

BETWEEN SUN AND SEA

AN AUTHENTIC KEYS HOUSE
IN ISLAMORADA EPITOMIZES
WATERFRONT LIVING

*I*n the early and mid-twentieth century, life in the Florida Keys was simple, relaxed, and connected to nature - and houses reflected that. And though those qualities are still at the heart of

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the Keys experience, time and progress have brought a degree of modernity, and even grandeur, to streetscapes and residential dwellings.

When Derek and Tara Rodberg decided to move from New Jersey to Islamorada, where Derek grew up, they wanted their home to reflect the simple insouciance of the Florida Keys. That is, after all, why they wanted to relocate in the first place.

"We missed living on the water, so we wanted a house with water frontage, a lot of sunlight and coastal charm," Tara Rodberg explains. "A place where we could spend a lot of time outdoors with our children."

When they found their waterfront property on Snake River, they hired architect Robert Barnes, who knew Keys design almost instinctively. "I was born in Homestead," Barnes says. "We were tomatto farmers. In the summers, we fished in the Keys.

**J. Robert Barnes, AIA
and Sam Murray,
Robert Barnes &
Associates**

ARCHITECTURE

**Kerry Allabastro, ASID
Allabastro Designs**
INTERIOR
DESIGN

**Brett Ekblom,
Native Construction**
Contracting
BUILDER

**Richard P. Brown,
ASLA
Brown & Crebbin
Design Studio**
LANDSCAPE
ARCHITECTURE





Jefferson Millwork executed the curved built-in under the staircase as well as the teal wall unit in the living room that Allabastro custom designed.

I can remember as a little kid spending so much time there."

If this project is any indication, that early exposure surely informed his design sensibility. The home Barnes and his late partner, Sam Murray, designed for the Rodbergs is "the epitome of what Keys architecture looked like when I was a kid," Barnes muses.

He describes it as a combination between Bahamian light frame construction and traditional

Antebellum, six-bay Southern Colonial design. It is true to the Keys' architectural identity dating back a century or so, he says.

"People in the Keys did not have a lot of decoration or frills in their homes. Back then, there was no-ego, minimal, light frame vernacular architecture," the architect explains.

Though the Rodbergs' house is large, elements such as gable ends with fly rafter supports, a standing seam metal roof, and abundant porches



and covered terraces give it a lighter, more delicate appearance.

Wood siding - actually not wood but rather a composite to weather the elements better - over masonry and minimal columns contribute to the craftsman look.

Aesthetically, it was what the owners wanted. But more importantly, it gave them the lifestyle they craved. Positioned along the river with long views of the water and gentle terracing leading to a fish-

ing dock, the house is perfectly connected to its surroundings.

"There is a water connection on all sides," Barnes notes, "and different exterior environments to experience it in. Depending on where you are, there is different light and also, the heat builds up differently."

"It's a beautifully positioned property, during day and night," builder Brett Ekblom, principal at Native Construction Contracting says. "You can

Interior designer Kerry Allabastro was tasked with creating interior millwork and cabinetry in keeping with the exterior architectural aesthetic.

Composite wood siding and accents, such as fly rafter supports, give the house a light frame, craftsman look despite its scale. A teal custom-finished wall unit is a focal point in the living room. A palette of lime green and various shades of blue against cool whites brings the colors of the outdoors in. An oolite terrace with tropical plantings leads from the pool deck to the fishing dock. The dock, situated on the Snake River, is the perfect spot to catch all manner of fish, shrimp and lobster at any time of year.





stand on the dock and catch large mangrove snapper, lobster, tarpon, bay shrimp ... There is always activity in the water at different times of year."

The interiors beautifully embrace the outdoors, even when doors and windows are not open. Huge expanses of glass on both levels admit the sunlight from every angle. And because exterior detailing has been brought indoors, the boundaries between inside and out are blurred. Designer Kerry Allabastro executed the interior architectural detailing to maximize this effect.

Practically every wall and ceiling is clad in bead-board or wood siding to give the space a craftsman cottage look. Other elements, such as outrigger-style brackets, a staircase inspired by the movement of mangroves and beamed ceilings contribute to that tradition.





Floors are made of reclaimed Virginia barn wood that was engineered for greater durability. Entry and stairwell ceilings are crafted of sunken cypress, taken from old logs recovered from rivers and custom milled.

"There is no drywall in this house," Ekblom notes. "Every single wall and ceiling has wood on it." Allabastro adds, "It's designed to look like an old Florida beach house, but with all the modern amenities."

The cottage tradition is also reflected in the furnishings. A combination of dark and white-painted woods with cane and seagrass accents lends an island flavor, while a palette of happy colors - lime green, turquoise and sunny yellow - places the home in a southern Florida context.

"The blues and greens reflect the outdoors and

tropical living," Allabastro says. "All fabrics are either heavy duty or outdoor, so they can entertain, and their children can spend time there with friends, without worry."

For the Rodbergs' three young children, one space gets more use than any other: the bunk room over the garage. It sleeps eight and includes a game room and lounge area so their activities can be self-contained.

For the grownups, the master bedroom holds the most appeal. Floor-to-ceiling French doors open up to a broad covered terrace that extends over the water, giving the space a resort-like feel.

"The bedroom is like a retreat," Tara Rodberg says. "When you look down at the water, you feel like you're in heaven." A cottage-style four-poster bed in a lime green finish, along with spa-blue





window treatments with an orchid motif, repeats the tropical sensibility of the public spaces. The same is true of the master bath, where white bead-board and a honeycomb tile floor are punched up by a lime green fabric.

The Rodbergs invariably spend a lot of time outdoors, around the pool deck or down on the dock. To further connect the house with the water, landscape architect Richard Brown created a terraced effect between the pool and the water line using oolite stone and various plantings. "There was a grade change down to the seawall," Brown explains. "By using oolite stone blocks in a curvilinear fashion, we complemented the shape of the wall and made a transition between the two distinct areas."

Plantings were used mostly to soften the foundation of the house and accent its height. Coconut

palms, Alexander palms and Christmas palms lend that tropical feel, while bougainvillea, birds of paradise and other flowering plants add color.

Thanks to strategic lighting, the mood is completely different at night. "We had to create an atmosphere at night as well as the day," Brown says. In addition to fixed landscape lights, Brown introduced copper propane torches around the pool. "There is nothing like the dancing light of the torches on the ripples of the pool at night," the landscape architect enthuses. "It's a wonderful atmosphere." The idea, Brown says, was to create a small resort feeling: "It's their permanent home but it feels like a getaway."

As far as the Rodbergs are concerned, they got what they had always dreamt of, and then some. Not only is the home casual and comfortable, it also epitomizes the Keys' waterside lifestyle.





"We've created one of the prettiest and most tasteful homes in all the Keys," Ekblom says. "It's an icon, a new standard of building in the Upper Keys, a level of style and quality others can aspire to." And as Barnes puts it, "It's one of the most serene feeling homes I've ever been involved in. It fits on this property like it was always there." ▲

RESOURCES

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