

THE DIDRIKSEN RESIDENCE IS PERCHED NEARLY 20 FEET ABOVE THE GROUND TO GUARD AGAINST POTENTIAL HURRICANE DAMAGE. A BOARDWALK WAS CONSTRUCTED TO PRESERVE THE FRAGILE SAND DUNE FLORA, AND LEADS FROM THE HOUSE TO THE BEACH. PHIL AND HELEN SPEND A LOT OF TIME WALKING THE PRISTINE WHITE SAND SHORELINE WITH THEIR DOG, FOLGER. THE LOWER DECK ON THE GULF SIDE OF THE HOME, BELOW THE SCREENED PORCH, IS "FRANGIBLE," DESIGNED TO BREAK OFF DURING HURRICANES.

"We don't get a lot of drop-ins at our place," says Phil Didriksen, as he gently, skillfully, motors his Pompano 21 away from the small wooden dock at Eldred's Marina in Placida, Florida. Eldred's is a quintessential Florida launching spot for fishing, and its shack-like store sells bait, candy bars, potato chips, and soda.

Carefully making his way through a narrow, shallow channel out into Placida Bay, Phil heads toward Little Gasparilla Island and muses, "Helen and I must have the island life in our blood." With a home in the historical district of Nantucket Island, another on a saltwater pond in the relatively remote North Fork area of Long Island, and now this refuge at Little Gasparilla, there's no doubt Phil speaks the truth. He lands the boat on the bay side of the island some 15 minutes after leaving Eldred's, pulling up to another wooden dock. His guests are unloaded and their gear is placed in a wheelbarrow with large rubber tires. The barrow is rolled to the end of the dock, and Phil ties it to his golf cart. Driving along a sand path no more than 10 feet wide, dodging a few intruding branches and slowing for some serious bumps, Phil says, "This is King Street, and soon we'll be stepping up to the big time, Grand Avenue." Indeed, just ahead Phil turns left onto Grand Avenue, which is also a sand path, about 12 feet wide. A few doors down, on the right hand side, is the Didriksen residence.

Miles and Miles of Beach

PHOTOGRAPHY BY ROGER WADE, STYLING AND TEXT BY DEBRA GRAHL, PRODUCED BY BRENDA KELLEY

Take one part Gulf of Mexico island and stir in a simple, green log cabin, and you have the perfect recipe for laid-back living.

“It was like being a Robinson Crusoe, along with many other Robinson Crusoes, each house way up on stilts and the island itself essentially untamed.”

Perched on a crisscross of pressure-treated posts, the first level of the home is situated nearly 20 feet above the sandy ground. An elevator from the ground level makes hauling supplies and groceries an easy chore, but one can always opt for the athletic route via wooden stairs at the rear of the house. Helen, Phil's wife, is hanging out on the screened porch with the couple's friendly black lab, Folger, both of them savoring the morning's cool Gulf breeze. The porch and deck wrap around the entire house, with eaves that span 10 feet deep, providing cool shade for outdoor living as well as protection from the Florida sun for the interior of the home. French doors open to the porch and the sea breezes of the Gulf of Mexico. The home feels more like a pavilion than a house.

Helen shares how she and Phil acquired their little piece of paradise: “We discovered Little Gasparilla Island by accident! In 2000, we were considering buying property in Florida and took what a friend of ours calls a ‘Mooch March’ through the state, visiting everyone we knew who had a home here. We didn't see anything that seemed quite right for us, and we objected to all the high-rises. One friend suggested checking out Boca Grande on Gasparilla Island, where high-rises are forbidden. While researching Boca Grande on the Internet, we kept coming across “seven miles of beach; to be reached only by boat,” and knew that couldn't be referring to Gasparilla Island, which is accessed by a causeway from the mainland. Digging deeper, we discovered the comment referred to Little Gasparilla Island, just north of Gasparilla Island, and found a house for rent that advertised having a piano and lots of antiques.” That sold Helen, as music and antiques are two of her passions. The couple rented the house for a week, and for many weeks during the years that followed. They had discovered a location that was unlike anything they had ever seen. Helen says, “It was like being a Robinson Crusoe, along with many other Robinson Crusoes, each house way up on stilts and the island itself essentially untamed.”

