

FLORIDA WEEKLY
LUXE LIVING

AUGUST 2016

THE NAPLES LUXURY HOME REDEFINED



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NAPLES KENNY COURTESY PHOTO



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Kitchen: The kitchen features a coffered ceiling, counter stools from McGuire Furniture, a backsplash in multi-glazed crackled tile from Ceramic Matrix, and custom cabinetry from Steve Unser Cabinetry.

Outdoor: An infinity edge pool reflecting a glass mosaic with waterfall, built-in benches with custom cushions and pillows, and a gas fire pit provide an interesting seating area off the dock.

Dining: Iron table with glass top is from the Thomas Pheasant collection of McGuire Furniture. Dining chairs are from the Lillian August Collection and the banquette is a Palm Beach vintage find, creating a more casual and fun way to dine.

Diary of a DESIGNER

An insightful interior designer takes us inside her process

BY BETHANY O'NEIL
Special to Florida Weekly

I met Nancy, one of my all-time favorite clients, back in 2006 by way of referral. She had admired a project I did in Aqualane Shores and hired me on the spot. Through the years, we tweaked her already furnished home. We had an annual habit of tweaking that went on for years, which then turned into a wonderful friendship. I love a client who is always excited to tackle the next design chapter in his/her life. After a two-year absence of hearing from Nancy, I had a surprise call one morning.

In spring of 2014, she invited me over for a visit. She told me she had thoughts of remodeling her kitchen and had hired MHK Architecture & Planning to do what we like to call in Naples "a little face lift" to the exterior of the house. 'Minimal' she called

it. She had longed for the cottage look that has become so sought after in the area. Although, she viewed them as two totally separate projects, I could already sense Pandora's box opening. But Nancy is one of those wonderful clients who embraces the unexpected.

After giving more thought to the amount of change that would be needed, I could see that this was going to trickle into other areas of the home. This was quickly becoming an invasive surgery rather than a cosmetic refresh. I went on to explain that once the kitchen would be completed, everything around it would feel outdated. Nancy wasn't entirely convinced. She left for a few months during the course of the summer, and optimistically encouraged, "Surprise me!" Music to a designer's ears.

In that time, I decided to take a leap of faith and hired a moving crew, completely dissecting each room one by one. I brought in a few large pieces of furniture on approval. As I sent Nancy pictures from my phone, she was able to see her old fur-

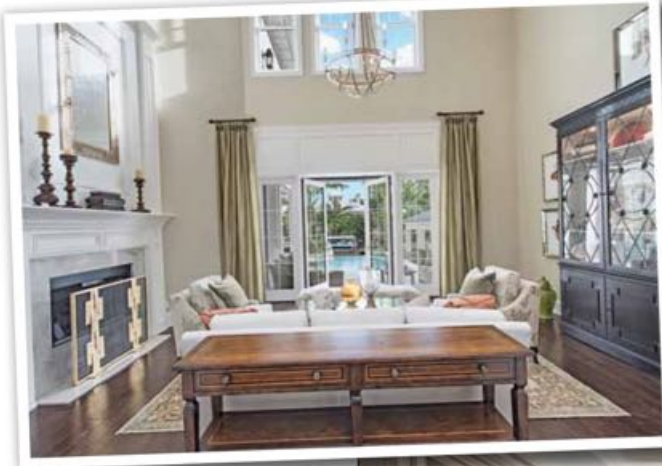
niture — now, not matching anything — in a new and wonderful layout. From there, I put together the floor plan changes, designed the kitchen, and had a proposal of all new furniture in the main areas I had created. Once we had all of our concepts ready to go, we needed the right builder. I called on Jerry Maxson of Legacy Homes to accomplish the remodel.

When MHK Architecture forwarded the first set of plans for the exterior, we re-evaluated how much more we could change, and we worked as a team to enhance each set of plans. After a few revisions, Jerry offered his opinion. "Nancy, if we're going to do this ... Let's really do it right." Before we knew it, we had a plan to replace every window, the garage doors, and the exterior lighting. This was turning into open heart surgery now!

Demolition finally started, and we found all kinds of surprises. The house had previously had a mystery fire in it, that no one knew about, that was completely concealed in the walls! We found an active bird's nest in the hood vent. She



Designer Bethany O'Neil



Living room: Opening to the lanai, the living room is positioned to view the infinity edge pool over the waterway. Large display cabinetry featuring a coral collection is from Sarried. The sofa table is a classic John Richards collection best-seller. The millwork above the french doors was added to bring the illusion of height to an existing low window height in this two-story space.

Family room: The coffered ceiling is a continuation from the kitchen. All the upholstery is from the Barbara Barry Baker collection. The custom bookcase has a pop TV in the lower unit that opens in front of the display shelves. Custom made through Old Biscayne. Woven shades are from the Hartmann & Forbes collection.

