining arm chairs, designed by Thomas Pheasant for McGuire, surrounding a custom-stained oak trestle table.

In the living room, Franza created a cozy space in front of the fireplace with upright reading chairs in linen and custom-trimmed with leather piping, a high-back sofa from Baker’s Barbara Barry Collection and a custom 5-foot-square coffee table. To vary the textures in the room, she introduced a wool sisal rug, faux fur throws and iron

table lamps.

The “casual elegance” theme is carried throughout the house with carefully selected artwork, including a stunning, one-of-a-kind Jay Shoots black-and-white photograph of a bird’s nest; interesting architectural details such as tongue-and-grooved ceilings and shiplap walls; and comfortable yet sophisticated bedrooms, particularly the master suite which features an imposing leather-upholstered wing bed with monogrammed bed linens and personal photos and mementos strategically placed around the room.

That’s not to say the house’s design or decor is predictable in any way. Take, for example, the home office. Hidden away in the crow’s nest above the second floor, it’s not even visible without climbing a narrow set of stairs. Then, there’s the wine room. Inconspicuously

located next to the main staircase, the space, set at a constant 59 degrees, houses hundreds of bottles of wine, as well as a table and chairs, and is covered with cream city brick that the homeowners had transported from Milwaukee. Finally, the clandestine pièce de résistance is a secret passageway in the guest quarters, where a seemingly normal bookshelf in the living

room opens up to reveal the guest bedroom.

Looking back, Franza says, she never could have imagined how the 5,900-square-foot house would be so completely shaped by a simple box full of seashells. So to celebrate, she had the shells framed in a shadow box which now hangs in the home as a constant reminder of inspiration coming from the most unexpected places. *

CREDITS:

Builder/contractor: C.F. Knight

Interior design: Kathleen Franza, KMH Design

Landscape design: Ben Dinkins Landscape Design

Cabinetry: River City Custom Cabinetry

Countertops: Belmarmi

Rugs: Jaffe Rug Gallery

Tile & stone work: J.T. Sims Marble & Tile

Pool designer: Brian Van Bower, Aquatic Consultants

Pool construction: Pools by John Clarkson

Opposite page (left): A bathroom with a view; (right): in the master bedroom, a gray leather-upholstered wing bed sets a sophisticated tone; This page (top left): The guest room living quarters have a surprise design feature: a secret passageway through the bookcase; (top right): on the other side of the secret passageway is the guest room, which has a decidedly more graphic design than the rest of the house; (bottom): tucked away behind the main staircase sits a wine room that many restaurants would be lucky to have.

