

# LUX LIFE

GULF COAST LUXURY HOMES + LIVING | SPRING 2015 EDITION

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CELEBRITY INTERVIEW MICHAEL USLAN







# SEAGRAPE

Architects Jody Beck and Ross-Alan Tisdale aspire to make architecture that tells stories. Their beachfront home set amid a stand of seagrapes along the northern stretch of Anna Maria Island does just that. “We try to address the spirit of a place, not just its physical characteristics, but also the deeper narratives,” says Beck. Beck and Tisdale are the husband-and-wife duo behind Traction Architecture based in Tampa. Inspired by Florida’s tradition of fictional landscapes—from Ponce de Leon’s Fountain of Youth, to the Magic Kingdom founded on a swamp, to the annual pirate invasion of Tampa Bay—Traction’s projects evolve from weaving together narrative, landscape and material to create dynamic designs that connect us to our surroundings and enhance the experience of the everyday.

WRITTEN BY SHANE DONGLASAN | PHOTOGRAPHY BY MORRIS MORENO



< VERACRUZ 1028 MILES



## HOUSE+HOME1

Clockwise from left to right: The kids' bedroom features custom cypress built-ins that function as storage and seating, minimizing the need for furniture. From the entrance, you can see the home's kitchen underneath the wraparound cypress ceiling. The home is essentially a bunker on the beach with a structure and envelope constructed entirely of poured-in-place concrete. The modular kitchen system is by Viola Park and countertops by Paperstone are made of recycled material—more cost effective than the traditional stone or quartz.



**FROM THE BEACH, THE SEAGRAPE HOME APPEARS IN HARMONY WITH ITS SURROUNDINGS, SERENE AND FLUID IN FORM,** but its location also brought the threat of extreme weather and inspired the architects to think about one of the most basic architectural narratives – that of man versus nature and the delicate balance between the two.

Beck and Tisdale were influenced by the shifting nature of the coastal site, a barrier island where the shape of the land transforms with each passing storm. During the course of the project, dunes emerged and multiplied, and the distance between the house and the coastline more than doubled. The recently completed building sits lightly on the land atop concrete columns, elevating it 15 feet above sea level to protect the home from storm surge and to allow the dune vegetation to meander below. The entire structure and envelope of the home is made of poured-in-place concrete to resist hurricane force winds, other extreme weather events and daily blasts of corrosive salt spray. “As part of the design process we studied diverse ideas about protection, from World War II concrete bunkers to the Apollo space suit,” says Beck.

Special measures were taken during construction to palliate the impact on soil, plants, and animal habitats. The house is the first LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) Platinum home on Anna Maria Island, with LED lighting, kitchen and bath countertops made of recycled paper, water-efficient fixtures, energy-efficient appliances and solar panels that provide about 65 percent of its electrical needs “We thought of the house as an anchor in the shifting landscape and also saw it as an anchor for the family, a place that would last much longer than the typical coastal home,” says Beck.

Beck and Tisdale envisioned the Seagrape home being passed down through multiple generations of family members, a gathering place for extended family whose members range in age from a 92-year-old great grandfather to a baby born partway through construction. “I saw the house as an opportunity to connect them to their surroundings,” says Beck. I tried to incorporate small gestures that would inspire them.” For example, above the built-in desks in each guest room are small windows that frame the ephemeral nature of the home’s surroundings—the rolling sand dunes, the ebb and flow of the







Clockwise from left to right: Cypress wraps the ceiling above. The kitchen from above, looking down from the second floor. Jody Beck with husband Ross-Alan Tisdale, partners in Traction Architecture, with their kids. They chose inexpensive glass subway tile and porcelain floor tile for the bathrooms. A mega-phone-shaped deck is subtracted from the volume of the building to amplify the sound of crashing waves.







tides, the seabirds gliding across the sky. Beck describes them as “St. Jerome boxes,” inspired by the classic image of St. Jerome at his desk, lost in thought, with the landscape framed in a picture window beside him. Small surprises were incorporated into the design, such as a guest bathroom that opens onto a cantilevered exterior shower. The sound of crashing waves is amplified through a megaphone-shaped deck that obscures nearby homes to provide a solitary experience with the natural landscape. A rooftop terrace offers irresistible views across the island.

Clever details, such as an aluminum line inlaid into the concrete floor orients one westward to the sunset, and carvings in the cypress wall triangulate one’s position across the Gulf of Mexico to Tulum and Veracruz, a nod to distant civilizations. Exterior concrete staircases cantilever over the pool and provide circulation between interior and exterior living spaces. A time capsule containing family mementos is cast high into the exposed concrete shear wall, another example of the home as a constant as time passes and children grow. “The landscape changes, we’re changing, but it’s still here,” explains Beck.

The architects were also greatly inspired by the “immeasurable and fantastical” elements of the site. From inside the house, framed views inspire contemplation of the landscape’s wonders—the vastness of the night sky, the creatures in the sea and the horizon line per-

petually beyond reach. The opposite perspective occurs from outside the house. Beck describes, “In designing this project, we strove for simplicity. Cost efficiencies were obtained by exposing the structure where possible, taking advantage of locally sourced products, and choosing relatively simple finishes.” For the floor, a local concrete company ground and polished the elevated slabs to create the finished floors and exterior staircases. “We chose cypress because of its history as a chief building material in the region’s earliest structures,” explains Beck. The cypress contains a natural oil called cypressene, which deters insects and resists mold and mildew, making it an ideal wood for Florida’s hot, humid climate. The architects opted for clean-lined minimalist furniture that doesn’t compete with the dynamic views seen through the floor-to-ceiling window walls along the Gulf side of the home. The great room is furnished with original mid-century furniture pieces that belonged to Beck’s grandmother, including two Saarinen chairs, a Knoll coffee table and Bertoia bench.

For Beck and Tisdale, the Seagrape Home allowed them much more freedom to follow a design idea all the way through. The end result was a project with a consistent vision and one that allows them to tell their personal story, gradually unravelling over time as they inhabit the home. LUX