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# Character-Driven

On Florida's Siesta Key, a family built their forever house from the ground up, fashioning a home that could fool even a local into believing it had been there all along

By Paige Porter Fischer  
Photographs by Jessica Glynn



## Among the oaks

Traditional clapboard siding, copper gutters, and a cedar-shake roof deliver a traditional look to this brand-new home. Architect Kurt Zobrist worked closely with Nautilus Homes to ensure that every design detail felt authentic and appropriate for the magical setting. The house fits perfectly between the seawall and two century-old live oak trees.

## Bringing the indoors out

The porch features a pair of rattan sofas with cushions in white performance fabric, and an unfinished teak coffee table that will patina beautifully over time. "This space is relaxed, inviting, and pretty, but it was designed for easy maintenance," says designer Jett Thompson. The porches have double retractable screens (one for insects and one for hurricane protection) that drop down at the push of a button, allowing the windows and doors of the home to open onto the porch without any threat of bugs entering. "Those screens allow the house to truly function as an indoor-outdoor home," says Zobrist.



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hen interior designer Jett Thompson first saw the bay-front lot where her clients were building their home on Florida's Siesta Key, she almost couldn't believe her eyes. "I went to the house very early in construction, and it was situated under these giant live oak trees that were dripping with Spanish moss," she recalls. "It honestly made my heart sing because they hadn't taken down all the native trees. They didn't clear-cut the lot to build the house, and they added mature native plants back upon completion of the project."

The intention was clear: With the help of architect Kurt Zobrist of Cincinnati-based Zobrist Design Group, the couple envisioned a home so melded to its mature landscape that it would appear to have been there for a very long time. "The owners are an outdoor family, and they wanted the house to be a part of its landscape, and for the landscape to draw them back outside," Zobrist says. "I came up with this H-shape design that fit perfectly between the grand live oaks and the seawall, and the house itself hugs a large grassy courtyard and swimming pool."

Because the clients were inspired by the Bahamian architecture of The Abacos, with nods to Old Key West, Zobrist was deliberate in his choice of materials. "We opted to use wood-frame construction and clapboard siding, because it felt more traditional, and a cedar-shake roof with really large, extra-thick shingles, which isn't the norm in this part of Florida because it requires additional maintenance to withstand the elements," he says. Zobrist also designed generous porches off almost every room in the house—seven total—which extend the family's living areas and keep the home's interiors much cooler in the hot Florida sun.

The couple tapped Thompson, a sixth-generation Floridian, to ensure the interiors lived up to the home's thoughtful architectural details. "The family had been to my [Naples] store a few times, which reflects my personal aesthetic—one that is layered with texture, collected, and a juxtaposition of old and new pieces," she says. "They said they wanted a house that would feel like it had been there for generations."

That was music to Thompson's ears, so she layered the home with warm woods, woven textures, and thoughtful color. To keep the indoor-outdoor connection seamless, she implemented an organic palette inspired by the home's natural setting, featuring lots of blue, periwinkle, and green, while mixing in surprise pops of pink. She delivered island style with raffia, wicker, and rattan; the art is a mix of pieces the client painted and collected through travel, as well as a grouping of antique Florida maps. Ceilings feature 150-year-old hand-hewn timber pieces, which deliver an immediate sense of history. Waxed French oak floors unite the spaces—except in a few spots, where Old Carolina Brick laid in a herringbone pattern delivers additional patina. Coral stone, a local material, played into the mix, too: on the fireplace mantel in the living room, on the home's front steps, and in the perimeter banding on all the porches.

For furnishings, Thompson did what she does best, curating pieces that appear as though they've been lovingly added to the rooms over time. "I don't buy a lot of pairs, unless it's shoes or earrings," says Thompson. "I like the tension of putting old and new, modern and traditional together. I think that is what makes a home feel collected. This house is quite pretty without being fussy. It's sophisticated, but still carefree. And more than anything, I think it's full of character even though it's brand-new."



