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SHIFTING SANDS

Seagrape House explores how to build smarter on one of Florida's ever-changing barrier islands

BY EDWARD KEEGAN /// PHOTOGRAPHS BY MORIS MORENO

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Anna Maria is a coastal island at the south entrance to Florida's Tampa Bay. Densely populated with post-war construction, its constantly shifting outlines have been exacerbated in recent years by climate change. Locally based Traction Architecture, led by Jody Beck and partner Ross Tisdale, tackled the area's particular challenges in its Seagrape House.

While many of the neighboring homes are 1950s slab-on-grade construction, this unsustainable building type is no longer tenable on the low-lying barrier island, which is vulnerable to flooding and hurricanes. "People want to be able to sleep at night," Tisdale says, not to mention the fact both FEMA and the Florida EPA have stringent requirements for raising new construction well above grade. Their interest in building a sustainable, comfortable home led the architects to use primarily concrete construction and to elevate the first occupied floor to 15 feet above grade.

The program is relatively simple for a 3,000-square-foot home. "The clients wanted to accommodate a diversity of experiences," Beck says, for anywhere "from two to 50 people." The five-sided, three-story structure follows the property lines, with its dominant, west-facing elevation oriented to the Gulf of Mexico and the ever-shifting dunes that separate the house from the beach.

The elevated structure provides space for an at-grade carport between the concrete columns that support the home. A small swimming pool on the east side allows for a little bit of drama away from the Gulf views—and the entry stair is



Structure on Display The minimal materials palette on the main floor, including polished concrete floors and cypress ceilings, allows the stabilizing concrete shear walls to be left in plain view in the open-plan space.

cantilevered over the pool. The second-floor entrance leads to an open plan that comprises living room, dining room, and kitchen, all rendered in a spare aesthetic that highlights the concrete shear walls necessary to protect the house against Florida's considerable external forces.

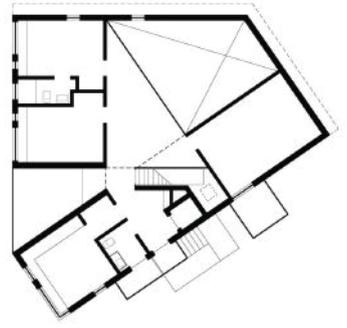
An expansive deck extends the major public spaces to the outside and overlooks the dunes and the Gulf. A single bedroom is discretely tucked into the south corner of the second floor, with three others located on the upper floor, where a small deck resolves the plan's geometry with a protected wood-clad exterior space. The floors on the house's main level are a polished concrete, enhanced with native

shells that provide an intriguing sparkle within the matrix.

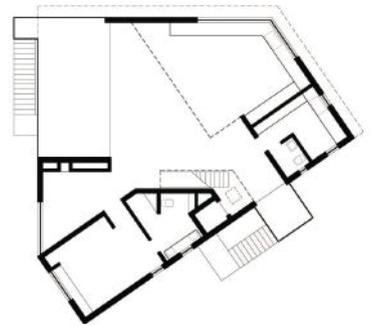
Seagrape House is the first residence on the island to achieve LEED Platinum certification, but the architects put sustainability in context. "It's about right-sizing," Tisdale says. "This is a smaller house than it might have been." One key to designing efficiently in Florida is controlling the use of glass. All large expanses of glazing are deeply set behind the primary outlines of the envelope. But the architects used these features as a design opportunity. The shapes of the deeply set balconies were determined by experiential considerations. They're clad in cypress, to provide a sense of warmth and protection, but the canted



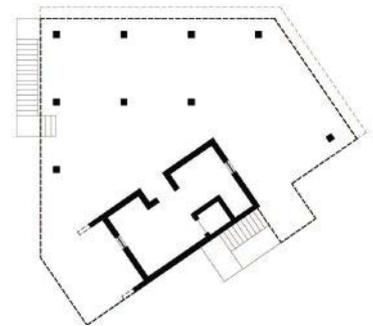
Third-Floor Plan



Second-Floor Plan



Ground-Floor Plan





Looking West Predominately west-facing windows in the third-floor bedrooms and private spaces maximize views of the dunes and water.

shapes—which also help control sunlight—help amplify the sound of the waves within the house.

The architects used only honest materials, clearly expressed. Most exposed wood is cypress—a local wood that’s susceptible to neither bugs nor mold. Some white oak, similar in appearance to cypress, is used in the kitchen; both offer warm tones that are integral to the concept of the house as a comfortable place for an evolving family.

Sufficient roof insulation is another key to achieving energy efficiency in Florida’s subtropical climate, with R-30 obtained here. The house turns its back to the south, eschewing heat gain. And rooftop photovoltaic panels have regularly resulted in electric bills below \$50.

Beck and Tisdale point out that lots of houses are destroyed by the harsh Florida environment—sand, wind, sun, and sea salt all pose significant threats to common construction techniques. “It’s not just hurricanes but day-to-day environmental conditions.” It’s a reminder, Beck says, that “on the barrier islands, you’re just a guest.” ■

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Project Credits: **Project** Seagrape House, Anna Maria, Fla.; **Architect** Traction Architecture, Tampa, Fla.; **Builder** Whitehead Construction, Cortez, Fla.; **Structural Engineer** Segó & Segó, Anna Maria; **LEED Consulting** Two Trails, Parrish, Fla.; **Living Space** 3,000 square feet; **Cost** Withheld