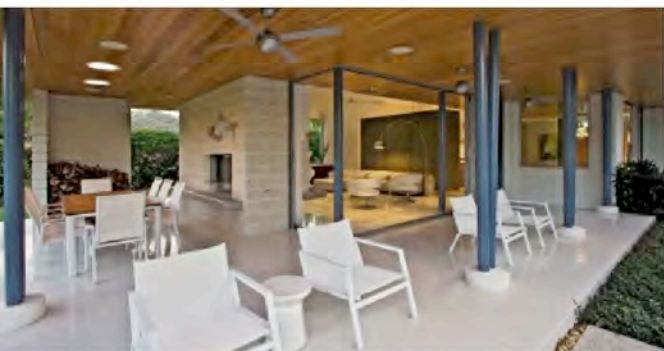


The Bold & Beautiful



Architectural inspirations emanate from this Sewall's Point home.



By Jennifer Arellano
Photography by Rosky & Associates

Subtly perched on what could have been the least desirable lot in Sewall's Point (surrounded by three streets, trees, sans water view) on Hillcrest Court is a home – redefined. Owned and designed by an architect-contractor couple, their love for mid-century modern design and architect Richard Neutra inspired their home's clean, functional, unadorned style. Not wanting to make an intrusive, hulking, modernist eyesore, but to assimilate with the existing neighborhood, the home's loudest visual statement



The homeowners' modern mindset combined with their architectural backgrounds gave way to a defining home.

is found within. Despite the hurricane-prone location, relative visibility from the neighbors, and the non-stop, high-speed train of three growing little boys, the Balfoorts have created a modern oasis in Stuart.

Modern and unimposing, peaceful and three loud kids, Palm Springs and Stuart? That's a triple threat of opposites made equals in the home of Michelle and Todd Balfoort. Composed entirely of typically cold, unfeeling materials



like concrete, glass and steel, there was the danger of creating a frigid, museum-like echo chamber. Adhering to their adoration of the mid-century modern, "it doesn't mean it's sparse. It's functional and, I'd say, calmer," Todd defends. Almost 50 percent of the 4,200-square-foot home is floor-to-ceiling glass panels, allowing massive amounts of natural light and southeast breezes to fill the space. When the glass panels are opened, the home expands to 6,200 square feet of living space. Not a sole intention, the modern elements of the house actually make it quite kid-friendly as there are no draperies or sofa slip covers to stain, and the openness of the floor plan is conducive to let the kids roam free.

The bone-white exterior makes a stunning but subtle statement on Hillcrest Court. Sleek, multileveled and very Palm Springs in the '60s, the Balfoort residence is the older, cool, hip, West Coast sister on the block. "We really had wanted to be friendly to the neighborhood. And we didn't want the house to be built out to every possible setback and pushed on every level, so we wanted things to step back from the façade and give some relief to the street and the neighborhood," Michelle explains.

The Balfoorts, Michelle, 41, and Todd, 42, met as architecture undergrads at the University of Florida. "We've been dating since Design V," quips Michelle, who is president and licensed architect of Balfoort Architecture and formerly was president of Balfoort Finnfold Architecture. Todd serves as president of Balfoort Contracting. In addition to designing and building their current residence, the couple, approaching 15 years of marriage, has worked together on design projects almost every year.

These eternal students redefine what it means to cre-



ate a living space. For instance, there is no formal dining room and no formal living room. The couple employed a don't-need-don't-build design ethos, only including rooms and furnishings that they've always loved (like authentic reproductions of Eames chairs, a Barcelona chair, a wave-wall headboard and terrazzo tiles), not wasting resources on wasted space.

