

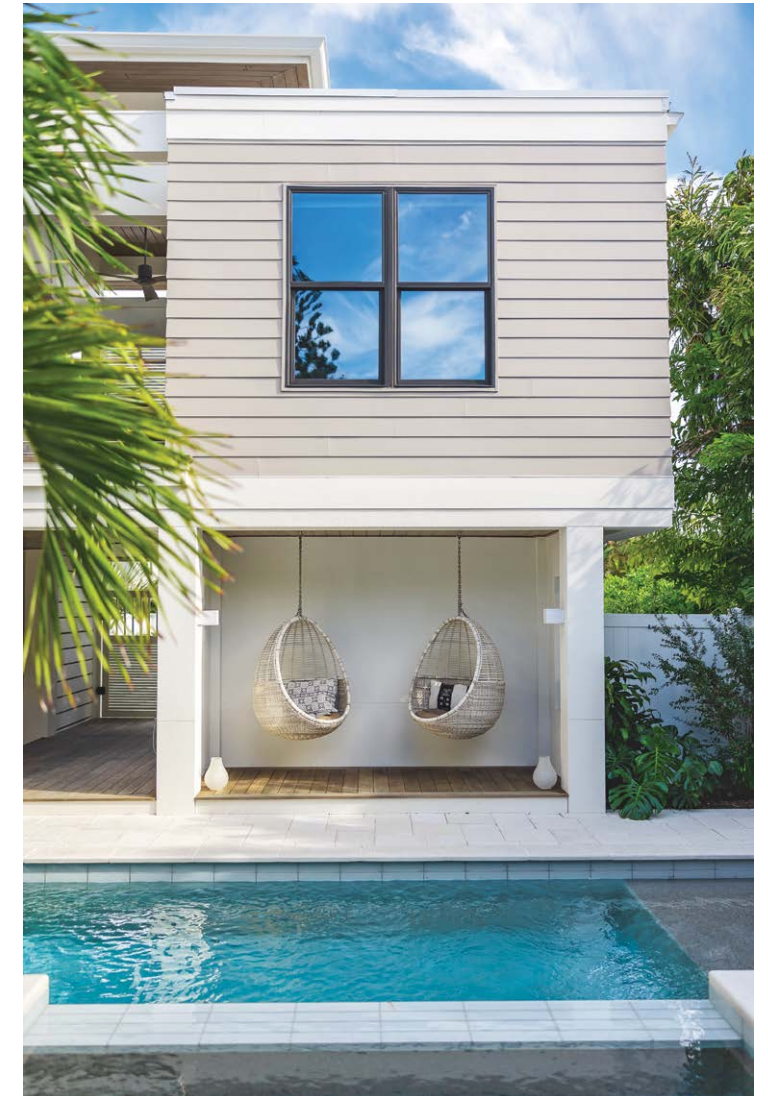
# KARMIC CONNECTION

A MIXTURE OF CIRCUMSTANCE AND FATE DRAWS AN ATLANTA DESIGNER TO ANNA MARIA ISLAND, THE IDEAL SPOT FOR A CUSTOM BEACH GETAWAY FOR HER AND HER FAMILY



Nestled on the tip of Anna Maria Island, this modern beach residence designed by architect David Wash emanates a West Indies vibe with its crisp white trellises, spandrels, and breezy Bahama shutters. A giant white planter draping with bougainvillea shapes the home's entrance.

INTERIOR DESIGN LAURA FREEMAN,  
MERITS DESIGN GROUP, ATLANTA, GA  
ARCHITECTURE DAVID WASH, DAVID WASH ARCHITECT,  
BRADENTON, FL  
TEXT JEANNE DE LATHOUDER  
PHOTOGRAPHY DAVID CANNON, MONROE, GA



ABOVE: Designed with impeccable sightlines and various pockets for entertaining and seating options, the pool area embodies a luxury-resort aesthetic. A pair of hanging pod chairs from CB2 offers a blissful cocooning experience.

