

# AN ISLAND PLACE

*Inspired by a trend to live in smaller spaces, a well-traveled couple chose Sanibel for their not-so-big house.*

by **SHERRY BECK PAPROCKI**  
photography **CRAIG HILDEBRAND**

DURING THE GLORIOUS DAYS OF SOUTHWEST FLORIDA'S WINTER MONTHS, A FORMER NEWSPAPER EXECUTIVE MAY BE SITTING ON THE BACK PORCH OF HIS SANIBEL DREAM HOME CONSULTING WITH A CLIENT IN A COLD, SNOWY CITY IN THE NORTH. Upstairs, on the home's third level, his wife—a retired college professor—may be stitching new things in her well-equipped sewing room.

This is the space the two have deliberately chosen after years of consideration and experience living in other places. Due to the nature of his newspaper work, this couple has lived in a lot of places and renovated a lot of big, vintage and historic homes. During professional years in the Northeast, the Midwest, Texas and a few other Florida cities, they built a few new houses, too.

Their sparkling new abode is just four houses from one of Sanibel's private, protected beaches. Mornings may mean a walk or a run. Or, the duo may hop in their boat for a trip to another island. Their three adult children and four young grandchildren will visit sporadically, as will a variety of other friends. If their house overflows with guests, not a problem. There's a small, cottage hotel only steps away.

Even though they've just settled into their new space, this couple had already grown to love the natural beauty of the islands during the 12 years they owned a condominium at Captiva's South Seas Resort. They knew that building would be a challenge due to the islands' strict regulations and rules.



**GREAT LIVING**  
The great room of this Sanibel home was influenced by the books of Sarah Susanka, who wrote *The Not So Big House* and others. Sanibel architect Edgar Burton designed the house, which is situated near one of Sanibel's private beaches. At right, a collection of seashells has been organized and framed by the woman of the house.



**ON STILTS**  
The first level of this stilt home was enclosed, providing private parking and storage space. "Getting a building permit on Sanibel is not simple or fast," the husband says of the three-year building process. "The rules are rigorous and there is no such thing as taking a shortcut."

That's one reason, says the man of the house, that they hired an architect and a builder based on Sanibel.

Planning for this house began several years ago when, in the midst of other home projects in other states, the couple began exploring the work of architect and author Sarah Susanka, who wrote *The Not So Big House* and a series of others with similar themes. The books illustrate ways to make small spaces feel and live like big spaces.

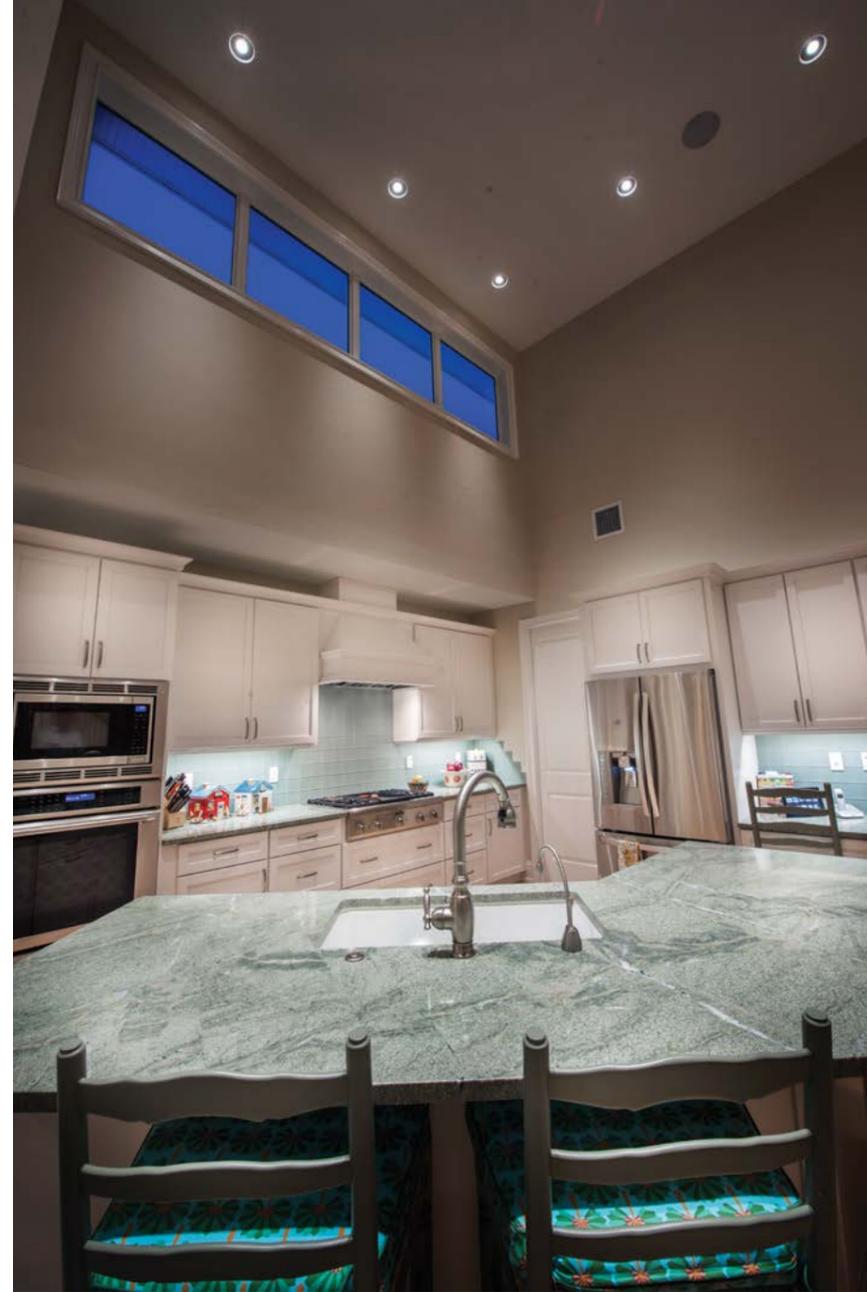
"The square footage of our house is modest (2,222 square feet), but the spaces feel much bigger because of the way we designed it," says the man of the house. His wife adds that their architect is now getting requests for their building plans. Others may also be seeing the benefit to building smaller, too.