Little Gasparilla Island, roughly seven miles long and half a mile wide, is one of a chain of barrier islands on the Gulf of Mexico in southwest Florida. A pristine piece of old Florida, Little Gasparilla is quiet, peaceful, and uncrowded. There are less than 400 single-family residences on the island, most of them unoccupied at any given time since nearly all are second homes. Not a single commercial enterprise, no restaurants or motels, operates on the island, other than the essential golf cart repair shop. Phil says, “The only mode of transportation on the island is golf carts or walking. A few bicycles are used for exercise on the beach.” The lack of commercialism provides an idyllic environment for the residents here, who cherish the breathtaking natural beauty of their unique island home, as well as the easy-going lifestyle that it fosters. Helen says, “The relative isolation, even though it's only 15 minutes to the mainland, makes for a particular friendliness among the residents. Everyone talks to everyone else, and it's quite a mixed group. When going ashore, a neighbor will ask you if you need anything.” This conserves time as well as fuel for the residents of Little Gasparilla, another great aspect of the good life here.

Phil launches into the couple's building experience: “Helen and I bought our property in 2001, a mere year after discovering the island. We wanted to be in basically the same area as the home we were renting, mid-island, where the houses are unusually close to the Gulf. We liked the neighborhood of nice homes, some more ‘beach house’ than others, but none pretentious. We were

GREEN TIP

BEING A NEW STRUCTURE, THE MAINTENANCE REQUIREMENTS ON THE HOME ARE MINIMAL. ONE OF THE MANY BENEFITS OF CEDAR IS THAT OVER THE YEARS IT WILL REQUIRE LESS REFINISHING THAN MOST OTHER WOODS BECAUSE OF ITS ABILITY TO ACCEPT STAIN.

THE WIDE OPEN FLOORPLAN ALLOWS FOR FAMILY AND FRIENDS TO ENJOY EACH OTHER'S COMPANY DURING MEAL PREPARATION. HELEN SAYS SHE NEVER FEELS ISOLATED WHILE COOKING UP A STORM. THE SLAB COFFEE TABLE, MADE OF SAPELE, AN AFRICAN HARDWOOD, WAS CRAFTED BY DOUG MOOBERRY, KINLOCH WOODWORKING, UNIONVILLE, PENNSYLVANIA. THE COUPLE COLLECTED THE ORIENTAL RUGS OVER MANY YEARS, FROM MANY SOURCES.



lation, which means less electricity needed for air conditioning or heat. Rodney Robertson, president of IHC, describes some additional green qualities of the product they offer to home buyers: "IHC has always had a good 'green' story to tell. We introduced laminated, engineered timber walls to the industry in 1966. This allows us to use second-growth forest products in every timber we sell, thus contributing to the preservation of old-growth forests. Using engineered timbers also allows us to more efficiently use the trees that are harvested, and our pre-cut system dramatically reduces waste on the job site."

The glue lines in the laminated timber also act as thermal breaks, which increases their energy efficiency. The cedar wood used for the timbers is naturally disease and pest resistant (it is one of only two species of wood grown in North America that can be imported into Hawaii without being treated), so it has tremendous endurance. Cedar also holds a finish better than many other woods, which increases the time interval between refinishes. Another energy-saving aspect of an engineered timber is its relatively light weight, which is achieved by kiln drying each 1 by 8 board before it is laminated, resulting in much less water weight than a rough-sawn timber of