*“LOCATION, LOCATION, LOCATION”* were the first words interior designer Laura Freeman expressed when describing the inherent charm of her family’s new vacation spot on Anna Maria Island. Having just sold their Atlanta home of 17 years, the designer and her husband Render began looking for the ideal place to build a getaway retreat. Their must-have list included easy access to a beach where they could walk barefoot for miles, a place to ride bikes safely, a nearby major airport for business travel and visiting guests, and lots of terrific restaurants and cultural offerings.

“Anna Maria’s proximity to Sarasota is absolutely perfect,” says Freeman, founder and principal of Merits Design Group, an award-winning interior architecture and design firm based in Atlanta. “We can spend quiet time on the tip of the island, and when we feel like a





LEFT: Outfitted in shiplap and reclaimed woods, the family room emits a casual California beach feel. Open bookcases backed with Phillip Jeffries grass-cloth wallpaper flank the TV wall. Mitered pieces of reclaimed wood compose the ceiling beam as well as the cap for a built-in banquette.

RIGHT: A rustic reproduction trellis table topped with a round mirror defines the long foyer where a showpiece lighting fixture the family named the Death Star hangs overhead. Homeowner and interior designer Laura Freeman procured the Teddy & Wool wall hanging.



bit more bustle, we can head to downtown Sarasota for shopping, restaurants, art exhibits, and theater.”

During the home search, Freeman was also working as an art director for interior projects at Walt Disney World. She would strap her beach cruiser to the back of her car and spend weekends in coastal towns that were on the couple’s list. “Anna Maria was a no-brainer,” she adds. “It has a quaint small-town feel with old-school architecture, and there are no cookie-cutter franchises and no gated communities.” Plus, there were also serendipitous signs guiding the family to land there. Freeman’s father played minor league baseball with the Pittsburgh Pirates, and the Pirates’ spring training camp is now in the area. The Freemans’ new home sits around the block from the homes of famous ball players like Eddie Mathews and Warren Spahn, who built a group of cottages there in the 1950s and baptized them with names such as Catcher’s Mitt and The Diamond. “We called my grandfather ‘Poppo,’ and there is a Poppo’s Taqueria,” says Freeman. “The karma was strong, and it felt like fate had brought us here—we loved it immediately.”



An abundance of specialty storage keeps kitchen countertops clutter-free. Hidden drawers stow cooking utensils, a microwave, and other essentials. Palecek counter stools and Surya rugs bring textural contrast to glossy surfaces.



After discovering an overgrown lot, the couple's builder, Dan Gagne, flew his drone above the property, showing them potential views from a main second floor, third floor, and proposed roof deck. "We saw gorgeous views of the Gulf and vistas of the Skyline Bridge to St. Pete," Freeman notes. "Those drone shots sealed the deal."

Before breaking ground on their 3,000-square-foot home, the couple consulted with David Wash, an area architect who came highly recommended by Gagne. Armed with an inspiration photo deck, they mapped out their vision—a place where family, friends, and young kids could gather to cook and eat amazing food, socialize, play games, enjoy peaceful spaces, and take in the views.

ABOVE RIGHT: Deeply contoured, precision-cut Porcelanosa tiles appear seamless behind the coffee and wine bar shelves. Built-in cubicles stow wine bottles and refrigerator drawers store anything that needs to be chilled.

RIGHT: Bahama shutters in this outdoor nook prevent glare from the morning and midday sun while allowing sea breezes and beautifully filtered natural light. The owners relocated the table from their Atlanta home's screened porch. The base was rescued from an old Tennessee factory, and the vendor added a reclaimed-wood surface.







ABOVE: Called “the lounge” by the homeowners, this cozy banquette is a preferred spot for morning breakfast and laptop work. Adjacent to a built-in desk area, a sleek oval table from Room & Board complements the angular seating proportions. A stunning shell vase and a montage of artwork, including Picasso prints, infuse colorful personality into the corner.