Even though this house project was three years in the making, this couple's affinity for working together while they create new living spaces is now well-honed. "We know each other pretty well after 45 years, and trust each other," says the man of the house. "I am more intuitive in making judgments, and she is more deliberate, but our tastes are similar and we know that we can resolve differences of opinion by talking and thinking through them. We make deci-

sions by consensus, and no matter how far apart we might be initially we know that we can talk it through and come to a satisfactory agreement in time."

He enjoys the new kitchen, where he has promised he's taking over the cooking responsibilities. She loves the fact that guests have their own laundry, on the home's third floor near the guest bedroom, and she enjoys her sewing room, which also is furnished with a Murphy bed for guests. "I like my sewing room," she says. "I like that he has his office ... and he can close himself away in it."

"We just love living in this house," her husband adds. "The kitchen is a perfect cook's kitchen. The great room is comfortable and easy to live in. My office is a great man cave and workspace. Her sewing room is great space for her purposes. The garage is enormous and gives us lots of storage and workspace. And, the pool and spa are wonderful."



**EFFICIENT DESIGN**

All of the accoutrements of a luxury kitchen were installed here with an island that divides the space from the other main floor living area. The unique granite is named "Costa Esmeralda" and the glass tile is by Island Stone, in a color called "Breeze."



**UNIQUE APPEAL**

The home's genius includes its many nooks that provide convenience in a small space. Above, as the staircase winds to the third story—where a guest suite, sewing room and second laundry are located—shelves are tucked underneath to accommodate toys and such. At left, the homeowners chose to extend their kitchen countertop into the dining area, providing a built-in cabinet for storage and extra space for food preparation.

In a last-minute decision during the design phase, the couple decided to add an elevator after realizing it was more cost-efficient during the building process than installing it at a later date. "We are vigorous now, but this will be our old-age house, and we might not be so vigorous in 15 years," the man of the house says. "It's great for hauling groceries upstairs!"

Meanwhile, their not-so-big living on Sanibel has been a good choice. "The house is everything we had hoped it would be, and it is easy and fun to live in," adds the man of the house. AH

*Architect: Edgar Burton*

*Builder: Dan Hahn Custom Builders*

*Interior Design: Julie Hopson with Marya Teets of Dan Hahn*

*Landscape Design: RS Walsh of Sanibel*

**OWNERS' QUARTERS**

The homeowners' suite is perched among the treetops on the second story, with easy access to the rear porch. The couple also appreciates other private spaces in the house: The woman enjoys a third-floor sewing room, while the man has a spacious office.



**YEAR-ROUND LIVING**  
A well-designed rear porch extends across the entire second level of the home. Various spaces can be used for relaxing, as well as entertaining. Below, the couple can check in on their spacious pool and Jacuzzi.

