

# HOME & DESIGN

D E C O R | E N T E R T A I N I N G | G A R D E N I N G

## At water's edge

Bayside, beachfront,  
poolside — our  
**annual coastal issue**  
is sitting pretty on  
St. George Island

### Creative sparks

All the fireplace can be a stage

### Getting Funky

Making art and a life in Panacea

### Beyond sand castles

The ins and outs of beach building

*Plus*

Meet Tom of  
Tom's Palms, find  
fresh Inspirations  
and more





# The long *view*

After losing a home in Orange Beach, Ala., to a hurricane, an Atlanta couple come to St. George to build a near-bulletproof contemporary that's all about that beautiful view

Story by **Joni Branch**

Photos by **Long's Photography**  
339-5799, [www.longsphotography.com](http://www.longsphotography.com)



Studded with windows, the Garbers' home is intended to amplify the coastal experience — putting anyone inside squarely *in* the view. Just off the living room, a second-level infinity pool adds to the impression of looking across endless, sparkling water to an open horizon.

Floral design by **Missy Gunnels Flowers**  
893-5555, [www.missygunnelsflowers.com](http://www.missygunnelsflowers.com)



More than 10 years ago, nationally known child-behavior experts Stephen and Marianne Garber reached a point where they asked themselves, “What do we want to do with the rest of our lives?” For these two Atlanta residents, owning a vacation home on the Gulf made the list.

Their search for a condominium in Destin ended with the purchase of a free-standing house in Orange Beach, Ala. — a splendid waterfront contemporary with four bedrooms and lots of windows, a place that suited them both and offered plenty of space for their four kids.

“We loved the house. It was perfect,” Marianne says. “Then Ivan came along.”

In September 2004, Hurricane Ivan cut a deadly path through the Caribbean and Venezuela before slamming into the U.S. mainland, making landfall on Alabama’s stretch of shore. In Orange Beach, as Marianne describes it, the Garbers’ home was among a row of 22 houses that began where the beachfront condominium developments left off. Every home in that row was either swept away or irreparably damaged. Theirs, listing on twisted pilings, was deemed too dangerous to enter.

After the insurance claim was settled and the land was put up for sale, the Garbers were back to square one.

“Stephen and I drove the whole Gulf Coast looking for another place,” Marianne says. “Adam (their son) and Stephen drove all the way to Miami.” After all of that, she says, “the place that they found was St. George.”

The island’s calm was a big draw for the busy pair, who both work with the Behavioral Institute of Atlanta, the practice founded by licensed psychologist Stephen. “This was the only place on the Gulf that was quiet,” Marianne says. And, she adds, Stephen found then that “there had not been a direct hit from a hurricane in >>>

*“We wanted it to be a little like a ship.”*

— MARIANNE GARBER

In the dining room, as elsewhere in the house, low furnishings and copious storage keep the view uncluttered.







Marianne Garber says she spends a lot of time in the kitchen, and the banquette is one her favorite places to perch. The storage unit above is part of a top-level office space that overlooks the living room. The whimsical fish, which are made of stiffened fabric, were a lucky find bought for a song.

100 years.”

First the Garbers rented, getting to know the island and its surroundings, delighting in the historic character and eclectic charm of neighboring Apalachicola. Then they decided to buy or build and went in search of another gleaming contemporary.

The right house wasn’t among those listed for sale, but one particularly well-made place led them to Gary Ulrich of Gary Ulrich Construction. “We actually had our contractor before we had plans or a lot,” Marianne says. Gary helped the Garbers find a lot in the private, gated community of St. George Plantation, and the pair sought out an architect well-versed in waterfront building and contemporary style, Cary McWhorter of the award-winning Florida firm McWhorter Architects, PA. Construction began in early 2010 and was completed in June 2011.

Today the Garbers have the perfect contemporary again, a clean-lined, win-

## SOURCES & SERVICES

The Garbers’ home was built by Gary Ulrich Construction Inc., 58 Ave. E, Apalachicola, 850-653-2900. Tallahassee-area companies and craftsmen involved included:

- Allpro Landscaping
- Gutter Solutions & Waterproofing
- Jackson Cook / structural steel columns and beams
- Sellers Tile / tile
- Seminole Trusses / roof trusses
- The Sights & Sounds Company / audiovisual system
- Whiddon Glass / mirrors, shelving, shower enclosures
- Woodlane Cabinet Company / cabinetry and custom furniture pieces

dow-studded three-story rising above the white sands of St. George Island, a second-level infinity pool set like a jewel on its beach side. Just inside the front door, an open-plan living room looks past that >>>





The master suite keeps to the serene palette and clean style of the rest of the house, and even the bedroom's television is a pop-up hidden away in the window-front storage unit. In the secondary bedrooms, even the vanities are built in, below right, and have mirrors inset with lighted strips. Surfaces throughout the house were chosen for durability and easy clean-up.



