Good VIBRATIONS

Balancing resilience and relaxation, a family's modern indoor-outdoor retreat radiates positivity.

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Architecture: Elizabeth Starr, Strang Design **Interior Design:** Alexandra Mangimelli, Strang Design
Home Builder: Casey Dooley, Dooley Construction **Landscape Architecture:** Simone Stark, Strang Design

Obtaining a coveted beachfront lot in South Florida offered a couple more than just a spectacular spot on which to build a family retreat—it was a chance to fashion a residence that embodies their personal mantra. "My husband and I say we are PMA, which stands for 'positive mental attitude'—all day, every day," the wife says with a laugh. "We wanted positive vibes throughout this house."

Envisioning a resort-like destination in Islamorada where they could spend quality time with their children and grandchildren, the couple engaged architect Elizabeth Starr and designer Alexandra Mangimelli to create a modern beach haven attuned to their family's well-being. "One of the first conversations we had with the clients was about how they wanted the home to feel, rather than look," Starr recalls. "We wanted to create a feeling."

Designing a welcoming environment was essential, but so was fortifying the structure to withstand hurricanes. Starr and Mangimelli harnessed a simplified material palette to achieve both, with concrete as the primary selection inside and out. Chosen for its strength and unobtrusiveness, concrete allowed for a boldly vertical design. The residence would be elevated on wide structural columns to create a covered outdoor living space on the ground level while keeping the main living quarters out of harm's way. "This house is a solid fortress," emphasizes general contractor Casey Dooley, who oversaw the pouring and polishing of the concrete floors that run through much of the interior. "We anchored it into the ground with 96 pilings and used 1,200 yards of concrete, which is not typical."

Given the property's location in the Keys, the team also gravitated toward wood to imbue the home with warmth. "Organic materials create a connection to nature," Mangimelli observes, "and that in itself has an energy flow and balance." Ipe wood was used extensively inside for sleek wall paneling and millwork, plus as an accent on the façade—most notably as louvered cladding.

The exterior's Zen-like effect continues seamlessly indoors. "Raw concrete and natural wood created a serene backdrop for what was to come with the interior design," Starr says. "The circulation was closely developed with the design team. It emphasizes having a good time and relaxing." Lounge-worthy upholstered seating with a contemporary bent was selected with this comfort in mind. At the husband's request, Mangimelli avoided dark colors in favor of predominately soothing, beachy hues that complement the natural light streaming through a multitude of windows. This lightheartedness comes through in pieces like the dining area's wavy table and rug, inspired by the couple's lively personalities. "They have a vibrant energy—they're fun people," the designer says. "It's a minimal home with modern principles, but we wanted to add this sense of playfulness." The clients' influence is especially evident in the primary suite, where they requested an open space with few walls for unimpeded ocean views. Embracing a studio-inspired layout, a luxurious soaking tub sits in front of a window—just steps from the bed.

Exterior gathering spaces were equally important, as the owners prioritized ample entertaining areas. "We pay as much attention to outdoor spaces as indoors," Starr says. "They're almost one and the same, especially when it comes to celebrating Florida's lifestyle and enjoying the weather." At the expansive rear, the team composed areas for lounging, dining, cooking and playing, including a pool and a billiard table. To ensure the covered section functions like the interior, it features an air-conditioning system, guaranteeing comfort in higher temps. Yet the most eye-catching element is an architectural feat: a metal-formed staircase clad in ipe wood and enclosed by glass balustrades, floating above a trickling water feature. "Having this louvered pièce de résistance creates something beautiful out of something functional," Mangimelli muses.

For the grounds, landscape architect Simone Stark devised a plan mixing native and tropical plants, accented by Florida keystone. "We straddled this line between the Keys and the tropics," she says, pointing to heliconias, lipstick palms and 30-foot-tall mature gumbo-limbo trees. "The couple wanted to incorporate a lot of color and flowering plants, which we got from the tropical selections."

Constructed with an upbeat mindset, the residence emphasizes well-being, inside and outside. "We were thinking about the energy the clients wanted the home to have," Starr says. "It's powerful how materials can do that for you."

A pathway marked by Florida oolite stone pavers leads to a gathering area that includes a Prism Hardscapes fire pit and Lujo beanbags. The surrounding landscape boasts Alexander palms, a green buttonwood tree, grandleaf sea grape, heliconias, green island ficus and ginger.

Previous page: The back exterior spaces feature Artefacto's Kondey II lounges, Forma&Cemento's Fusto dining table and Tribù's Dunes side tables and Amanu armchairs. A ponytail palm, a clusia hedge and butterfly ginger dot the grounds.