Front of the house: An MHK Architecture & Planning and OPI collaboration, the front elevation features garage doors from Garage Doors of Naples and Bevelo Copper Lighting.

Rear exterior: The new pool deck is paved in a new manmade material combining recycled sea glass, shells, and concrete. It has flecks of green glass that inspired the exterior color scheme. The furniture is from Summer Classics.

really meant it when she said she doesn't cook much! Then a few weeks passed, and we discovered a huge mold issue coming from leaks in the front of the house. How does a homeowner remodeling really know all this unless they entrust their team to be this thorough? Thank goodness Nancy trusted me to do what I do.

Now the project is shut down for mitigation, and we're off picking out a new roof and new air conditioners."

On the upside, the timing couldn't have been better for making great improvements otherwise overlooked. With all the chaos, someone from the demo team mentioned, "Hey, are we replacing the pavers on the pool deck?" We all looked at each other and said, "Sure! Why stop now? We want our client happy." That in turn, spun off great ideas of redoing the entire pool, adding a fire pit, and suddenly we had completely revamped the entire site plan. We couldn't have done these exterior renovations without Andrea Douglas from Outside Productions International (OP). Her expertise was perfect for our A team.

Back inside, we had challenges to overcome every step of the way. We had serious structural issues that took a considerable amount of engineering. So we had multiple architectural consultants come in to evaluate how we could float a beam to support a second floor of concrete, in order to open up the kitchen to the family room. We were able to camouflage the structural supports through custom millwork.

Each month it seemed like we were adding another room to the project. Before I knew it we were replacing floors in the bedrooms and painting the walls, and in the process continually squirreling away life's clutter to the second floor each time we added a room. I finally decided everything had to go into storage, so I hired the movers.

I met them as scheduled on the job site only to find the stairs were gone. I must have missed that meeting. Since we replaced the floors in the surrounding room, it directly affected the staircase. That was a very interesting moving process, and I'm sure they all quit after that day.

While we were rebuilding the staircase, I said, "Let's change the shape, and make a storage area under it with a hidden door. We added millwork to enhance the staircase and hide the door. During the course of waiting for the new stairs to arrive, we used the elevator. Until the day came that two subs got stuck in it, and it just stopped working. So we all shifted our attention to adding a safer modernized elevator to the remodel project. Just glad the breakdown happened to us and not our client and her family!



to be ready on time. Jerry's men helped me in every way, and set up temporary ramps, so we didn't disrupt the landscaping from all the rain.

Wednesday finally arrives. The trucks and crew ready to work. We moved everything back in, including Nancy's personal belongings that made the final editing stage. Days turned into nights to get it done on time. She arrived in town on a perfect Friday night in fall, after not seeing the project for months.

Comically, Nancy rang the doorbell, and I answered it as though I was the maid. She said, "Is this my house?" I don't recognize it and almost drove by. We laughed and cried as I gave her the tour. She still can't believe it is the same house. As the old saying goes, when it comes to remodeling, "you can't just do one thing."

With every project comes phases of improving your original design, revisions, obstacles, new ideas, and the "unknown factors" take over. In most jobs, the team knows the extent of collateral damage from the very beginning, and we plan for it. From start to finish, this was the magical mystery tour for all of us. In the end, she couldn't be happier, and that's what it's all about.

P.S. Maybe we should have just torn it down and started from scratch. ■

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Over the months, we all worked diligently on a project that led from one exciting change to another. Nancy would fly into town every six weeks for a few days to check on progress and be active in the meetings. She stayed at friends' homes, nearby hotels, and frequented every restaurant in town at least five times. She was on vacation while she was displaced and saw Naples through different eyes, a staycation of sorts.

When I finally felt like we reached all our goals, and we were nearing the end, I got the call. "Bethany ... (long pause) ... I think I should remodel the master bath." She thought she would come back to it down the road. I replied, "Well, we

have to do it right now while we have the patient on the table." I never picked out anything so fast in my life. We had Ferguson Bath, Kitchen & Lighting Gallery providing product within three-day lead times. It was amazing that we could get another "surgical procedure" completed at the very moment we had the right subs working on other parts of the house. A perfect storm, as they say!

We finally reached a point when the construction had ended. I scheduled my movers to arrive on a Monday, every detail perfectly planned. I waited and waited. I finally got the call, "Our truck broke down on Tamiami Trail, and we're blocking traffic. We have to completely unload it, and reload it onto another truck, so we can have it hauled away, so sorry. No move today." I was speechless. My only thought ... "this house must be on an Indian burial ground."

I rescheduled for the next day, Tuesday, which I refer to as the day with the "no name hurricane" came with torrential downpours the entire day. God help me! My client is arriving on Friday ... someone just shoot me, it's never going