## Classic Florida style

The expansive living room required thoughtful spatial planning. The sectional sofa by Verellen—flanked by two chaises large enough to sleep in—lives with four wicker spa chairs. Thompson positioned a pair of reclaimed-wood coffee tables back to back to anchor the seating arrangement. She chose Benjamin Moore White Dove for the interior walls throughout the house, most of which wear horizontal, nickel-gapped planking. The 60-inch-wide fireplace is the focal point of the main living area. "We gave it a southern Florida-style stucco finish, for texture and warmth, and repeated the same finish over the hood in the kitchen," says Zobrist. The mantel is fashioned from coral stone.

## Light & airy

The center portion of the house is only one room deep, allowing light to flow through the kitchen's windows, which take the place of upper cabinets on both exterior walls. A large, pale blue island anchors the space; reclaimed beams above it deliver a sense of history. Thompson chose to forgo a line of identical seating in favor of something asymmetrical and more visually inspiring: a double bench by Hickory Chair alongside two barstools upholstered in performance leather. Reclaimed bricks and wood add texture and character above the range. "We knew for lighting that we needed something big, but we didn't want something loud," she says. "We settled on these mercury glass fixtures, which feel grand without taking attention away from the other pretty moments."



## A quiet space

"The starting point for the couple's bedroom was the print on these Matouk pillow shams," says Thompson, who carried the pale blue-and-green palette to the window draperies, a lattice print by Galbraith & Paul. Boudoir chairs and an ottoman by Hickory Chair compose a quiet seating area in the serene space.



## Modern-traditional style

"It was such a voluminous room that we decided it needed this wood-and-iron bed—a more modern take on a traditional four-poster," says Thompson. Bleached rough-hewn wooden side tables and hand-thrown pottery lamps by Charlie West balance the contemporary frame. The bench is upholstered in a pale chartreuse fabric, punctuating the space with one more bit of color.



## Architectural details

The spacious back porch, which is 18 feet deep and 44 feet wide, features Old Carolina Brick flooring laid in a herringbone pattern with coral stone banding. Zobrist tucked windows into the dormers to allow natural light into the main living space and covered porch. Thompson paired an outdoor dining table from JANUS et Cie with woven chairs for a relaxed, outdoor vibe.



## Porch "hallway"

Porches encircle the house, illuminated by gas lanterns that flicker like candles in the evenings. "One of my favorite details in the house is the way the brick integrates with the local coral stone on the floors outside," says Thompson. "It's a wonderful marriage of elements that makes the house feel like it's been here for a very long time."



### A separate space

Instead of a disconnected guesthouse, Zobrist created a “cabana” on one wing of the house. Connected to the main house by a sleeping porch, the space functions as a complete “tiny house,” says Zobrist. Rattan-and-acrylic slipper chairs with grass green cushions cozy up to a white sleeper sofa. Stairs lead to a sleeping loft. The custom green cabinet hides refrigerated drink drawers.



### Napping porch

South Carolina-made swinging beds with a Chippendale-style back echo the design of the nearby porch railing. Retractable screens make sleeping on this porch a real possibility.



### Sleepover goals

In the guest cabana, Zobrist and Thompson designed a sleeping loft in such a way that four people could “stay up late talking to each other from their beds and still see one another,” says Thompson, who introduced soft pinks in this ethereal space. “There’s a big window seat that looks out at the water, too. This room feels like a beautiful escape.”

“The clients wanted to build a home that would stand the test of time—that would feel as good in five or 10 years as it does today” —designer Jett Thompson



### Timeless design

The H-shaped house was designed so that the center portion would hold the primary living and entertaining spaces, and each wing would feature sleeping quarters. The primary suite occupies one wing, enjoying its own covered porch and easy access to the pool and hot tub. Homes on Siesta Key must sit 11 feet above sea level, but Zobrist didn't want the "house-on-stilts" look, so he created a more gradual "climb" from the seawall. "We brought in a lot of dirt, so it is a few steps up from the Bay to the pool, and several more steps up to the courtyard, and still a few more stairs up to the porches and house," he says. "It is a much more manageable ascent a few steps at a time."