

Style

A MAGAZINE OF THE
HERALD-TRIBUNE MEDIA GROUP
🌐 DECEMBER 2012

Jewel
tones



Everything Zen



STROBER-JENSEN RESIDENCE

The home of Sue Strober and Michael Jensen in the Sanderling Club reflects contemporary Japanese design.

BY MARTY FUGATE
PHOTOGRAPHY BY GREG WILSON

The house surprises you — and it's surprising that it can. The Gulfside residence is in Siesta Key's exclusive Sanderling Club. This close-knit community has more than its share of knock-your-socks-off architecture. Even so, this home stands out. Its Japanese-style design — not a recreation of a historical style, but contemporary Japanese design — is the kind of upscale home

you might find on the outskirts of Kobe. It's a place of Zen simplicity, though achieving that simplicity was no simple task.

Sue Strober and Michael Jensen are the lucky denizens of this exceptional home. Sue is an interior designer noted for her clarity of expression. Michael is a renowned economist and an emeritus professor at the Harvard Business School. On top of that, he's a prolific speaker and author who stresses the foundational importance of integrity. The house is the perfect

expression of their shared philosophy and aesthetic.

They bought the property in 1999. The site had a house on it — a structure built in 1966. From the distance, the original house looked very much like the house that's there now. But don't be fooled.

The original 3,970-square-foot structure was right on the water — about 10 feet away from the shifting shoreline of the Gulf of Mexico. It had an Asian vibe, but it was showing its years. Four

decades of wind and water had taken their toll. The house was only 20 feet from the high water line, after all, and below the flood base elevation. Needless to say, it needed work. But how much?

Regulations had changed since the 1960s. The existing structure violated most of the new regulations, but it was grandfathered in. Such a building could never be built where it is today. If Jensen and Strober tore it down, they'd be forced to put a new structure in a completely different spot, at a different elevation. If they kept the existing structure, a superficial makeover was pretty much all that the law would allow.

But the new owners weren't satisfied with cosmetic changes. They wanted a total rebirth and would settle for nothing less.

In late 1999, Strober and Jensen began the not-so-simple process of transforming the residence. They contacted Maho Abe — a celebrated architect working for Zen Associates in Sudbury, Mass. — to reinvent the main residence and add a new two-story guest pavilion.

Consultation and initial design took about two years. But here's where things really got complicated. On a project of this nature, architects don't work from a blank slate. They have to think

about more than spaces, volumes and materials. They have to think about building codes. When the building codes became a straightjacket, the architect had to think like Houdini.

The solution? Divide the responsibilities. Abe, working out of her office in a Boston suburb, functioned as the design architect. Mark Smith, based in Sarasota, was the project architect. Officially, he was the architect of record. Unofficially, he was the permit wrangler — the Houdini who performed an incredible escape act from the confines of regulations. Smith's magic made Abe's design possible. Michael K. Walker &



The main house and a guest pavilion wrap around a central courtyard with swimming pool.



The home's location on a private, sandy beach overlooking the Gulf of Mexico adds to its Zen appeal.



Strober's interior design scheme combines Japanese design elements with a French modern sensibility.

Associates Inc., a long-standing luxury home builder in Southwest Florida, did the heavy lifting.

Actual construction took about two and a half years. In practice, it resembled a game of Tetris. Here's how it worked:

There's something called the 50-percent rule. Because the house was in the flood base, FEMA regulations only allowed for renovations costing up to 50 percent of the house's appraised value. Jensen and Strober's vision would cost far more than that.

But Smith had discovered a way around the rule. Lift the house! If the structure was raised above the flood base, the 50-percent restriction would not apply.

So that's exactly what happened.

Walker separated the original structure from the underlying foundation, and then jacked it

up about 6 feet higher. Then, with the aid of concrete blocks, he raised the foundation 6 feet to support the floating house, leaving the basic footprint of the structure unchanged. As they say, build your castles in the sky, but don't forget to add foundations.

