

A HOME FILLED WITH LIGHT AND LOVE FOR AN ACTIVE FAMILY

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Vero Beach *Magazine*®

DOWN BY THE
SEASHORE



The Connor home is filled with light and love for an active family.

DOWN BY THE SEASHORE

BY JULIA DOUGLAS
PHOTOGRAPHY BY GRIDLEY + GRAVES

Patti Connor says with a smile, “At heart, I’m a beach girl. I knew any house we bought or built in Vero Beach had to be close to the sea.”

When Patti and Frank Connor decided to acquire a vacation home of their own in 2007, they had 30 years of experience visiting the area. During their dating days, they visited Frank’s family’s house in John’s Island. They came back as newlyweds and later often returned with their four children. Occasionally when beds were short at the elder Connors’ house, Patti, Frank and the kids would shoot up to the local Disney Resort for a few nights.

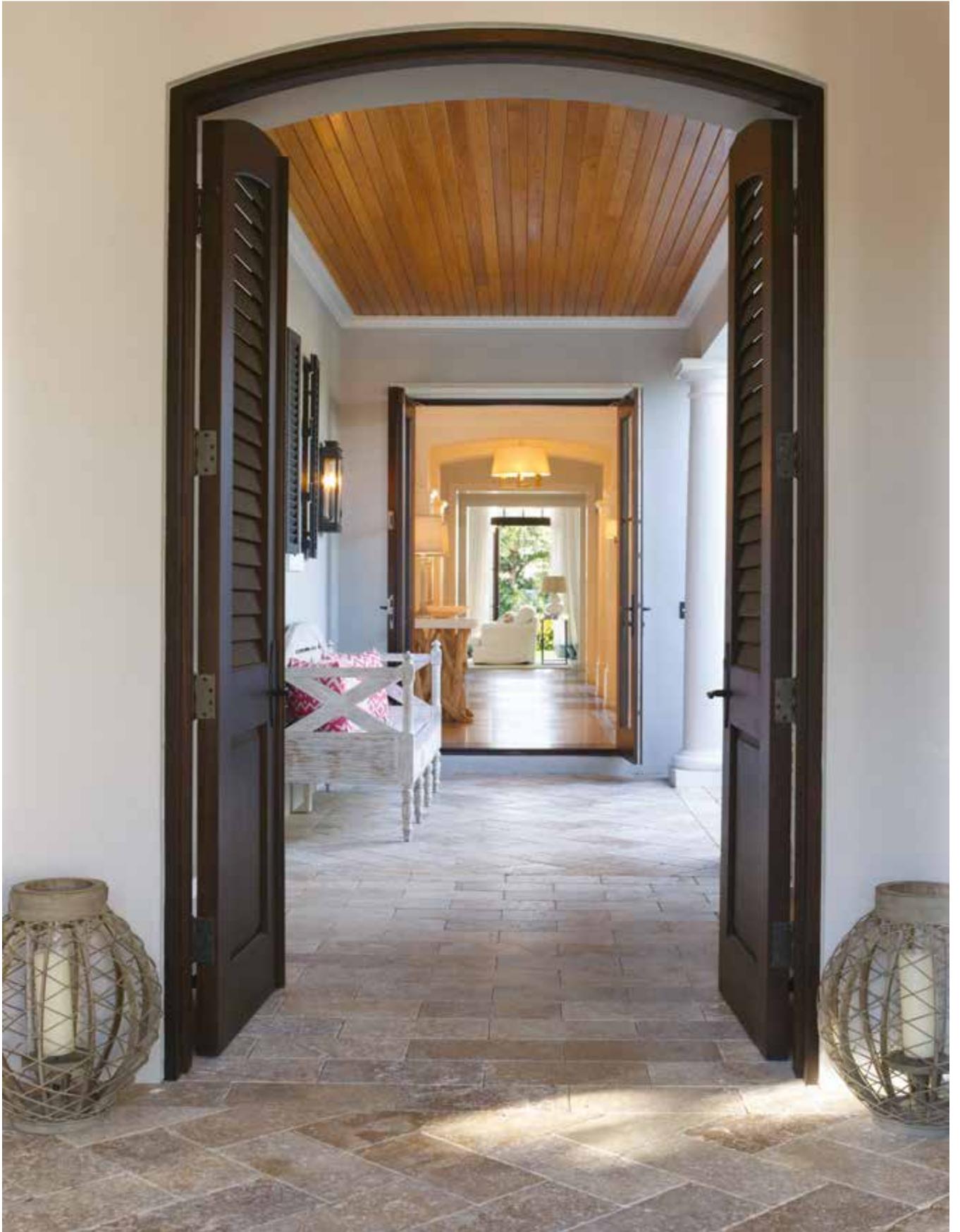
After a thorough search, the Connors found a home on a large corner lot close to the ocean but nicely protected from the strong, perennial winds. The original John’s Island

