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A bayside retreat

By Diane Cowen | May 9, 2017

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Photo: Brad South Photography

IMAGE 1 OF 17

An aerial photo of the bay view from Galveston home of Forrest and Audrey Wylie.

Audrey Wylie talks about her Galveston bayfront home as if she enters paradise every weekend she visits.

Driving there from Houston, she exhales deeply when she hits the causeway. Once she's there, the busyness of life melts away. No billboards, fewer cars and a lot less noise.

From the sun-drenched deck that runs the width of her home, Wylie looks out onto West Bay's marshes and water, waiting for a brilliant sunset.

"I've only been here one night, but I feel like it's been a week," Wylie says. "The water is so calming."

She and her husband, Forrest Wylie, who works in energy investments, moved into their vacation home early in 2014 after selling another house nearby. Homes were building up around them, and they didn't want to lose their dazzling view in The Harbor section of the Pirates' Cove neighborhood.

Their full-time home is in the Bellaire/West University area of Houston, and they have a working cattle ranch near Bay City, where they plan to also build a hunting lodge.

Wylie's vision - translated by interior designer Ginger Barber - was a relaxing weekend "retreat that feels comfortable and chic, but with a Texas feel."

Sea, water and sand factored into the home's soft, muted color palette, borrowed from what's just outside the French doors that line her living room.

From a napkin to a home

"It was so exciting to do something completely from scratch with a wonderful builder," says Wylie, who worked with John Dreiss of Purple Sage Construction.

Since the couple's prior Galveston home had sold with the furniture in it, Wylie and Barber shopped for two years to fill the new 4,600-square-foot abode with a combination of custom-made items and vintage and antique pieces.

"It was a lot of fun to design this home," Dreiss says. "The Wylies came to me with a drawing on a napkin - you'd be surprised at how helpful those can be. We worked from there with their ideas; it all kind of evolved from there."

The Wylies and Barber wanted Lueders limestone - mined from Central Texas quarries - for poolside, paving the driveway and elsewhere, a request that called for four semitractor-trailers to haul it all in.

Audrey Wylie also wanted the landscaping

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to look lush and mature, which called for more plants and larger trees. To get them on the bay side of the property, Dreiss brought in a 110-ton crane to lift the towering date palms over the two-story home on stilts.

Their plans tapped into a current trend for interiors: reclaimed wood and ceiling beams.

Just as Wylie and Barber asked for those beams and Dreiss was figuring out where to get them, he got a lucky phone call.

"We had just talked about the wood, and this guy, who had been down here for years and years and liked my homes, called me out of the blue," Dreiss says. "This guy calls and has them. They were perfect."

He got a pile of 22-foot-long beams, 100 years old and made of clear heart pine - materials that are difficult to find now.

"We didn't do anything to those beams," says Dreiss, who builds custom homes exclusively in Galveston's West End. "We cut them and put them up, and the finish is totally natural."

A peek inside

The effect of those beams and other materials throughout the home is subtle and intentional. Whitewashed wood laid shiplap style throughout means there's not a sheet of drywall in the place. Wood floors also have a different treatment for indoors: a blue-gray stain that's typically relegated to the outdoors. Woven grass Conrad shades hang on windows in every room.

Once the palette and foundation were established, all of that shopping was driven by the Wylies' taste and Barber's sourcing.

"At first, it was getting to know Audrey and Forrest," Barber says. "Being from Florida and

living on the water, my look is very casual, so it's not hard for me to go there."

The living room holds Forrest Wylie's one request: a big fireplace, trimmed in Leuders limestone. Custom-made ivory linen sofas and chairs in a pale, blue-ivory linen check pattern fill the room. They sit on a jute rug, which can be found elsewhere in the home.

The showstopper in this room - except for the view - is the huge cypress stump that was bleached and treated and now serves as a heavyweight coffee table. Antique mirrors hover over built-in cabinets on each side of the fireplace, sandwiching a painting by Houston artist Deborah Moseley.

The dining area and kitchen share the big open space, too, with a table made of reclaimed wood and a set of vintage Ficks Reed bamboo chairs. Over it hangs a new chandelier made of faux bois whitewashed wood and stainless steel.

Audrey Wylie jokes - kind of - that the kitchen was designed around a heavy island she found. It wasn't quite big enough or tall enough, so Barber found an old door that could be cut apart to add depth and width and she put it on wheels to give it more height. White, hide-covered wood barstools tuck under the island's overhang for casual seating.

Rimming the kitchen are a double SubZero refrigerator and a Wolf double-oven range finished with a pewter tile wall. Old hinged doors cover up a small bar nearby when the Wylies aren't here.

The master bedroom is on the first floor, prompting Audrey Wylie to comment that if no one's visiting, she and her husband don't really need to leave this floor at all.

Hanging over their iron king bed is a striking photo-on-canvas image of a beachside scene in France, by Houston photographer Karen Sachar.

Vaulted ceilings here create drama in an otherwise soothing space, and a white desk and chair add a contemporary pop among the vintage tables, lamps and other furnishings.

A step into the screened-in porch shows more antiques, old wicker furniture, a drum barrel overturned as an end table and a concrete-topped coffee table with an old iron base.

Upstairs holds another master suite, plus another guest bedroom and a bunk room. Since there are no TVs in the guest rooms, a shared media room allows visitors a quiet place to sit and watch movies.

Laid-back lifestyle

An expansive second-floor deck and a ground-floor patio add to the many spaces in which to sit and while away the hours.

In the heat of summer, the Wylies and their guests might take a dip in the limestone-rimmed pool or rest in the adjacent cabana. The fire pit on the other side of the cabana provides respite during cooler months.

Audrey Wylie says that she and her husband don't have a lot of big parties but prefer to host smaller groups of family and friends. Her entertaining staple is steak and loaded baked potatoes, but she says she's gotten gumbo down to a science, too.

They love the neighborhood feel of Pirates Cove. They'll take a trip in their golf cart to Alex's Seafood, or head to Waterman's for a casual dinner. Once in a while, they'll hit the Galveston Country Club, or call in a to-go order and pick it up in their golf cart.

Audrey Wylie says the Galveston home is more hers and the Bay City ranch is more her husband's. "I grew up in Florida, and my mom says that I never got the sand out of my toes."



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