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FOR A FAMILY LOOKING TO DOWNSIZE, A SKILLED DESIGN TEAM CREATES  
A COMFORTABLE YET ELEGANT NEST OVERLOOKING LAGUNA BEACH.

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INTERIOR DESIGN / **MICHAEL FULLEN, MICHAEL FULLEN DESIGN GROUP, INC.**  
ARCHITECTURE / **KIRK SAUNDERS, KIRK SAUNDERS ARCHITECT**  
HOME BUILDER / **CHRIS GALLO, GALLO BUILDERS, INC.**  
LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE / **ERIK KATZMAIER, KATZMAIER NEWELL KEHR**



With their blended family of five children starting to leave the nest, Karyn and Damon Shelly began to think small. A North Laguna home—nearly half the size of their current place—met their downsizing goal, and its stunning views drew them in, but they found its Mediterranean style, dark cabinetry and heavy stone less compelling. Instead, their designer, Michael Fullen, says, “They wanted a contemporary style that was still warm enough to feel comfortable in. And since the home is beachfront, it was important to capture the indoor-outdoor possibilities.”

The place was stripped back to its studs, paving the way for Fullen to layer in new materials and finishes and for architect Kirk Saunders to reconfigure parts of the floor plan. “We have two children in high school who are with us half-time and three in college,” Karyn says. And while none live there full-time, it was important to the Shellys that the house felt like home.

To that end, Saunders cleverly squeezed in an additional bedroom and bathroom, as well as a hallway to improve flow. “Two of their older children are occasionally home together, so we created their area with two pods so they could each have a space within the space that was theirs alone but would act as a single bedroom when they weren’t together,” he says. For Damon, who frequently works at home, an office was added. “It occupies the old wine cellar,” says builder Chris Gallo. “We enclosed the space with glass walls, so if you’re inside working, you aren’t closed off from the rest of the family.” Adds Karyn, “It’s a perfect way for him to feel like he’s integrated into the house.”

Reimagining the palette, Fullen incorporated colors from the surrounding hillside, ocean and beach, using neutrals accented with blues and greens. “It feels timeless,” he says. “The view commands all the attention, and rightfully so.” For the finishes, the designer opted for subtlety to create a calm backdrop—nothing reads as visually busy. “We used the same bronze finish for all the cabinet detailing, for instance,” he explains. “The desk, range hood

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—MICHAEL FULLEN

and fireplaces all have bronze details.” Other materials throughout the home repeat, as well. “All the wood surfaces were made from figured eucalyptus, obeche and rift-cut white oak,” Gallo notes. “A powder room wall, sink and counter were made of book-matched onyx.” Elsewhere, gleaming glass tiles bestow a jewel-like feel to another powder room and coverings in everything from leather to newsprint to sequins grace the walls.

Fullen’s furniture choices lean toward pieces with crisp, elegant lines. “The look is clean and simple, but also comfortable and inviting,” Karyn says. “That was our caveat to the whole contemporary idea.” The sleek interiors help showcase the many design details that Fullen incorporated, such as a console featuring doors with a bone inlay in a starburst pattern. “My favorites are the living room sofas, which have an oak band over each sofa arm,” Fullen says. “It’s a unique detail that actually could function as a place to put your drink if you trusted yourself enough!”

The designer also helped the couple place pieces from their art collection, which ranges from bronze sculpture to work by Los Angeles-based artist Anja Van Herle. Paintings by Laguna Beach artist Chris Gwaltney, whose work the Shellys had long been collecting, also appear in the house. “It is fitting that our most colorful and prominent pieces happen to be from a local,” Karyn says.

The owners love having friends over for barbecues, host family from all over the world, and have even held a charity event, so the home needed to work for entertaining—and that meant a well-functioning kitchen. “The old kitchen was dark and didn’t have great flow,” Gallo says. “We created an open-concept feel that really brings in more light and air and takes advantage of the ocean views.” The team also reworked the floor plan to enhance circulation, placed the appliances more thoughtfully, and added an open nook pantry as well as cabinetry with custom storage. “We worked meticulously on designing every single cabinet and drawer,” Karyn says. “Every pot and pan has a home.”

For their gardens, the Shellys turned to landscape architect Erik Katzmaier. “Karyn said she enjoyed succulents, and having worked with them in the past, I knew she wanted fruit trees and a small vegetable/herb area,” says Katzmaier, who searched for structurally interesting succulents to give interest and scale to the outdoor spaces, opting for echeverias. “They have beautiful bronze tans and soft gray tans. The felt plants are also in gray tones and tie beautifully with the clean lines of the house.” He also chose apple trees that were espaliered to fit into narrow spaces, semi-dwarf citrus trees and a dwarf avocado tree.

Ensnconed in their new digs, the couple revel in being home. “There are so many woods and metals and textures, and it all flows together so nicely,” Karyn says. “One fun decision that Damon and I make every morning is, ‘Where do we have our coffee?’ In our master bedroom, we have a sitting area and a patio. There’s a corner window upstairs with two swivel chairs and a 180-degree view of the coast and Laguna Beach. For the first time in our lives, we have a home that we really love.”

For a family’s Laguna Beach home, designer Michael Fullen and architect Kirk Saunders reimagined the residence. Under their direction, heavy Mediterranean elements gave way to a fresh, updated look at ease with the home’s beachy surroundings.



Warm neutrals define the living room's subtle palette, chosen so the focus remains squarely on the view. The Joseph Jeup sofa, walnut armchairs and coffee table with a lacquered-linen top are all from Holly Hunt. Underfoot is a handwoven Tibetan rug from Aga John Oriental Rugs.



Tom Corbin's *Woman 1*, a bronze sculpture, stands near the staircase, which features the same clean lines and open feel as the rest of the house. Fullen worked closely with the homeowners to place their extensive art collection.



Custom walnut-and-leather chairs surround the dining area's walnut Joseph Jeup table, which is illuminated by cast-glass Alison Berger Glassworks chandeliers. A Chris Gwaltney work hangs above the Ironies console from Kneidler Fauchère with bone-inlaid doors and a bronze base.





Tiles from Ann Sacks line the kitchen's backsplash and Caesarstone covers the countertops. The leather-clad barstools are by A. Rudin. Gascogne blue limestone from Arizona Tile provides a durable foundation for the space.

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An outdoor shower allows beachgoers a handy spot to rinse off before heading into the house. The stools are from Summit.

**Clockwise from top left:** Outside, the serene palette gives way to bursts of bolder color and pattern, as in pillow fabrics on a Brown Jordan Elements collection sectional—the zigzag and solid fabrics are by Perennials from David Sutherland; the stripe is from Janus et Cie. A mask from the clients' art collection. Brown Jordan Elements collection chaises make a perfect spot for sunbathing. The Lulu lounge chair is from Janus et Cie.



Clerestory windows above the limestone-clad wall bring light into the master bathroom while maintaining it as a private oasis. Hanging above the Duravit Starck tub is a Cloud fixture by Ted Abramczyk, purchased through Ralph Pucci.

A custom leather wall panel with bronze details frames the bed in the master suite. It stands on a shimmering carpet from J.D. Staron. With its expansive ocean view, the space is a restful cocoon for the busy couple.







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