In the great room of the Connor house, subtle hues dominate, enlivened by flashes of color. The transoms over the windows increase the light and emphasize the view to the pool. The bleached ash wood Parsons coffee table has a blue glass insert on top. The sliding door, shown closed, creates privacy or opens to the adjacent family room. The tongue and groove panels mimic the paneling in the foyer.





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For intimate dining, the architects lowered the ceiling. The niche, decorated with colored wallpaper, is Patti Connor's favorite spot in the house.

house, dating back to the 1970s, was dark and cramped. To make the house livable, the Connors knew they were in for major renovations.

Patti says, "We wanted tons of light and open spaces in our house. When we described our wishes

to architects David Moulton and Scott Layne, we felt they got it. We had interviewed a number of firms but we had an instant rapport with them."

Moulton and Layne have worked together for 14 years, each playing a distinct role in the firm. Layne is the visionary and Moulton handles all the business aspects of the job. They work on the drawings, floor plans and elevations as a team.

When talking about how he

approaches a project, Layne says, "The first thing is to listen closely to the client and figure out what they want to achieve. The process is like a tennis match. Ideas get bounced back and forth and eventually evolve into concrete concepts. Patience is a valuable attribute to possess."

For a year before the renovations began, the Connors vacationed in the existing house, figuring out on an almost daily basis what they wanted to change. They prioritized their wish list and communicated it to the architects. They charged

Architect Scott Layne designed an enticing entryway corridor ending in a windowed view. A visitor's eye is drawn down the series of hallways to the great room and the yard beyond.

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Moulton and Layne with creating an up-to-date dwelling that was young and fresh with the feel of the beach without being a cliché.

Then they assembled the rest of the team. Patti says, “We got interior designer Rod Mickley to come on board. I had seen dozens of his houses and loved his style. We ended up with a dream team: Scott and David, Rod, August Schwartz as landscape architect, Ed Reilly as our builder and Dennis Hulce as job foreman. It was quite harmonious. They all worked together without a hitch.”

Layne says, “In the Connor project, we tore down the entire existing house save for one wall on the property line. We built within the existing footprint, always keeping in mind the primary quest for light and openness.” To achieve his primary goals of finding and capturing light and airiness throughout the house, Layne created bay windows in several rooms and bounced light off windows into mirrors.

Frank was intrigued by the construction process, in particular the specs for lighting and electrical equipment. He says, “I had enough knowledge about architectural plans and construction to want to play an active role in the whole process. A few details of the house were my ideas: the transom windows in the great room, solar light tubes in the interior spaces and relocation of the garage.” Layne put these ideas in the plans, equipping hall ceilings with solar lights and incorporating

A sofa situated in the bay window is an instant focal point in the family room. The pillows sport a beach motif of corals and shells. Designer Rod Mickley’s use of contrasting blues in the chair fabrics conjures up the colors of the sea. The inverted hip ceiling, with its tongue and groove boards, adds texture, height and light to the room.

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The up-to-date kitchen is the scene of many informal meals. The Connor family likes to sit at the island for conversation and snacks.

transoms in a series of windows. From dark interior spaces, he constructed corridors that terminated in windows or doors that emitted bright patches of light.

Besides providing three ample bedrooms and an office with baths en suite in the main house, the architects cleverly commandeered

space in the garage to provide sleeping quarters for the three Connor sons. In an awkward corner across the room from the twin beds, the architects tucked in handsome double-decker bunks.

From the beginning, Patti and interior designer Mickley were on the same wavelength. Mickley

says, “Patti and I had a ball working together. She was willing to take risks, to go with wild wallpapers and daring fabrics. By bringing in bright color spots and bold patterns, we were able to give the house an image that was young and fresh – a look that suited Patti’s generation, not her mother’s. The Connors wanted



A hand-knotted Tibetan rug adds pizzazz to the study. The room can be closed off from the rest of the house for serious work; but with its convertible couch and adjacent full bath, it can also accommodate house guests.