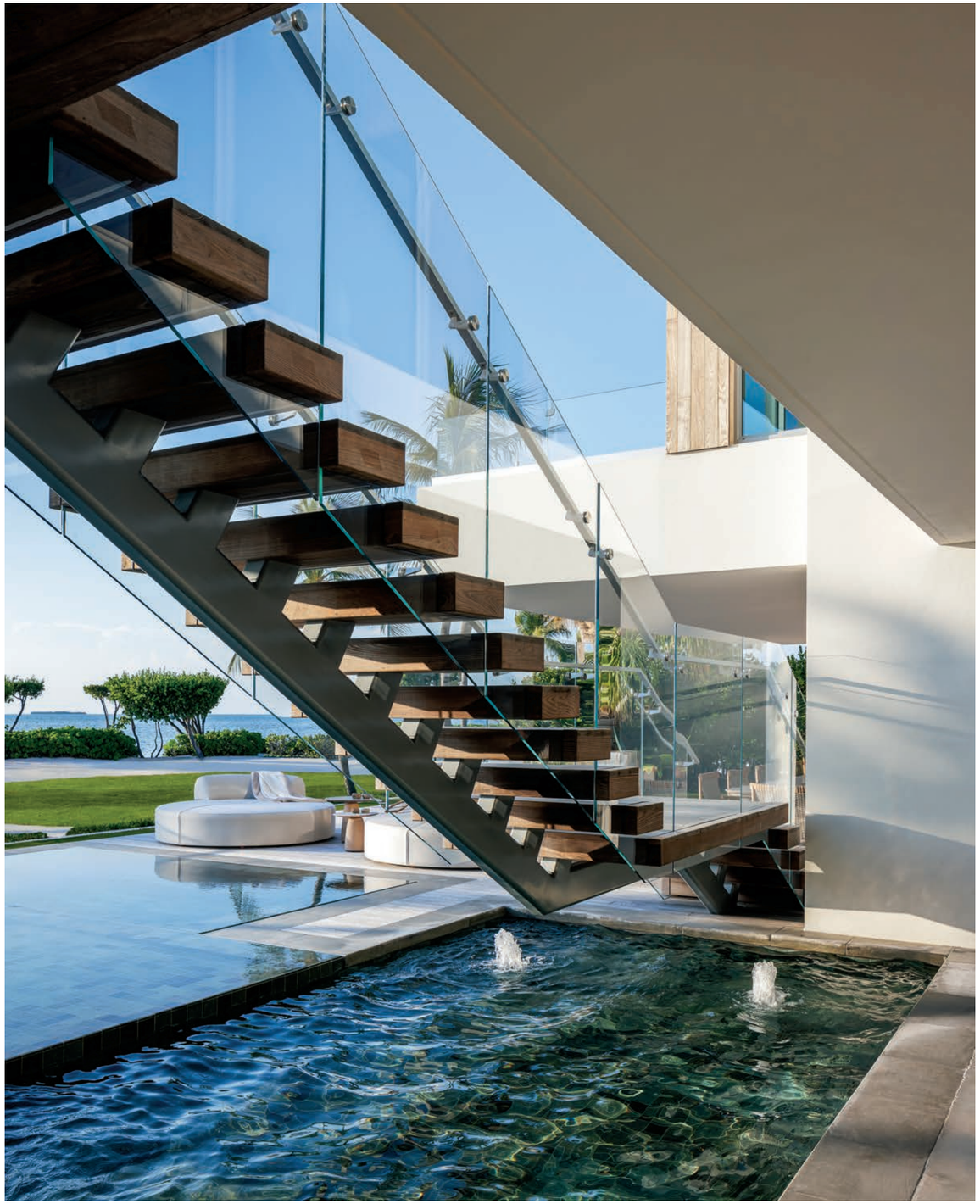
Designed to be comfortable and sophisticated, the living area offers ample room for socializing with Jader Almeida's Bass sectional. La Chance's Salute side table pairs with Linteloo's Isola coffee table from Andros Home.

Jader Almeida armchairs and stools and a Bieke Casteleyn table unify the dining area and kitchen. Ernestomeda cabinetry from Interius complements the Opustone quartzite backsplash and countertops, lit by a Garnier & Linker fixture. The Miele and Wolf appliances are from Ferguson Bath, Kitchen & Lighting Gallery, and the Dornbracht faucets are from Designer's Plumbing & Hardware.

Evoking the feel of a serene spa, the primary bathroom is outfitted with Hydro Systems' Mizu freestanding tub along with Vola fixtures from Designer's Plumbing & Hardware. The polished, poured-in-place concrete flooring was produced by Dooley Construction.

Opposite: In a guest room, Strang composed a headboard with Opustone travertine, countering the bed's textures. Beneath Atelier de Troupe's Miro 1 pendant, Crate & Barrel's Fernando table rests on Bella Citta Floors' French white oak from Foundation Flooring.

Artefacto seating prioritizes relaxation on the loggia, where a coffee table, bench and stools by CEU Studio mingle with Gloster tables. The architectural materials include a Florida keystone wall as well as a staircase with ipe wood treads and a glass guardrail.

Aggy's Panama Banana loungers from Andros Home beckon on the loggia near the staircase. The space invites guests to unwind while enjoying the stunning views of the pool and water beyond.

Opposite: A bold architectural element, the sculptural Thermory staircase enhances the home's sense of drama and flow. The bubbling water feature adds to the ground level's Zen-like atmosphere.