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THE COCONUT PALMS SURROUNDING THE CIRCULAR POOL HELPED GIVE THE WELLINGTON HOME THE IMPRESSION OF A REGAL ESTATE. THE OUTDOOR FURNITURE WAS DESIGNED BY SKYLINE DESIGN.



# luxe life

PHOTOGRAPHY BY JERRY RABINOWITZ

**A waterfront**, West Indies-style home in Wellington provides plush comfort for casual entertaining

## BY LINDSAY LAMBERT DAY

To many Florida residents, entertaining areas and native flora and fauna are top priorities when it comes to finding the right home. So it made sense that a family-oriented equestrian enthusiast opted to build a tropical-style house in Wellington in which she and her frequent visitors could feel at ease, enjoy their own space, and stay connected to Florida's famously warm outdoors.

At the recommendation of a friend, she enlisted the help of Rene Alonso, president of the West Palm Beach building firm Alonso and Associates. He, in turn, assembled a stellar team of professionals for the project, including Miami architect Cesar Molina. Drawing from his own tropical influences—his family's Cuban heritage and extensive time spent working in the Bahamas and South Florida—Molina came up with a design for a West Indies-style home. The luxurious but approachable lakefront property comprises a four-bedroom main residence, a one-bedroom guest house, and ample outdoor living space.



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**A LIVELY POP OF COLOR FROM THE DINING ROOM, *RED BEAN RUMBLE* BY MATT GODWIN COMMANDS ATTENTION FROM MULTIPLE CORNERS OF THE HOME.**

**OPPOSITE PAGE: A SCREENED DINING AREA ALLOWS IN PLENTY OF SUNLIGHT AND CONNECTS OCCUPANTS TO THE OUTDOORS.**

By being involved from the start, Alonso was able to offer early input about construction details to find the most cost-efficient, ideal materials for the residence. For instance, the original concept included wood shakes on the roof. Alonso instead recommended concrete tile, which was ultimately used. "It looks like wood shakes to give the same look, but it's a better selection because of its durability and maintenance," he explains. "Everybody was happy with that."

The home's unique aesthetic—clean-lined balustrades, long terraces, and overhanging roofs—is a welcome departure from the neighborhood's myriad Spanish-style homes. But for the team, the home was different from the start because of its L-shaped lot. "The homeowner decided to buy an additional lot next door because she wanted the guest house to be somewhat removed from the main house," Alonso says. "For Cesar, it was great because it turned the corner and gave him a great opportunity to







**SHENAMAN MIXED TRADITIONAL AND CONTEMPORARY DECOR ELEMENTS TO GIVE THE HOME A LIVED-IN FEEL.**

create multiple views. In fact, the guest house has the best view because it has a long vista down the lake."

The atypical shape also meant the home could be compartmentalized in a useful and appealing way. "Instead of having your typical residence—or these big, palatial, 8,000- to 10,000-square-foot houses all under one box—this house has a lot more movement, a lot more pods, or roof structures," Molina says. As a result, despite its combined 16,000-plus square feet of indoor and outdoor living space, "it becomes a lot more intimate when you look at it," he explains.

The L shape of the lot, and the home itself, also created the perfect nook to house a stunning circular pool and surrounding garden, one of the property's many picturesque outdoor havens. "Being West Indies in style, [the house] has a lot of indoor-outdoor space, so there are a lot of terraces, balconies, and covered loggias," Molina says. "At the end of the day, it's a very understated, elegant house."

That notion of understated elegance continues in the home's interiors, which designer Katherine Shenaman styled in a transitional manner—"a bridge between contemporary and traditional," she explains. "It's light, airy, soft. It's not contemporary in the sense of chrome and white leather, but it's not traditional, either, with fluffy bed skirts and pleats everywhere."

For every traditional piece employed, Shenaman chose a fresh, fun component to counter any potential stuffiness and to reflect the owner's lively personality. In the living room, a cream tufted sofa sits between two end tables topped with sculptural Murano glass lamps. In the dining room, an unframed abstract fuchsia print and a vintage tiered Murano glass chandelier add edge to an otherwise whisper-soft space. On the screened loggia, a decidedly industrial oversized ceiling fan breaks loose the buttoned-up look of mahogany windows and doorframes.