LEFT: COLORFUL MEXICAN TILES LINE THE FARMHOUSE SINK AND COUNTER BACKSPASH. THE BRIGHT YELLOW COUNTERTOP IS STAINED CONCRETE, CUSTOM MADE BY LARRY ANDERSON, OWNER OF ARTISTIC ILLUSIONS BASED IN ENGLEWOOD, FLORIDA. INSET: THE DINING ROOM HUTCH, IRISH IN ORIGIN WITH ORIGINAL PAINT, WAS FOUND IN AN ANTIQUE STORE IN OLD RHINEBECK, NEW YORK. IT DISPLAYS COLLECTIONS OF CHINA AND POTTERY AND WOODEN ANIMALS FROM SAN MIGUEL DE ALLENDE AND SANTA FE. BELOW: THE 19TH-CENTURY DINING ROOM TABLE WAS PURCHASED FROM A FRIEND OF HELEN'S YEARS AGO AND IS MADE OF CURLY MAPLE. THE CHAIRS BELONGED TO HELEN'S GREAT GRANDPARENTS AND ARE FAUX BAMBOO. THE CHANDELIER WAS MADE TO ORDER BY ILLUMINARIES LIGHTING, OUT OF AUSTIN, TEXAS.



fortunate enough to find a rare double lot, which gave us 100 feet of Gulf shore frontage."

Not only did the Didriksens fall in love with Little Gasparilla, they also fell in love with the house itself, which was built from cedar lumber that had been laminated into flat-faced engineered timbers. Buddy and Laurie Gaines, now good friends of the Didriksens, told them that the house had been created by a company in Washington State called International Homes of Cedar. Buddy had been in Hawaii in 1982 filming the devastation from Hurricane Iwa for Allstate Insurance. One of the only homes in the area still standing was an IHC home and, remarkably, it was completely undamaged. This incident led Buddy to Woodinville, Washington, to meet with IHC to discuss his plans for building on property he had recently acquired on Little Gasparilla Island. Years later, they were thankful for their choice when the eye of Hurricane Charlie passed within 10 miles of their home, and caused no damage.

Phil and Helen contacted the company and began to explore home designs. They went with a floorplan similar to the Gaines's home, with some modifications. The Didriksens were not really thinking "green" as they embarked upon their building project, although by choosing IHC and its 5x8 laminated cedar timbers, they ended up with a house that boasts great insu-



the same dimensions. Rodney explains the benefits of this quality: "The maximum weight for a 16-foot-long timber is less than 80 pounds. This reduces shipping costs [less fuel] and eliminates the need for a boom truck or crane to lift the timbers in place. Two people can stack one of our homes." The Didriksens also received the benefit of a quiet, peaceful job site, since IHC homes don't need loud, heavy equipment to stack the logs.

Phil and Helen chose a local builder, Bruce Woithe, owner of Hoot Gibson Construction Company out of Placida, Florida, to construct their home. Transporting building materials from the mainland to the job site required special equipment and skills, and the company has had many years of experience with building island residences. "We were amazed to be told that it would take more than a year to get the house up," Phil recalls. "In fact, the actual construction time did take a year, even though all the building materials had to be brought to the island by barge. But the entire project took us eight years total because Helen and I fussed for a long time with the house design, and many months were consumed with getting permits due to severe building codes and environmental requirements here on the island."

THE SCREENED PORCH ON THE GULF SIDE OF THE HOME IS THE COUPLE'S MOST USED LIVING AREA. FURNISHED WITH COMFORTABLE WICKER SEATING AND A DINING AREA, PHIL AND HELEN ENTERTAIN NEIGHBORS HERE ON A REGULAR BASIS, ENJOYING THE BEAUTIFUL VISTA OF THE GULF OF MEXICO. PORCHES SURROUND THE HOUSE AND THEIR DECKING IS IPE, AN EXTREMELY HARD WOOD FROM SOUTH AMERICA. THE GULF-SIDE DECK WAS BUILT THREE FEET BELOW THE MAIN LEVEL SO THAT ITS RAILING WOULD NOT OBSCURE THE VIEW FROM THE SCREENED PORCH.

The modestly sized, 1,868-square-foot home has an open floorplan, with master bedroom and bath on the main floor and a loft-style second bedroom and bath at the top of the staircase that ascends from the great room. The size works well for Phil and Helen, who are empty nesters and have family and friends who are comfortable with "fancy camping" when they come to visit. The porch adds another 1,298 square feet of living space and is comfortably furnished with seating and dining areas, including hammocks on either end of the Gulf-facing porch.