Simple.

Well, except for the tropical storm that blew in while the house was jacked up in the air like a car at the repair shop. Walker and his crew stripped the suspended house and opened up windows and door frames to allow the breeze to blow through unobstructed. Then everybody waited and prayed. The storm passed. The house was still there.

They completed work on the taller foundation and set the house back down.

And then tore the original house down.

There was sound logic behind this seeming

magic: Smith's logic. As he had foreseen, the structure now met the height regulations. That meant the 50-percent rule was now void. The owners could now renovate it as they pleased, so long as they didn't change the footprint. In this case, "renovating" the structure meant tearing it down to the new foundation. And then building it up again.

This created some misunderstanding. Strober and Jensen had been renting another house in Sanderling during their renovation. They'd made friends with the postal carrier and told her about what they were doing with their nearby residence on the Gulf. Then the storm hit. Afterwards, the postal carrier saw the naked concrete slab and assumed that the big, bad storm had blown their house down. "The mail lady rang our doorbell at the rental house," Strober recalls. "She looked heartbroken. She said, 'I'm so sorry



about what happened! Your house blew down — after you went to so much trouble.”

Strober quickly assured her that rumors about the destruction of their house were greatly exaggerated.

Walker and his team resumed work. He realized Abe’s design. It took materials from around the planet and a small army of designers, architects and artisans to do it. Work was finished in 2003. Everyone involved was satisfied. (Walker was especially satisfied at the three national awards he received for this renovation.) The owners’ reaction?

“We’d been involved at every stage in the process, so I can’t say we were surprised,” says Strober. “But we were delighted with the results.”

No surprise there. The results were nothing less than delightful.

The redefined residence is really two structures: a main house and a guest pavilion, creating a total of 5,731 square feet of living space. These two structures wrap around a central swimming pool. There are gardens at the courtyard’s center, and a larger Zen garden, creating a privacy buffer between house and street. Appropriately, these meditative green spaces were also designed by Zen Associates. Peter White and Jon Russo were the landscape architects.

Built spaces and grown spaces flow together

The ever-changing drama of the outdoor environment adds to the allure of this home, where human and natural space become one.

A gift of comfort ...

You can make everyone a lot more comfortable this holiday season.



RECEIVE \$200 OFF

any Stressless® recliner or
\$400 OFF select Stressless®
Eagle or Wing recliners

**when you donate \$50
or more to
The Resurrection House**

Now thru January 14

See sales associate for details.

copenhagen imports

7211 South Tamiami Trail • ph. 923-2569

www.copenhagen-imports.com

Mon.-Sat. 10:00 - 6:00 • Sun. Noon - 5

1602225



BlackBirdHomeGallery.com
 Tuesday-Saturday 10:30AM- 5:30PM
 Monday by Appointment
 941.366.0941
 1540 Main Street Sarasota, FL 34236

CS00026577



The master bedroom embodies the home's name, "Seijaku," meaning a place where you go to find calm.



Artwork can be found throughout the home, including this outdoor sculpture by Danish sculptor Jens-Flemming Sorensen.

here, creating a realm of meditative calm. Human space and natural space are one.

That had been Jensen and Strober's dream from the beginning.

When their dream became a reality, the owners gave their house a name: Seijaku. It's a Japanese word with many connotations. Stillness in the midst of activity. Harmony with nature. Serenity. According to Abe, "The main sense is a place of meditation. It's not simply a place that is calm. It is a place where you go to find calm, to find your own center."

The source of the heavenly serenity is a simple, open plan — full of subtle details. Abe's design stressed natural materials. Below your feet: gleaming, granite floors in a solemn shade of brown. Before your eyes: Brazilian Ipe wood on the sprawling pool deck, wenge wood on the interior trim and

Voted Sarasota's #1 Closet Company

We Don't Just
Build Closets



CLOSET•TEC™

Fine Custom Closets ■ Home Offices
Wallbeds ■ Media Centers ■ Garages ■ Pantries

Free Installation & In-home Consultation

factory and showroom: 5691 DEREK AVE. SARASOTA
(I-75 exit 205/Clark Rd., then 2 miles west)

941-923-4563 ■ ClosetTecInc.com



exposed roof beams, cypress wood in the guest house and the dramatic covered walkway (a stately Japanese watari roka) leading up to the main structure.