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**THE KITCHEN BACKSPLASH IS STATUARIO VENATO  
 TILE WITH ONYX AND MOTHER-OF-PEARL.**

**OPPOSITE PAGE: LIVE OAKS WERE A PRACTICAL  
 TOUCH THAT ADDED A SOPHISTICATED LOOK.**

When it came to hard finishes and interior architecture, Shenaman and Alonso collaborated on everything from backsplashes to millwork. Alonso, who began his career as an architect, frequently scribbled away in his sketchbook, creating completely customized details. “Rene has a keen interest in architecture, and he really enjoys the decorative part of building,” Shenaman says. “To be able to collaborate with a contractor who has an interest in architecture is really a treat—it doesn’t always happen that way. It was critical to achieving the look that we did.”

For the home’s mahogany windows, Alonso expanded his search outside the state, finding the right ones at the right price in Georgia. Other decisions like using scraped wood floors instead of high-gloss ones and scrapping a pricy stone-and-concrete combo for different types of stone fed serendipitously into the home’s theme of casual elegance. “The materials work for any occasion, and in no part of this house do you feel like you have to take your shoes off,” he says.

Outside, the casual elegance is also felt on the property’s methodically minimal grounds. In the front of the home, the introduction of nine live oaks “gave the





home file

**Builder:** Rene Alonso, Alonso and Associates, West Palm Beach ([alonsoandassociates.com](http://alonsoandassociates.com))

**Architect:** Cesar Molina, CMA Design Studio, Coral Gables ([cmadsi.org](http://cmadsi.org))

**Designer:** Katherine Shenaman, Katherine Shenaman Interiors, West Palm Beach ([shenaman.com](http://shenaman.com))

**Landscape Designer:** Krent Wieland, Krent Wieland Design, Delray Beach ([kwdesign.net](http://kwdesign.net))

**Backsplash:** Ceramic Matrix ([ceramicmatrix.com](http://ceramicmatrix.com))

**Cabinets:** Planning and Building, Wellington ([planningandbuilding.net](http://planningandbuilding.net))

house an instantly mature look," says landscape architect Krent Wieland, whom Alonso recommended for the project based on past personal experience working together. This tree species also has practical purposes, he adds: "It's a native oak down here, and it does really well with the weather and hurricanes we tend to get at some point. The live oaks made it through the last storms here better than any other canopy tree. [Also], they just get better with age."

For similar reasons, the garden and lawn surrounding the circular pool encompass a grove of mature coconut palms. "They give it that old Palm Beach estate look. ... They're symmetrically placed, but the gentle curve of the trunks gives them more of a relaxed elegance," Wieland says.

Without a doubt, barefoot is exactly how the homeowner enjoys one last critical outdoor space: an enclosed stretch of lawn outside the master suite that the team nicknamed the Secret Garden. "One of the things we wanted to achieve in the building of this home was giving the owner a private outdoor space that she could enjoy on her own, even when she has guests," Shenaman says of the miniature oasis. The space is enclosed with a mix of polyalthia trees, quercus hedging, angel wing begonia, and, importantly, traveler's palms.

"The traveler's palms will continue to get thicker on the upper end of the structure so that eventually, when there's another house next door, the owner won't feel like someone can look down and see her from their second floor," Wieland explains.

Indeed, one peek inside this warm and welcoming estate would clue in any onlooker that a get-together here is one not to miss. ❖



POSITIONED BETWEEN THE DINING ROOM AND THE KITCHEN, THE BUTLER'S PANTRY FEATURES CALCATTA GOLD MARBLE AND CABINETS BY ELMWOOD FINE CUSTOM CABINETRY.

OPPOSITE PAGE: IN THE MASTER BATH, WATERWORKS' ETOILE FAUCET AND A MARBLE TUB SURROUND ADD EUROPEAN SOPHISTICATION.