The decorative style of the Didriksen's home is eclectic. Helen describes herself as fanatic about their art collection, but says her tastes have changed over the years from formal art to more "for and by the people" art. The couple's Tramp Art collection fits that category. "Supposedly," says Helen, "the first Tramp Art was made by railroad hobos carving notches into cigar boxes during the Depression. It has since become much more complicated and varied." Other collection interests include primitive 19th-century paintings, Currier and Ives prints, and painted furniture, particularly pieces painted by impoverished people attempting to dress them up. Helen also



Beachy Keen

The home was built using a modified version of IHC's "Leeward" floorplan. The design is similar to "Old Florida" beach house architecture, with wide porches, ample windows, and a "pop-up" to capture views of the beach and Gulf of Mexico.

The porches almost double the home's living space, so there is plenty of space for outdoor cooking, dining, or simply enjoying the water and the breeze.

Phil and Helen live on the main floor while family and friends are treated to the second-floor, loft-style aerie.

ABOVE: PHIL AND HELEN REFER TO THE SECOND-STORY BEDROOM AS THE "POP-UP" BECAUSE OF ITS APPEARANCE FROM THE OUTSIDE. CONSISTENT WITH OLD FLORIDA ARCHITECTURE, THE ROOM IS FLANKED WITH WINDOWS TO CAPTURE THE VIEWS AND BREEZES FROM THE GULF. AN ANTIQUE CRAZY QUILT GRACES THE DOUBLE BED IN THE GUEST ROOM. RIGHT TOP: HAND PAINTED SINKS WERE MADE IN MEXICO AND CAME FROM CASA-CASTILLO, SAN MARCOS, CALIFORNIA. THE MIRRORS WERE ALSO MADE IN MEXICO AND CAME FROM LA FUERTA IMPORTS, COLORADO SPRINGS, COLORADO. THE STAINED CONCRETE COUNTERTOP WAS MADE BY LARRY ANDERSON, THE SAME CRAFTSMAN WHO CREATED THE KITCHEN COUNTERS. RIGHT BOTTOM: THE PAINTED ANTIQUE METAL BED CAME FROM A DEALER IN LOS ANGELOS AND IS COVERED WITH A VINTAGE-STYLE QUILT FROM ANTHROPOLOGIE.



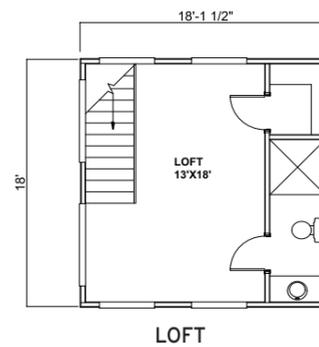
points out, "Our art for this house was very influenced by a trip to San Miguel de Allende, Mexico, in 2003. We particularly loved their religious art and tile work." She modestly states that she might have been a better collector if she had focused more on one subject. "But it was more fun this way!" she exclaims, "and I am not a sensible 'decorator type.' I buy something on impulse, then have the challenge of finding a place to put it!"

GREEN TIP

"WE HAVE A SHALLOW WELL IN THE SAND DUNES BETWEEN THE HOUSE AND THE BEACH," EXPLAINS PHIL. "FRESH WATER COLLECTS ON TOP OF SALTWATER AND THAT IS OUR HOME'S WATER SOURCE. A VERY CLEAN AND SIMPLE SYSTEM. THE WATER NEEDS SOME FILTRATION AND CHLORINATION, BUT ONLY REQUIRES OCCASIONAL ATTENTION."

The Didriksens enjoy their home exactly as it was meant to be enjoyed. It is an airy abode, open to the breezes, and very, very relaxed. "This lifestyle would not appeal to everyone," Phil says, "but it certainly does to Helen and me. We have always been sailboaters, going to remote locations in Maine and Nova Scotia, which could be part of the reason we are so at ease being here. The island is only about two city blocks wide, so it is often possible to have both bay and Gulf in sight from the same spot. It's dazzling to be engulfed by the water

