

Photos Courtesy **Ciro Coelho**
Wooden gates and a stone paved courtyard lead to the stunningly simple entrance of this oceanfront retreat. **Neumann Mendro Andrulaitis Architects.**



Understated *Elegance*

By Andrea Cambern

"Hello, my name is Andrea and I'm a Houseaholic...."

I've never met a house I didn't like. And that's the problem. Penthouse or plantation, mid century modern or Mediterranean — my addiction does not discriminate. For me, architectural style doesn't dictate. What floats my boat is the soul of the space, the feeling you get when you walk through the door. The feel the owners of a magical oceanfront retreat were going for was understated elegance... and they hit it out of the park.

The challenge for the Carpinteria archi-

tectural firm picked to design the property was to create an expansive, state of the art, estate but make it feel simple. Architect Mary Andrulaitis says the directive came with more don'ts than dos. "They did not want it to be ostentatious or overdone," she says. "Nothing too grand."

A tall task for Andrulaitis and her partner Andy Neumann of Neumann, Mendro, Andrulaitis Architects. Their desert dwelling clients wanted every possible amenity for the four acre ocean bluff site, including guest quarters, a tennis court, swimming

and lap pools and entertaining spaces, but they also wanted it to feel simple.

"The wife wanted a place where she could curl up on the sofa with bare feet," says Andrulaitis.

Nod to the Past

The impetus for the design came from the lone structure that stood on the property since the 1940's — a tiny board — and — batten cottage. "It was a classic Montecito beach cottage, very low key, casual and it was the inspiration for the entire project," says Andrulaitis.

And beach cottage feel is the best way to describe the home, in spite of its 11,000 square foot size. Natural materials including sandstone, slate and copper are combined with board and batten to achieve the unpretentious aesthetic. A creamy palette and simple materials are used throughout for a cohesive feel and to scale down the house.

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1. Stone fireplaces flank the bright and airy living room. Classic upholstery is paired with contemporary and antique pieces. Interior Design/Tom Stringer Design Partners. 2. A covered porch is one of many entertaining areas on the blufftop estate. Builder/Paul Franz Construction. 3. An open-air teak folly was handcrafted in Bali and assembled on site. The lap pool doubles as a reflecting pool. 4. The boys bedroom has a contemporary yet casual beach feel. 5. The guest suite sitting room in a neutral palette has a more traditional European feel. 6. The master bath features a Water works tub and tongue-and-groove walls.

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"We tried not to make anything too grand," says Andrulaitis. The front door is really played down. A stone path and wooden gates lead to the entry."

But the grounds can't be called anything less than grand. Including Andrulaitis' favorite place on the property — a secret garden that reveals the lap pool and teak folly designed for the man of the house. "He's very much into fitness and health so this is a place he can retreat to." The folly was designed by the architects, hand crafted in Indonesia (to California earthquake standards), shipped here and reassembled on site. "It's a little jewel from Bali."

Along with the ancient art of carving, there are hidden high tech tools to enhance

the ambience of the property. A manmade stream meanders through the estate to soften the noise from the highway. It's even programmed to run faster during peak traffic hours! And if that weren't enough, stairs down to the beach are miked to enhance the sound of the surf.

Team Effort

More than bricks and mortar, the project took patience and persistence. Andrulaitis says on top of the coastal commission concerns, there were butterflies, birds and archaeology issues that would stop and start the project. It took seven and a half years to complete.

Andrulaitis credits Tom Stringer, a Chi-

cago-based designer, with much of the success of the project. He had a history with the clients and was very familiar with how they lived. "It was the best relationship — team effort — ever," she says. "He was involved in everything, from the furnishings and fabrics to the detail of the cabinetry. Even the color in the landscaping."

The house is furnished with an uncomplicated mix of old and new. Contemporary pieces combine effortlessly with antiques. And the compound, although expansive, feels intimate. Almost as if it has been there since the 40's... just like that little board — and — batten cottage that once stood alone on the bluff.



Andrea Cambern is an award-winning broadcast journalist and columnist based in Santa Barbara. A self-proclaimed 'houseaholic' who is addicted to designing and renovating homes. Share your story ideas: andrea@thehouseaholic.com