Strober's interior design scheme blended Japanese design elements with a French modern sensibility. "It's not so much minimalist as soft-edge contemporary," she says.

She describes her color palette as natural. "I filled the house with the colors of sand, sea, sky and garden," she says. "I worked with tans and sandy browns and muted greens that echo the natural landscape outside."

Strober and Jensen's art collection adds more beauty to the space. This beauty comes in many flavors. In the courtyard fountain, a spherical piece by Danish sculptor Jens-Flemming Sorensen, both playful and powerful, like a giant, cracked, bronze egg with the suggestion of a human form inside. In the living room, two paintings from Edward Giobbi's "The House from My Window" series grace the walls. In the dining room, paintings from Japanese artist Yuri Tsuzuki's "Trees" series create a relaxing aura.

Beauty aside, Abe's layout is serenely functional. Sliding glass doors give instant access to gardens and pools. The kitchen is a clean, well-lit place, with plenty of working surfaces and zero clutter. Jensen's home office



The master bath is a serene oasis with its views of the beach and Gulf waters.



The kitchen is a clean, well-lit place, with plenty of working surfaces and no clutter — and, of course, those amazing views.

COUNTERTOPS ♦ CABINETS ♦ CLOSETS



AFFINITY KITCHEN & BATH

When Quality Comes First

GRANITE | MARBLE | QUARTZ | CAMBRIA | SILESTONE | CORIAN

941-953-3240
WWW.SRQ-KITCHENS.COM

OPEN SATURDAYS 10-2PM
1035 N. LIME AVE • SARASOTA



Home & Design

Bring art into your life

art UPTOWN

1367 Main St
Sarasota, FL
941-955-5409

Sarasota's oldest
artists-owned gallery

artuptown@artuptown.comcastbiz.net
www.artuptown.com

Déjà vu
Consignment Boutique

*A
Merry Christmas
Sale*

UNIQUE
UPSCALE DESIGNER
CLOTHING
ACCESSORIES
JEWELRY
COLLECTIBLES

Monday - Saturday 10:00-5:00

2153 Siesta Dr
Across From Dillard's

925-3662

1602634



Shop the fashionable
collection of designer clothing,
jewelry, home furnishings, antiques,
artwork, crystal and china while
supporting a worthy cause -
a woman

Consignment donations are
accepted at the Women's Resource
Center of Sarasota County's
Venice or Sarasota offices.

ENCORE!
& more
Consignment Shop

1439 Main Street | Sarasota
941-953-4222

Weekdays: 10am-5pm
Sat: 9:30am-4pm Sun: 12-4pm

1602638

www.theWomensResourceCenter.org/Encore



Inside the two-story guest house, a contemporary wood-and-glass staircase takes you up to the living quarters.

is equally shipshape and trim; his library reveals his mental acumen. "There's no wasted space," says Jensen. "It's as much house as we need — no more, no less. That's one thing we love about it."

That clean serenity can survive the frequent visits of their seven grandchildren. "That's what's great about having a guest house," Jensen says, laughing. "They love it!"

"Give a kid a beach, a pool and freedom and they're happy," Strober adds. "But we're happy for the same reasons. I guess it works for adults, too!"

Renovation team

Zen Associates, Inc.
Landscape architects:
Peter White and Jon
Russo
Design architect:
Maho Abe
www.zenassociates.com
(781) 932-3700

Smith Architects P.A.
Project architect:
Mark H. Smith
www.smith-architects.com
346-7205

Michael K. Walker &
Associates
Builder: Michael K.
Walker
www.michaelwalker.com
365-3301