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ARTISTIC ENDEAVOR

John and Anita Poling's creative retreat on Sanibel combines practicality and high style

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John and Anita Poling are happily retired and loving life as full-time island residents. Their Sanibel home was designed to blend with its scenic surroundings and provide ample space for entertaining family and friends.

Long before Ohio transplants John and Anita Poling drew up plans for their home in the Gulf Pines neighborhood on Sanibel, the couple envisioned a home with a cathedral ceiling, built around the tangled vegetation overlooking Gulf Shores Lagoon.

That’s not what they got — and they couldn’t be happier.

“It was a process,” says Anita of the homebuilding experience. “We’d start with one idea and refine it and refine it. We’re really pleased with the way it turned out.”

Built by Sanibel-based Dan Hahn Custom Builders, the three-story home is a masterpiece containing five bedrooms and 4.5 bathrooms in approximately 4,500 square feet under air, with substantially more square footage on the spacious screened decks and balconies.

Its uncluttered, flowing layout allows the home to easily accommodate visiting friends and family, including the Polings’ three grown children and three grandchildren. It’s also perfect for hosting neighborhood parties, such as a recent Gulf Pines quarterly dinner that drew 30 fellow homeowners.

Because of its height and square footage, the home was built with a number of convenient extras including an elevator, an extra-large pantry with an auxiliary refrigerator/freezer and a washer and dryer on both the first and second levels.



One of four spacious and colorful third-floor guest rooms.



Clockwise from top: Glass tiles, polished marble and muted colors give the master bathroom the soothing look of a luxurious spa. » The Polings' home has plenty of space to accommodate their diverse artistic treasures and colorful paintings, including hallways and guest rooms (see next page). "I don't know if it's great stuff, but we like it and it has memories attached," says John. » Against a turquoise backdrop, the powder bath's shell-framed mirror reflects a flock of ceramic birds in flight.

The crowning glory is a crow's nest that affords enviable panoramic views of the Gulf of Mexico.

The Polings might have ended up living on the opposite side of the Gulf had fate not intervened almost a decade ago. At the time, the Polings were seriously considering buying a second home in Mexico. But when friends from Columbus invited them to see their newly-purchased home in Gulf Pines, the couple took them up on it.

"We came down here in February, 2004 and just fell in love with the place," says John. "We loved the unpaved roads, the little side streets with bougainvillea and all the tropical vegetation, and we thought, 'This is great!'"

That summer, after exploring "every subdivision on the island," the Polings purchased and renovated a two-bedroom, 1,300-square-foot home in Gulf Pines, almost directly across from their current home.

Two years later, Anita (an RN with a BSN from Ohio State) retired from her career as a nurse for Columbus Public Schools and in 2009, the couple began planning for John's imminent retirement from real estate finance. Part of the plan was to find a larger island home to live in year-round.

By chance, they came down for a long weekend that September ("something we'd never done before," says John) and saw a lot for sale across the street.



They were already sold on the neighborhood and its park-like atmosphere, as well as its natural and man-made amenities. They especially enjoyed having two community pools that they didn't have to maintain and were just a short bike ride from home.

"I called and we were under contract within three or four days," says John. "Had we not made that trip, we wouldn't be sitting here now."

Strategically designed spaces

In designing the home, it helped that the Polings had definite ideas about what they wanted. During their 36-year marriage, the two had renovated or built out other homes in Columbus. The experience "was a primer on what to do here," says John.

"It wasn't sufficient, but it helped."

Non-negotiable elements included a main living area on the first floor and guest quarters upstairs, along with an open floor plan. Balconies, decks and pocketing, impact glass doors met the couple's desire for seamless indoor/outdoor living space. However, they also needed ample space to accommodate their diverse collection of sculptures, paintings, wall hangings and art glass, along with adequate display lighting to show it off.

Throughout the design phase, the owners remained flexible and open to suggestions from a variety of sources, including neighborhood friend and designer, David Neville. In the preliminary planning stages, Neville suggested designing the home at a 45-degree angle in order to fully utilize the irregular, five-sided building site.