LEFT: Family and guests gravitate to this breezy alfresco family room to enjoy morning coffee. Anchored by a Dash & Albert rug, modern RH furnishings blend effortlessly with antique accent tables.



The music and movie room doubled as an office for the designer’s husband during the pandemic. A custom storage unit houses the family’s vinyl record collection, and acoustic drywall covered with Winfield Thybony grass-cloth wallpaper buffers the noise. The flooring features Polynesian patterned planks made from recycled materials.

“After discussions with Laura and Render, it became clear that taking advantage of the outdoor setting and maximizing the perception of space would be top priorities,” says Wash, who heads up his own firm. “While the upper-level primary suite and roof deck enjoys the beach view, it was imperative to organize the ground and main levels around a private central courtyard to create an internal space secure from outside influences.”

“David’s modular approach was perfect and knocked our vision out of the park,” says Freeman. “He and I worked really well together, and I thought he captured the exterior style of modern-California-meets-West-Indies that we were going for very well. Once the exterior shell was settled, I got to work on the interior spaces.”

Freeman’s leading source of inspiration celebrates the natural landscape—the colors of the dunes and driftwood, the incredible hues of the Gulf of Mexico, the sunsets, and the wildlife of coastal birds, shells, and turtles. Additional inspiration came from a family trip to Greece in 2018, where she fell in love with the open-air concept of living, white materials like linen and stucco, and layers of texture.





ABOVE: The bunk room includes custom ladders with spliced cotton rope detailing. Carpet tiles from FLOR offered the ideal solution for the room's irregular shape and layout.

BELOW: Freeman developed a passion for African art after traveling to Kenya. Hence, a trio of African shields she foraged from an Atlanta antiques market backdrops an armchair tucked into a cozy corner of the primary bedroom.

“Composite siding, stucco, pergolas, and aluminum pipe railings are consistent with the traditional island structures but expressed more modernly,” notes Wash. “This modern touch—a collaborative effort between Laura and me—is probably the most satisfying aspect of this design and one that could only be achieved with the client’s openness to alternative ideas.”

A graphic designer with a master’s degree in interior architecture and design, Freeman is well-versed in building custom architectural elements and furniture. Because space was tight, she designed all the built-in components, including a primary bathroom vanity, floating nightstands, a laundry room, a kitchen banquette and desk/mini home office area, the family room’s TV wall, the kitchen layout and pantry, a coffee/wine bar, a guest bunk room, an outdoor kitchen, and a pizza-oven station. An advocate of sustainable design, she deliberately chose salvaged pieces, reclaimed woods, and materials that were functionally and aesthetically eco-friendly. Durable, easy-to-clean organic linens, washable slipcovers, jute rugs, and performance fabrics were priorities, as was the hard-wearing and sustainable hickory engineered flooring—an essential for wet and sandy feet.

“My COVID silver lining was that I was furloughed and then laid off from Disney, which coincided exactly with the time we broke ground on our home,” she adds. “It allowed me to take a super deep dive into all the details, and, as divine intervention would have it, I was called back to Disney two months before we moved in. What incredible timing—we feel so fortunate to have this wonderful home to share with the people we love.”



Private and peaceful, the primary bedroom includes a desk space where Freeman can work remotely. Caned furniture from Pottery Barn melds with the island aesthetic and the casual allure of a platform bed by RH. The couple’s travel mementos from Amsterdam, Greece, and Kenya accent the open bookcase.



With its stellar sightlines, the multi-faceted outdoor area emanates a welcoming vibe. The wood-fired pizza-oven station accommodates frequent family nights around the pool and hot tub.