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This room does double duty as sleeping quarters for the Connor daughter or as a guest room. The hand-hammered iron canopied beds contrast with the soft mimosa white wallpaper. Recycled materials comprise the papier-mâché artichoke lamp.

television sets that were visible and accessible in every room. So I didn't try to hide the TVs. I just let 'em hang out."

"Working with Rod was a pleasure," Patti says. "He listened to me, absorbed my ideas and gave us the look we wanted. After sunset, I like

to sit in the loggia and look back into the lit-up house. I enjoy checking out the cool night scene of the great room and the dining area."

Landscape architect, Schwartz, has definitive goals in his treatment of exterior space. He says, "The totality of landscape architecture

revolves around creating a deliberate and recognizable sequence of space. We use landscape elements of plants and trees with hardscape elements of walls, gates and pavers to form and articulate exterior spaces and enhance the architecture."

In the Connor project, Schwartz



skillfully placed clumps of Christmas palms and dwarf elephant ears to define a narrow travertine walkway in the side yard. He deliberately defined the outdoor spaces of the rear yard into separate rooms, allowing for abundant light in the pool area as well as shady spots throughout. A croton hedge effectively screens a grassy lawn area from the pool.

Layne noted, "David and I have worked with Augie Schwartz and Rod Mickley numerous times. Not only do we communicate well, we actually push and challenge each other to do our very best. The loggia between the house and pool area was an example of a successful innovation. Formerly that area was a boring grassy plot. Now, the columns on the loggia provide architectural interest, and the outdoor room brings welcome shade to the Connors all day long."

Patti says, "It's great. The way the team organized the space, our whole family can be comfortably together in the house for Christmas and any vacations."

Asked about challenges of the job, Reilly, head of construction, says, "The Connors were great clients. The renovation came out beautifully in spite of strict time constraints imposed by the local association. The construction team met the challenge with high quality work and came in on schedule. The renovation was one of my favorite projects."

Frank says, "It was lots of fun to watch the house go from a concept on a piece of paper and slab of

Landscape architect August Schwartz provided interest to the narrow side yard with his use of Christmas palms along the path.

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The loggia is the go-to spot for the Connors. This outdoor room, a handy transition from the main house and the rear yard, is situated close to the kitchen for easy al fresco dining.

concrete to the finished product. We agonized over a number of plan iterations before we finally felt we had it right. In the end it all came together. Now we can just sit back and enjoy the house.”

The new house was put to the test when Patti gathered her four best friends from college days at St. Mary’s in South Bend, Ind. for their annual house party in Vero Beach. A yearly ritual that occurs in May, the ladies cook together, bike, hit the beach and gab for four glorious days.

Patti says, “We have such fun together, reliving old times, discussing our lives and kids. My friends love our house and never want the reunion anywhere else.”

To their delight, the Connors have discovered many unexpected aspects to Vero Beach since they have begun spending more time here. The

Riverside Theatre, Vero Beach Art Museum and numerous art galleries add a cultural dimension to their lives. Frank keeps his motorboat at

the Vero Beach Marina and takes it out for deep-sea fishing. He’ll come home with a load of blues and skillfully clean and cook the fish. An avid athlete, he is a long distance biker, golfer and tennis player.

Patti likes tennis, golf and plays some bridge but confesses her favorite pastime is reading on the beach. She says, “I’m a flip-flop person. I love the casual and easy lifestyle, and Vero Beach is full of interesting contrasts. The restaurants are varied and most nights, Frank and I head downtown for dinner.”

Patti says, “Our house has been a delight. It epitomizes the easy living we like. We can come and go with a minimum of fuss. I like to fly down at least once a month for a mini-holiday, arrive on Tuesday and go back north on Friday. Though it is a long haul from the Orlando airport, we figure that’s what keeps Vero Beach so pleasant and uncrowded. When I come over the Wabasso Bridge to A1A, I can feel the tension and stress leave my body. Vero Beach is a great place to relax and unwind.” ❁



Patti relishes the chance to look back into the lit-up house. She never tires of the scene. The roofline of the loggia neatly echoes that of the main house.