*"I wanted it to be calm."*

— MARIANNE GARBER



turquoise blue pool and straight to the glittering Gulf. The house is designed to amplify the view and, with sleek, built-in storage cabinets throughout and Stealth Acoustics speakers invisibly embedded in the living-room walls, puts little in its way.

"We wanted the feel of the other house, so that you would look out and just see water," Marianne says. "We wanted it to be a little like a ship," so that standing in the living room is "like standing at a ship's rail."

This house built to offer maximum exposure to the coastal landscape is also built to provide maximum protection from any storm that might come spinning across the Gulf. The 5,200-square-foot structure is encased in steel-reinforced concrete and set on pilings sunk up to 57 feet deep. All those big windows are made to withstand winds up to 170 mph. The place also incorporates a number of environmentally friendly features, including a geothermal climate-control system and a

saltwater pool.

"It is definitely the place I would want to be if I needed to ride out a hurricane," says builder Joel Ulrich, who works with dad Gary.

On the everyday wear-and-tear front, should any sand be tracked inside the house, it'll do no harm. The floor in the main living area is tile and the upholstery fabrics, chosen for durability and stain resistance, will wipe clean. Stray sand aside, the color scheme brings the beach >>>



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indoors with whites, tans and taupes. Accents are in the shades of the waterfront sky at sunset, when peaches and lavenders slide into the deepening teals and blues of twilight's edge. "I wanted it to be calm," Marianne says. "Purple is my favorite color but I had sworn the house would not be purple."

Early in the morning, she likes to sit where a bit of purple, albeit a subdued shade on a striped upholstery fabric, makes an appearance – at the kitchen banquette. Her other favorite spots include the "very comfortable" chairs in the top-level master suite. There, wide windows again offer a front-row seat to the Gulf's glory.

Marianne says she and Stephen love the house and that in fact the whole experience of building it was "wonderful." Father and son builders "Gary and Joel were fabulous," she says. "We had great subcontractors, great craftsmen."



After their lives settle down – the couple's first grandchildren, twins, were born earlier this year to one daughter and another daughter was married in May – the Garbers plan to regularly make the trip down from Atlanta to spend several days a month on St. George. "It's a place to unwind."

Marianne continues with a laugh in her voice, "I'm always sorry when someone says they know where St. George is. I wish they'd forgotten." **H&D**

## FEATURE

# Building the dream

## The ins and outs of coastal construction

By Andy Lindstrom

One of the many blessings that come with Tallahassee living is easy access to a second home down by the Gulf.

Whether you're planning a modest stilt walkup back off the beach or a million-dollar villa overlooking the surf, it's a short drive to coastal bliss: deep-sea fishing. Dolphin watching. Flaming red sunsets and an island-time tempo. Shrimp boats. Palm trees. Fresh grouper.



Rock Solid Construction builds frequently on the nearby coast, using insulated concrete forms that are reinforced with rebar and sandwiched between polystyrene panels. This home by Rock Solid went up off Highway 98 near Carrabelle.

Photo courtesy of Rock Solid

But enough of this idyllic talk. Like the proverbial rose and its thorns, coastal building has its issues. Particularly in what are designated as "high-risk areas."

First, of course, is the dreaded "h" word — hurricanes. There hasn't been a direct hit on our stretch of the Gulf since Hurricane Kate in 1985. But don't tell that to the insurance companies who had to cover the losses, or the government folks who regulate building codes.

Tim Tucker, the president of Rock

Solid Design & Construction in Crawfordville, said that Wakulla County's minimum standard for a new home on the seaward side of the state's coastal construction control line (the so-called high-risk area) has been upgraded to withstand 130 mile-an-hour winds. The CCCL, as it's called, marks the area's 100-year storm-surge high. For Franklin and Gulf counties, Tim said, it's 140 mph.

"Peace of Mind," is Rock Solid's company motto. Its insulated concrete >>>

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