

ALL IN GOOD FUN

TRAVEL CURIOS AND NAUTICAL
DETAILS CREATE HARMONY IN A
VACATION HOME ON THE COAST.

WRITTEN BY **MIKKI BRAMMER** / PHOTOGRAPHY BY **MARK ROSKAMS**

INTERIOR DESIGN / **JAMES DUNCAN AND MIRIAM DUNCAN, JAMES DUNCAN INC.**
HOME BUILDER / **FABIO CISTERNINO, FAB INTERIOR & EXTERIOR**





A bathroom table in the shape of a life-size sheep could be considered an unusual design choice—but designers James and Miriam Duncan knew it was exactly the kind of lighthearted eccentricity their clients wanted in their Key Largo vacation home.

The owners, whose primary residence is in Canada, happily gave the husband-and-wife team complete creative freedom for the project. But there was a caveat: The result couldn't be too precious. The Duncans could do whatever they wanted, so long as it was fresh, fun and a home that could be lived in.

Although the unit in the Ocean Reef Club didn't require many structural changes, it was lacking a certain character. "We needed to give it a little bit of personality," James Duncan says. "It had a lot of drywall and porcelain, so we wanted to warm it up and make it friendly."

To add visual depth to the condo, general contractor Fabio Cisternino crafted wood moldings and customized natural wood shiplap for parts of the dwelling, such as the living area and hallways. "We tried to make it really fresh," he says. "I like the combination of nice furniture and finishes with more rustic details. It's sophisticated but also has warmth."

The change established a backdrop for just the atmosphere the owners desired. "Being a vacation home, they wanted it to feel more casual," Miriam Duncan says. "They want to be able to walk in with the sand on their feet and not worry about anything." This meant choosing furniture and fabrics that resist the carefree holiday antics of the family's several generations. "The clients have grandchildren, so we were looking for bulletproof finishes,"

James Duncan says. To that end, the designers' use of vinyl wallpaper in hallways as well as outdoor fabrics and rugs throughout mean the apartment is easy to clean up after a festive gathering. "The owners aren't trying to impress people; they're just trying to have a good time," James Duncan says. "You don't want a design to look straight out of the showroom—it should feel like a life, a collected story."

Of course, a good vacation home is one that also conveys a sense of wanderlust. For that, the Duncans dug into their own collection of curios they have amassed from extensive global journeys, having dedicated two months a year to traveling. One hall displays wooden tribal masks from Mali and a sculpture from Papua New Guinea, the dining area has a console table from Vietnam, and the living area is furnished with antique chairs from Prague and smokestacks, once part of an old French ship, transformed into lights. "Good interiors are a bit of storytelling," James Duncan says. "With our spaces, we try to make it feel like this is a home, a collection of experiences."

Amid the international mix of findings, the Duncans made sure to also incorporate a local sense of place. In the bedrooms, they incorporated board and batten walls as a tribute to a signature building exterior in the Keys. And unsurprisingly, there are plenty of references to the ocean, from a custom gold chrome surfboard in a bedroom to a driftwood console in a hallway and beachy fabrics throughout. Combined, the rustic, organic textures add an extra touch of soul, with just the right patina to look as though they've been lovingly weathered over the years by salty sea breezes.

The coastal vibe is deepened through the unit's striking artworks. A dreamy abstract in soothing blues and grays sits above a weathered wooden bench in a hall, while large-scale photographs capture nautical vignettes: a majestic tricolor spinnaker blooming from a sailboat in a corridor; a seabird folding its elegant neck into its plumage in a hallway; a solitary white lifeguard stand surveying the azure waters in the master bathroom.

As for the sheep, Miriam Duncan says it is a testament to the homeowners' easygoing spirit—and trust in the designers' creative direction. "When you suggest a client have a sheep in their master bathroom to hold their soap, a lot of people would be very hesitant," she laughs. "But if you have the freedom to just do it, then it's a nice surprise and it's playful."

It's exactly those design details with a twist that imbue the waterfront property with the kind of laid-back, cheerful vibe inherent to a good beachside getaway. "It feels very light and bright," James Duncan says. "You just want to be happy there." ■

"YOU DON'T WANT A
DESIGN TO LOOK LIKE
A SHOWROOM—IT
SHOULD FEEL LIKE A
COLLECTED STORY,"

—JAMES DUNCAN



In the back hall of a Key Largo condo, husband-and-wife designers James and Miriam Duncan curated a large-scale bird photograph above a James Duncan Collection Paris console from Ammon Hickson. Fab Interior & Exterior crafted an inset wall of glossy white wood shiplap surrounded by a Phillip Jeffries vinyl grass-cloth wallcovering from Holly Hunt.

Right: The living area's vintage chairs from Prague pair with a velvet Bottega Veneta sofa—topped with Mexican mud cloth pillows—on a Japur rug. “We chose this rug because it has a water-like vibe,” James Durcan says. The designers transformed smokestacks from a Parisian flea market into lamps.

Opposite: First seen when entering the home, a corridor displays a custom driftwood console holding a sculpture from Papua New Guinea. A bone and glass Made Goods mirror joins tribal masks from Mali on the wall. A navy jute rug rests on the floor.









Atop a hand-knotted wool and silk Stark rug, a Bernhardt dining table is situated beneath a plaster Made Goods chandelier. The console is a vintage find from Vietnam. RT Decor fabricated the Belgian linen draperies, operable by Lutron motors.

This page: The Duncans styled the existing bar cabinetry, adding a custom rug to enliven the space.

Opposite: The designers left the kitchen largely untouched, lining the island with Bungalow 5 counter stools. The pendants are from the Medina of Rabat in Morocco.





"I LIKE THE COMBINATION OF
NICE FURNITURE AND FINISHES
WITH MORE RUSTIC DETAILS."

—FABIO CISTERNINO





Above: The master bathroom received a minor refresh. "We found and repainted the sheep table, a lightweight bit of fun—perfect for a candle and a glass or two of wine," James Duncan says. The duo painted the walls Benjamin Moore Distant Gray and hung a Steve Schlackman photograph for interest.

Left: The designers sourced a guest bedroom chandelier from Bali and covered a surfboard with gold chrome for a unique decor element. Flanking the custom bed, Made Goods nightstands hold stone lamps. The artwork displayed against the shiplap wall was purchased during a Duncan family trip to Borneo. "The wall treatment gives the room a cottage vibe," James Duncan says.