"That had never occurred to us," says John. "We were just thinking (in terms of) big rectangles."

Architect Craig L. Meyer incorporated many of the ideas and suggestions into working drawings, which John says went through "eight or nine iterations" prior to construction. The final design not only opened up the main living area, it also gave the top floor more useable space, including a fourth guest room, a media room and a large outdoor deck.

"We had such a wonderful experience with our builder and all the subs. They were great to work with," and made some valuable suggestions. One of them was to remove the staircase wall and design a floating staircase with open steps. Locally designed, the entire staircase was manufactured in Germany and shipped to Sanibel, where it is one of the home's most striking sculptural elements. "We love it," she adds.

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Décor and more

While many new residents seek a total departure from their northern home decor, much of the Polings' furniture is from their home in Columbus. The scale and timeless style suit the space so beautifully, it's hard to believe the furnishings weren't custom-made specifically for that floor plan.

"We didn't build the house around the furniture, but we were aware of what we had and we gave it a lot of thought," says John.

The couple also worked closely with Marya Teets of the Sanibel Design Center on finishes and materials used in the kitchen and bathrooms. In fact, some of their ideas came directly from the center's showroom, including the granite and natural stone tile mini-kitchen on the second-floor loft, the hanging, black granite bar in the great room and the kitchen's granite countertops and Omega cabinets.

Otherwise, the Polings did most of the interior design and décor themselves,

Clockwise from top: The home's open floor plan maximizes the breathtaking view from the great room and works well with the Polings' "less traditional" furnishings, most of which they had in their Ohio home. » Red and white reclaimed oak flooring was used in most rooms and on the steps of the custom-designed floating staircase, which was manufactured in Germany. » A private, screened deck opens the master bedroom to the great outdoors and capitalizes on the home's sharply angled design.

mixing a few new pieces (such as a Tommy Bahama lighted buffet in the great room) with things they already had: leather, modular sofas, a 12-seat glass dining table, brushed aluminum kitchen chairs and other sleek, stylish furnishings.

As a result, their home is as much an art gallery as it is a tropical retreat.



Top: "We always knew we wanted a big island, so we looked for the largest single slab of marbled-looking granite we could find," says Anita of the 9.5-foot by 5-foot top on the kitchen island. Its generous overhang makes it perfect for entertaining and accommodates chairs all around for casual dining. The Polings found the distinctive granite and the honey-glazed Omega cabinets at the Sanibel Design Center. » Bottom: in creating their tropical retreat, the Polings relocated trees and designed their home farther from the road and closer to the water. Doing so facilitated magnificent lagoon views and privacy from passersby.



Clean, unfussy lines and mainly neutral-colored walls provide the perfect canvas for their eclectic artwork, which they began collecting in the 1980s. “I don’t know if it’s great stuff, but we like it and it has memories attached,” says John.

There also seems to be a story behind each object d’art: the oil painting over the buffet is by Ana Julia Aguada, a now-famous artist they discovered years ago in central Mexico; a vividly-painted wooden armadillo purchased during a drive

through Oaxaca; and oil paintings found at art shows, and in galleries and markets from Columbus to Shanghai.

The Polings also support local artists, whose work can be seen throughout the home. There are numerous pieces from Matlacha’s Leoma Lovegrove, Sanibel ceramics artist Andi McCarter and Fort Myers oil painter Terri Causey, as well as a hand-crafted inlaid wood end table from Friz Neal.

Appropriately, the home is named “Kismet,” in part for a Turkish hotel on

An expansive, undivided screening maximizes the view from the main floor’s wraparound wood deck, while various seating and dining areas maximize its utility. Balconies and decks on both upper levels also meet the Polings’ desire to be indoors and outside at the same time.

the Aegean Sea but mainly for what the word represents.

“Fate brought us here and we’re extremely happy here,” says John. **G**