"We use this house 100 percent of the time every day," Michelle says. The walls are not really walls but "partitions" that don't touch the ceiling and don't provide distinct separations of space, promoting an openness and flow room to room. The master bedroom closets are door-less and thus always open. There are few freestanding storage units as the pantry, cabinets and fridge are invisible in the "pocket doors" of the partitions. Todd didn't want their front door to open to the street, which did cause initial

confusion with some visitors who would park in the wrong driveway and attempt to enter through the back. Fortunately, the front entrance isn't hard to miss; after all it is made of glass, anchored by a reflecting pond, waterfall and fire pit immediately to the left (inspired by two installations at the Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao, Spain).

"It's a good family house," Todd says. "The house really isn't built to follow that mid-century style. We like mid-century architecture, but the whole reason the house came to be is because of the people that live here. This is how we live as a family and this is the resulting space. And we try to do things like respond to the environment, make it energy efficient and those things also impacted the design."

In fact, the five-bedroom, five-and-a-half-bathroom residence underwent a rigorous and wildly extensive process to become LEED-certified (LEED stands for Leader-



The Balforts took advantage of great window light and designed their home with floor-to-ceiling glass.



ship in Energy and Environmental Design and is assigned to homes that are environmentally friendly and energy-efficient). Among many environmentally friendly features there are low-water-use toilets, all Energy Star appliances, reflective roof coatings, renewable materials such as bamboo floors, and during construction the Balforts were able to recycle 83 percent of their building waste. With nearly 50 percent of the home as floor-to-ceiling glass, the house takes advantage of natural light and breezes.

The home exhibits a very studied and artful balance between function and beauty. “There’s streets all around so the fountains at the pool and the waterfall at the front

give a white noise so you don’t hear the cars. And the waterfall’s really groovy,” Todd laughs. “What I enjoyed in the finished process was kind of layering over all these very orthogonal- and rectangular-type hard and sharp edges, was all the softness, the tiles, the circles, and the mirrors – you know, just softening things up,” Michelle remarks, referring to the circle panels in the kids’ bedrooms and bathrooms, soap-dish-shaped tile patterns in the kitchen, psychedelic flower-printed rugs in the master bedroom, orange walls in the guest bedroom and a Lewis Paulsen artichoke lamp above the kitchen table.

The interior design reflects the couple’s extremely



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The Balfoorts' open layout makes it conducive for their three children to freely roam the home without feeling confined while their parents can keep an eye on them.

well-edited, curated collection. Their two favorite pieces are a Danish buffet and table set that Michelle's parents bought in Germany in the 1960s. The pieces now host the Balfoorts' family dinners as most recently for their first Christmas in Stuart this past December (the couple moved into the home on June 1, 2011).

As much as the Balfoorts profess love for their favorite mid-century modern architect and certain iconic design elements, the real heartbeat here hangs on the walls – blown-up portraits and framed photos of their three boys, Tucker, 2, Emmett, 5, and Peyton, 8, compose a majority of the home's art.

When asked to describe their own home and their personal taste, Michelle and Todd are hesitant to pigeonhole their abode as simply a 1960s period piece. One gets the feeling they are always learning and still enthralled by their design educations. "I've never really designed by style," Michelle says.

"I hate the word 'contemporary.' That's what people call anything that's not a 1960s rancher or a Boca Mizner house... There's so many more ways to describe a building," Todd explains. Shunning typical design norms and instead creating a home that fits them and not certain style eras or real estate listing descriptions, the Balfoort project is a lesson for all in creating a home, not merely a house.

It's a half-glass house full of light, love, lessons in design, and a boisterous set of boys. Instead of tunes like "The Girl from Ipanema" or a Frank Sinatra crooner filling the air, their Sonos sound system blasts Adele, Coldplay and Feist. In lieu of "Mad Men"-era-like fêtes, martinis and cigarettes, there are first Christmases, LEGO men mysteriously strewn

in mom's vanity, games of tag and juice boxes. And yet, somehow, the glamour of the '60s and the luxury of minimalism is not lost. It's the glamour of having it all in one house – work space, entertainment space, relaxation, high-style quotient and play areas for the kids. The Balfoorts created for themselves a new kind of modern. ■

