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APRIL 2007

EASY WEEKEND LIVING

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April 2007
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VOL 26 NO 4



DUTCH TREAT

ARCHITECT BOBBY MCALPINE ADAPTS HIS SIMPLE-BUT-SOPHISTICATED STYLE
TO AN ATLANTA FAMILY'S ROSEMARY BEACH VACATION HOME

WRITTEN BY HEATHER J. PAPER PHOTOGRAPHED BY ERICA GEORGE DINES PRODUCED BY GILL AUTREY



STAN and MELANIE BENECKI know a thing or two about developing properties. As the owners of Benecki Homes, they've worked in numerous locales across the Southeast. But when they decided to build their own beach house, there was no question where it would be: Florida's Rosemary Beach tugged at their heartstrings. "I grew up on the Gulf Coast, so that water—any

kind of water—pulls me," says Melanie. "And it's one of the prettiest beaches in the world."

If that weren't enough of a draw, the accessibility from Atlanta was attractive, too, as was the idea of new urbanism, of building a new town. "Our backgrounds are in design and architecture," she adds, "and we're so taken with the creativity down there!"

The Rosemary Beach vacation home of Atlanta residents Stan and Melanie Benecki has Dutch colonial roots, with a 1940's sensibility in that it has a "humble scale," says project manager David Baker. "One of the best things about this house is how well the main living area works with the courtyard; they seem to join, even though they're divided by an exterior wall." Lantern, Bevolo, (504) 522-9485. ■ Melanie Benecki, opposite, peers over the salt-water pool.



Having worked with him on several previous projects, the Beneckis were obviously taken with their architect, too. Bobby McAlpine of McAlpine Tankersley Architecture "is very good with small spaces," chimes in Stan. "He can make a 3,000-square-foot house feel like 7,000. Bobby creates very technical houses that look very simplistic. He's just a genius."

For his part, McAlpine thoroughly enjoys the collaboration, too. "They are unique people in that they both possess a superior amount of style and a zest for living. They put all of the things that they do in their professions to work into their own lives, too. And they put a tremendous amount of faith in me. We have

worked together enough that we're very much in sync."

The Beneckis requested architecture with Dutch influence, which suited McAlpine just fine. "I love Dutch architecture because it's kind and it's glad—a little silly, but in the end it articulates an elegant gesture," he says. "It somehow gets away with that without any pretense."

Then, in this architect's inimitable way, he simply sat down and sketched out the entire house. "The greatest challenge in any of these new urbanist places is the tremendous amount of restrictions; a lot of things fall into place quickly because they're prescribed," he explains. "Once you take into account what the client wants and what *can* be done, it's a real jackrabbit



start. From my point of view, it's great fun; it's like a party game. You sit down and, by the time you get up, you're done!"

In fact, McAlpine typically does his preliminary sketches on nothing more than a 4- by 5-inch pad, sometimes even a cocktail napkin, says David Baker, who served as project manager on the house. "Bobby has a gift for reading his clients and pairing them with an in-house architect or project manager that can help develop the house. This one lent itself to be humble and sweet, and it grew from that."

The residence, says McAlpine, operates much like a Savannah-style house in the sense that you enter through the courtyard door. It's intensely private, in large part due to the way it turns in on itself.



The kitchen is quite simple, with little more than a stove, drawer storage and an island that accommodates grabbing a quick bite. So where are the rest of the essentials? "Bobby designed the kitchen with a working pantry off of it," says Melanie, of the pantry, left, which houses appliances such as the refrigerator, microwave, and coffeemaker. Open shelves make it easy to find what you're looking for. Concrete countertops, Dex Studios, (404) 753-0600. ■ Set against a backdrop of tongue-and-groove painted walls, the living room, opposite, exemplifies Melanie's deft hand at understated elegance. "Stan and Melanie have their own style they bring into play—specifically, the elegance of cotton," says architect Bobby McAlpine. "Cotton can be anything, anywhere, at any time, but isn't it great that it's just cotton?" Round tables, Julian Chichester, Oliver Walker & Co., ADAC, (404) 262-1408. ■ McAlpine's "Shelter Wing" sofa for Lee Industries tucks into this dining area. Accompanied by a trio of his "Sack" chairs, it's further evidence that, in this house, comfort comes first. Flooring, Peacock Pavers, (800) 264-2072. Furniture, Lee Industries; leeindustries.com for Atlanta retailers.



A slipcovered headboard blends quietly into the background in this master retreat, allowing a line-up of 1830's seaweed prints to lead the eye from one bedside lamp to the other. Bedside tables, Oly Studio, Bungalow Classic, (404) 367-8522. Headboard, Shabby Slips, (850) 231-4164. ■ A vintage-style bathtub is the undisputed focal point in the master bath, but cabinetry that recalls the color of rosemary adds to the relaxing atmosphere. Tub, Kohler, (800) 456-4537. Faucets, Easton Collection, Waterworks, (404) 266-1080.



"When you walk through the gate, right away you're in an oasis," says Melanie. "There's palm trees and blue skies with no buildings overlooking. And that's before you even hit the front door. The space is so emotional, which is what Bobby tries to do—and what I try to do. It's relaxing; there's a cocooning effect."

Once inside, the main living area is one large room. Still, there's a feeling of separate spaces. At one end, "the kitchen is like a stage overlooking all of the other seating groups," says Melanie. "And Bobby purposely placed the dining room on the opposite wall so you're always walking through the space, always feeling like you're using the entire room."

Between the kitchen and dining areas are two seating groups—one, with a sofa

and pair of chairs, overlooks the swimming pool while the other, a fireside seating group, the architect refers to as an inglenook. "A client once taught me that in a big house you can do almost anything with the furniture," he says. "And it often tends to float in a room. There is a point of being 'attached' in an inglenook or a booth or a banquette that grounds you. This [inglenook] is a cozy living spot that's annexed to a larger, more gregarious group of furnishings. So it's a room that tends all emotions; it pulls everyone together."


The color palette established in the main living area flows right on into the first-floor master, too. "My first thought was to go with an oyster shell scheme—all purples and grays," says Melanie. "But

it just didn't work. We used Peacock Pavers on the floor, which are really creamy, and the contrast just didn't feel right. I didn't want [the palette] to be cliché, something very typically 'beachy.' Yet, at the same time, I kept looking at the gulf; it's that beautiful blue-green, an indescribable blue-green." Thus, the pavers became the "sand" and the blue-greens throughout the house the "water."

"Like a lot of the Rosemary Beach houses, it's very efficient," says McAlpine, "but because Stan and Melanie know what people want, it has a perfect listing of amenities. It's friendly to families but perfect for adult couples, too."

The architect laughs, too, as he again reflects on the close working relationship, noting that while he designed the house, Melanie took charge of the interiors—using many pieces from the collection he designed for Lee Industries. "We're all over each other in that house!"

■ For Melanie Benecki's favorite places to shop at the beach, visit atlantahomesmag.com.

A two-story house with a large balcony overlooking a pool. The house has a white exterior, a dark brown shingled roof, and a balcony with a wooden railing. The pool is in the foreground, and there is outdoor furniture and a large umbrella on the left side. The house has several windows and doors, some with shutters. The overall style is a mix of traditional and modern architecture.

"The nice thing about our lot—and the thing we love so much, besides our salt-water pool—is that it's got such a large courtyard that provides privacy," says Melanie. Outdoor furniture, Kingsley-Bate, Logan Gardens, ADAC, (404) 231-4808.

Design Details
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