**SOURCES**

**FOYER**

Console table – Vintage, Scott Antique Market, Atlanta, GA  
 Round mirror – Kelly Clarkson Home, [wayfair.com](http://wayfair.com)  
 Pendant lighting – Graypants, [graypants.com](http://graypants.com)  
 Area rug – Pottery Barn, [potterybarn.com](http://potterybarn.com)

**FAMILY ROOM**

Sofa – Pottery Barn, [potterybarn.com](http://potterybarn.com)  
 Club chair – Acquisitions, Atlanta, GA  
 Cocktail table – RH, Atlanta, GA  
 Side tables – Vintage, Scott Antique Market, Atlanta, GA  
 Table lamps – Palecek, ADAC, Atlanta, GA  
 Area rug – Serena & Lily, Atlanta, GA

**KITCHEN**

Cabinetry and island designed by Merits Design Group, Atlanta, GA, and fabricated by Progressive Cabinetry, Bradenton, FL  
 Pendant lighting – Rejuvenation, [rejuvenation.com](http://rejuvenation.com)  
 Stools – Palecek, ADAC, Atlanta, GA

**OUTDOOR NOOK**

Table – Vintage, Scott Antique Market, Atlanta, GA  
 Stools – Kathy Kuo Home, [kathykuohome.com](http://kathykuohome.com)  
 Lighting – Hinkley Lighting, [hinkleylightinglights.com](http://hinkleylightinglights.com)

**LOUNGE**

Banquette designed by Merits Design Group, Atlanta, GA, and fabricated by Sundance Fine Carpentry, Bradenton, FL

**ALFRESCO FAMILY ROOM**

Seating and cocktail table – RH, Atlanta, GA

**MUSIC AND MOVIE ROOM**

Sofa – RH, Atlanta, GA

Ottoman – Crate & Barrel, Atlanta, GA  
 Side table – Merits Design Group, Atlanta, GA  
 Wallcovering – Winfield Thybony, Kravet Showroom, ADAC, Atlanta, GA  
 Area rug – Dash & Albert, Codarus, Atlanta, GA

**BUNK ROOM**

Bunk beds designed by Merits Design Group, Atlanta, GA, and fabricated by Sundance Fine Carpentry, Bradenton, FL

**PRIMARY BEDROOM**

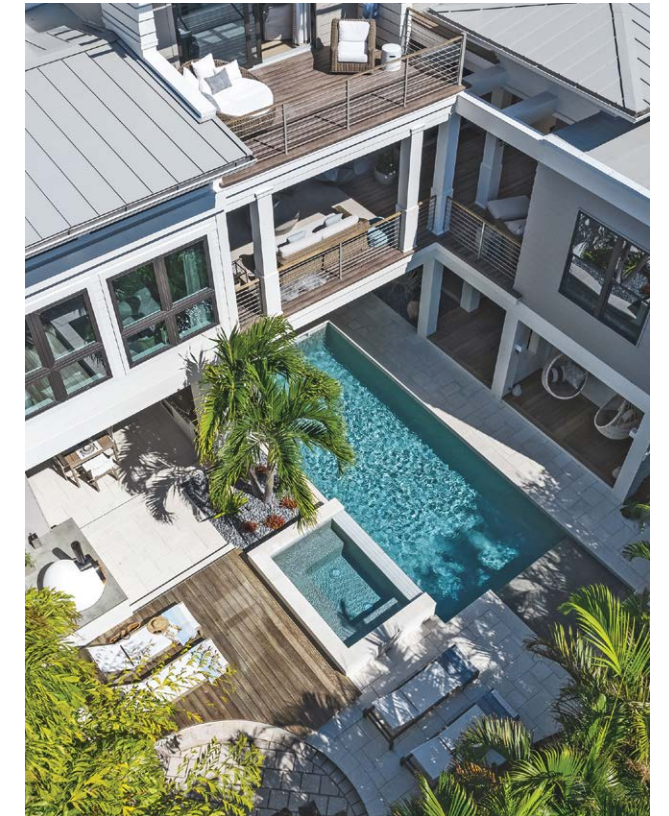
Bed – RH, Atlanta, GA  
 Club chair – Acquisitions, Atlanta, GA  
 Wicker side table – Vintage, Scott Antique Market, Atlanta, GA  
 Desk and chair – Pottery Barn, [potterybarn.com](http://potterybarn.com)  
 Area rug – Serena & Lily, Atlanta, GA

