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PERFECT FIT

OUT OF A SLENDER PARCEL
OF LAND RISES A SPACIOUS,
CONTEMPORARY NEWPORT
BEACH ABODE.

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In the living area of a Newport Beach house by architect Christopher Brandon, designer Brooke Wagner arranged a custom sofa, covered in Gina B & Company leather, and a Croft House side table. Behind the grouping is Shinnoki oak cabinetry fabricated by Ziething Cabinets and accented by Schoolhouse hardware. The shade fabric is by Clay McLaurin Studio.



With its picturesque waterside setting, the Balboa Peninsula is one of Newport Beach's most desirable neighborhoods. It's desirability, though, is balanced by some unique hurdles for anyone looking to build a home there. Not only can tide levels rise unexpectedly high, the area's small lots often make construction a game of Jenga that can only be mastered by an experienced crew. Luckily, Thomas and Robyn Miller, a couple looking to create an open-plan home cozy enough for two but able to handle visits from their family, turned to an all-star design team more than able to execute their vision. "We just felt a connection there," Thomas says of their meeting with architect Christopher Brandon. Soon, the group expanded to include designer Brooke Wagner and general contractor Robert D. McCarthy. Taking the site's challenges in stride, the trio delivered a house that ticked all the boxes.

Of course, given the lot's slender dimensions, producing a structure that fit the couple's needs required plenty of ingenuity. Brandon, who worked with project manager Caitlin Smith, points out that the house is only about 72 feet long by 22 feet wide. That meant he needed to build up rather than out. The result is an opulent master suite and comfortable guest quarters that sprawl across the second floor, out of earshot of the first floor's main entertaining rooms. Thomas's wish for a private space is fulfilled by a retreat on the top deck in which to work and relax in style.

In order to make the relatively compact house feel bigger, Brandon had some additional tricks up his sleeve. "You've got to incorporate a lot of windows and tall ceilings where you can; and, you've got to maximize outdoor space and deck space," he advises. In the great room, recessed ceilings inset with oak, give the illusion of height. Ceiling-height kitchen cabinets and fireplaces also emphasize the home's verticality. Ample doors and windows accentuate the feeling of openness.

A pair of chairs, in a Kravet fabric, and a coffee table, all from Lawson-Fenning, create a comfortable seating area in the living space; beneath is a Stark carpet. Adjacent is the kitchen where Carrara marble from Famosa tops the island, perimeter counter and backsplash. The counter chairs are also from Lawson-Fenning.



Above: Installed under the direction of general contractor Robert D. McCarthy, flooring from Warren Christopher defines the stairwell. A glass fixture from Linden Rose & Co. is suspended above. Jeld-Wen windows allow light to pour in.

Left: Pendants from Linden Rose & Co. light the kitchen. Pirch supplied the Wolf range and Waterstone faucet. The dining area is furnished with Croft House chairs and a custom table. Mark Alexander fabric from Thomas Lavie is on the banquette cushions. Artwork by Wolfgang Bloch imparts a calming quality to the space. Basalt flooring from Famosa offers striking contrast to the paler hues.

"It's one of our favorite selections," Wagner says of the freestanding Native Trails tub in the master bathroom. It stands below a lantern by The Urban Electric Co. The Rohl tub filler is from Pirch. On the floor is tumbled limestone from Famosa.



With Brandon's blueprint in hand, McCarthy, along with his associates Chris Lindsay and McKenna Duley, set about making it a reality. New building codes required that the foundation elevate the home 30 inches above ground. "We're required to lift the house up so that it stays out of that floodplain," McCarthy says. Outside, the team dressed the structure in Trespa in a walnut finish. "It's a new material for us—it's durable and low-maintenance," the contractor adds. Elsewhere, the building is outfitted in Mexican shell stone, honed in some places, chiseled in others. Together, the components add up to an inviting, warm façade.

While the overarching vision was Brandon's, the nitty-gritty of figuring out the project's details—plumbing fixtures, tiles and cabinet layout—relied on the smooth dance between McCarthy and Wagner. Witness the gray-and-white striped Delano marble used for both the master bedroom's fireplace and for its shower stall: Wagner chose the material, but McCarthy's meticulous installation ensured

its show-stopping effect. The designer appreciates that she was involved in the project practically from the beginning. "You can give a lot of input on space planning and window location," she shares, "so we can lay out our furniture and make sure the traffic patterns work." This was especially important given the home's narrow footprint.

"You have to make every inch count," says Wagner. Explaining her decision to go custom with most of the upholstered pieces, she notes: "A lot of it has to do with the sizing and getting things to their correct scale." Amazingly, in many areas, Wagner was also able to coax out space where none seemed to exist: banquette seating paired with chairs from Croft House around a custom table is an elegant setting for dinner yet relaxed enough for breakfast; a walk-in pantry is tucked behind the kitchen's sleek Shinnoki oak cabinetry; in a guest bedroom, motorized shades glide open to reveal a stunning view that makes the small room feel spacious.

For the master bedroom, says Wagner, "We added another full-height fireplace, fabricated with striped marble, with an oak bench and ledge to warm up the charcoal and gray tones in the room." She hung artwork by Lorraine Pennington on the wall and placed a pair of Arteriors tables in the space.



Facing the master bed, which is wrapped in Pavoni leather and grounded by a carpet from J. D. Staron, are a Lee Industries chair and ottoman. The clients can take in the views on the covered terrace. Draperies in de Le Cuona fabric are at the window.

Creating an aura of calm elegance, Wagner favored texture and pattern over color. "They definitely wanted a little bit of a more sophisticated palette," says the designer. Pale neutrals predominate with their deeper variations used to ground a space or add a touch of drama. Brass accents wash rooms with glamour. Balancing the golden metal with polished nickel and bronze ensures the interiors will retain a timeless air for years to come. And Wagner brought a similarly polished feel to the furnishings she chose for the exteriors. "There's lots of salt and lots of birds coming and going, so we needed stuff that's not super high maintenance," she notes. A concrete table and resin chairs "bring the

interior elements outside, and the same kind of vibe to the exterior," she says.

The harmony seen and felt throughout the house mirrors the harmony present among the design team as well as between them and their clients. "We have a great relationship," Wagner says of Brandon, who was collaborating with him on her own home while they worked on this project. Adds Brandon, "There was a lot of synergy on this." The clients wholeheartedly concur, having turned what they had envisioned as a weekend house into a permanent base. "How can we ever build again?" Robyn muses. "They were probably the best design team we could have gone with. They made it very easy for us to make the decisions." **L**

Western Window Systems windows open on to a terrace. There, a rectangular table by Hart Concrete Design makes for an ideal spot to dine by the water. Landscape designer Ryan Burress of Ryan Burress Inc. handled the concept for the landscaping. Wagner notes the clients requested multiple fire features.