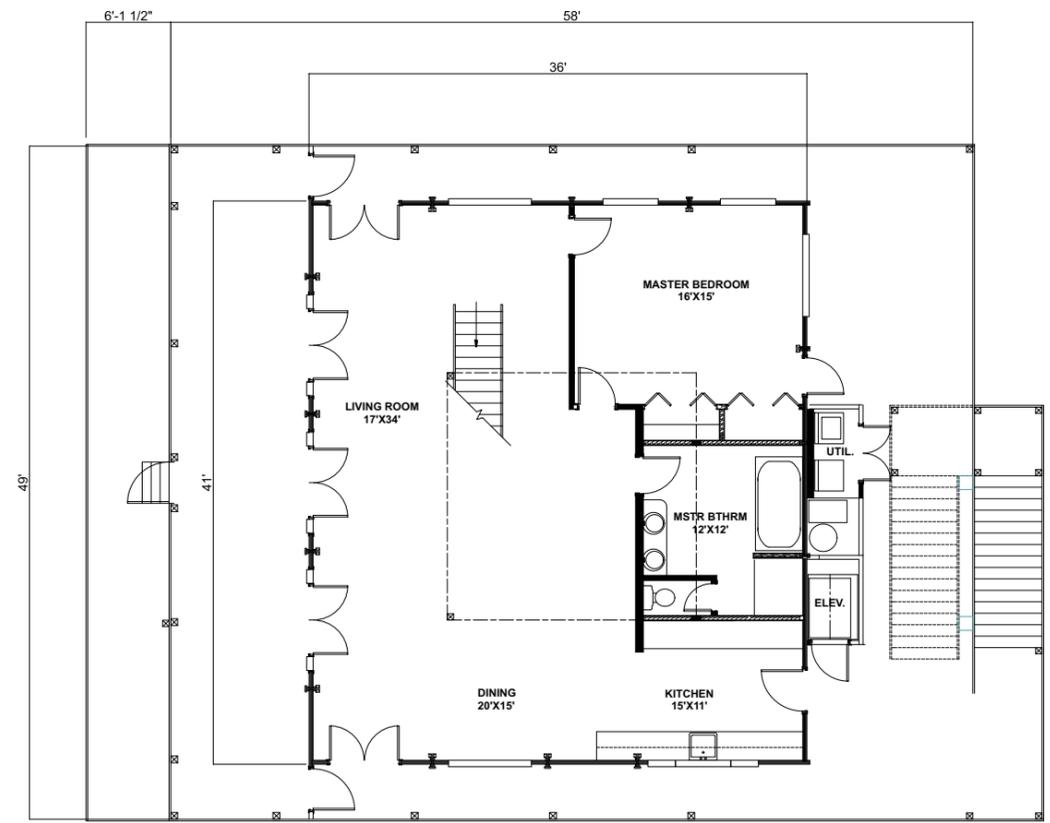
this way. All of the people here are friendly, the neighbors are great, and the sunsets are fantastic. Not to mention our many miles of beach to roam, which is what brought us here in the first place." ❁



THE MASTER BEDROOM AND LARGE BATHROOM ARE ON THE MAIN LEVEL OF THE HOUSE. THE "POP-UP" SECOND STORY BEDROOM, FULL BATH, AND WALK-IN CLOSET PROVIDE ROOMY QUARTERS, PRIVACY, AND SPECTACULAR VIEWS FOR OVERNIGHT GUESTS.

THE KITCHEN ENTRANCE IS CONVENIENTLY LOCATED NEXT TO THE ELEVATOR, MAKING GROCERY UNLOADING EASY. THE KITCHEN DOOR ACCESSES THE REAR DECK OF THE HOUSE, WHERE THE OUTDOOR GRILLING STATION IS SITUATED, EXPANDING THE INDOOR KITCHEN TO THE OUTDOORS.

FIVE SETS OF FRENCH DOORS FLANK THE GREAT ROOM OF THE HOME, ALLOWING EASY ACCESS TO THE OUTDOOR LIVING SPACES AND BRINGING THE GULF BREEZES INTO THE HOME.



Log Home Producer: International Homes of Cedar, Woodinville, Washington
 Log Home Builder: Bruce Woithe, Hoot Gibson Construction Co., Placida, Florida
 Two-story home | Square Footage: 1,868 | Bedrooms: 2 Baths: 2