**OUTDOOR DINING**

Table and chairs – RH, Atlanta, GA  
 Pizza-oven station designed by Merits Design Group, Atlanta, GA, and fabricated by Californo, [californo.co](http://californo.co)

**THROUGHOUT**

Builder – Gagne Construction, Anna Maria Island, FL  
 Landscape architecture – Jeff Gilchrist Landscaping, Bradenton, FL  
 Landscape lighting – Bright Lights Landscape Lighting, Sarasota, FL  
 Exterior sconces – Hinkley Lighting, [hinkleylightinglights.com](http://hinkleylightinglights.com)  
 Shutters – Gulf Coast Shutter Co., Bradenton, FL  
 Pool and jacuzzi – Tom Sanger Pools, Bradenton, FL



ABOVE: A drone shot reveals a spectacular bird's-eye view of the property's backyard, which centers around a courtyard pool and multiple outdoor spaces.



Simply styled, the outdoor kitchen and dining space take design cues from the couple's trip to Greece. Concrete countertops and smooth white stucco make perfect partners for the ipe cabinets.





## JERRY SPARKMAN

Sweet Sparkman Architecture  
*"Moving Parts," page 74*

The tropical modernist home that graces our cover didn't always look like it does now. Its current appeal has all to do with the work of Jerry Sparkman, one of Sarasota's leading architects. The owners of the residence called Sparkman when they wanted to add square footage to the dwelling, but were limited in what they could do as a result of state code restrictions. Sparkman's solution was to build up. "We made some improvements to make it more resilient to storms, but we still kept its position with the great vantage points across the sand," he says. "We took our time and we did it properly."



## MEG CARSON & CHLOE HARLAN

Emcy Interior Design  
*"Endless Holiday," page 80*

After a husband and wife purchased their dream vacation home in Longboat Key and called on Emcy Interior Design to bring it to life, in came Meg Carson and Chloe Harlan to the rescue. Named Channelside for its private waterfront location, the property's coastal environment drove the inspiration for the interior décor. "Organic, soft, and elevated, this home will remain timeless for its many years of family vacationing," says Harlan. "The home gets rave reviews every time someone new visits. As one of the designers, that's the best endorsement you can get."



## LAURA FREEMAN

Merits Design Group  
*"Karmic Connection," page 90*

Designer Laura Freeman ensured her getaway home in Anna Maria Island was everything she envisioned by overseeing the interior design herself. She did have some help, however. "Our architect, David Wash, captured the exterior style of modern-California-meets-West-Indies that we were going for," says Freeman. "Once the exterior shell was settled, I got to work on the interior spaces." Her inspiration? The natural landscape right outside the house and a trip to Greece in 2018, where she fell in love with the open-air concept of living, white materials like linen and stucco, and layers of texture.



## TRACEE MURPHY

Trade Mark Interiors  
*"Personal Statement," page 102*

Although a bit intimidated at first, designer Tracee Murphy says that taking on the design work of her California-style ranch home in Sarasota allowed her to incorporate all the elements she loves about design and really lean into her own distinctive style. "The guiding principle that drove the design of this house was the idea of loved ones," says Murphy. "I wanted a true family home with a classic and sophisticated aesthetic, and that's what was achieved. This is a primary residence for my husband and I, as well as our youngest son, but between our other four children, who live in different cities but visit often, it always feels like a full house."



## KELLY KAISER-PUTNAM

Orange Moon Interiors  
*"American Coastal," page 112*

When a New Hampshire businessman and father of two purchased a beachside villa in Siesta Key, all the vacation home had going for it was its prime location. Everything else was a blank slate, which was ideal for designer Kelly Kaiser-Putnam to work her magic. Kaiser-Putnam's approach was to amplify the vacation feel of the property with a coastal look that makes the most out of natural textures and bold moments of pattern and color. In terms of surfaces, Kaiser-Putnam and her team opted for wallcoverings for wow-moments that, as the designer puts it, "are like walking into a story." The end result? A home with soul where the family can make memories for many years to come.