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BEST RESORTS 2006

WRANGLING A RANCH:
WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

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BRECKENRIDGE, ASPEN & BEYOND



DESERT ISLAND

By Melissa Wujick

THINK YOUR WORK COMMUTE IS EXTREME? DESIGNER CLAIRE OWNBY REVAMPS RESIDENCES IN THE LAND OF THE LUAU AS WELL AS THE STATE OF THE SAGUARO.

WHILE MOST BLONDE LITTLE GIRLS hosting tea parties for their dolls and stuffed animals were busy attending to their guests, lasses with a destiny for interior design, like Claire Ownby, were more concerned with the alignment of the chairs around the tea table. “Even when I was a little girl, I was moving furniture around my mom’s house,” Ownby says. “She got so tired of it because every time she came home, things were in a different place. As a child, I rearranged my room every few weeks.”

After spending her youth reshuffling loveseats and end tables in her family’s St. Louis home, she moved with her parents to the West. As a teen, Ownby fueled her passion for interior settings by participating in the only design class her high school offered (drafting), and she eventually graduated from Arizona State University’s environmental design program in 1999. She then put down permanent roots in Scottsdale and founded Ownby Design that same year. Since opening her firm, she has fashioned interiors for more than a dozen of Arizona’s exclusive communities,

including Scottsdale’s Estancia and DC Ranch.

After completing such high-profile projects and settling into her fabric-sample-laden Scottsdale office in 2003, Ownby made the decision—after a Hawaiian escape—to split her time between the Sonoran Desert and the island coast. “On vacation, I investigated how many designers were in the phonebook,” she says. “There are a bazillion [in Arizona] and far fewer [in Hawaii]. There was a need for talent on the islands.” Ownby saw the opportunity, seized it and set up a part-time studio in Kona, Hawaii, which she visits every several weeks. Among the tropical dwellings bearing her design thumbprint are a contemporary Balinese estate in Maui and an Asian-inspired masterpiece on the Big Island.

Although Ownby’s schedule is undeniably busy, her design style is anything but: It is minimalist, organic and classic. Even so, she isn’t opposed to working outside of her cool, contemporary zone—she has also done a handful of artfully upscale estates in the traditional Tuscan vernacular.



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In general, she carefully considers a home's architecture, tends toward a neutral palette and fancies renovating kitchens and baths. "They are the most stimulating," the designer says. "You are working in a confined space around other elements; it isn't an open box. It is definitely challenging in a good way."

One would think the most challenging aspect of Ownby's jet-setting job would be working and living in two different areas of the country that are as contradictory as, say, prickly pear and hibiscus. While Arizona's arid landscape and Hawaii's laidback seaside atmosphere are quite different, the designer notes that this diversity is beneficial to her work. Operating in two separate locations has actually provided more product options on the mainland and additional cost-effectiveness on the island. "We have always had a flair for oriental, Thai and Balinese influence in our contemporary designs because they go hand-in-hand," Ownby says. "We have contacts [in Hawaii] for those products. [And we can transport] more stuff from the mainland to the islands due to labor costs."

Apart from a few obvious contrasts, like the need for materials that can withstand Arizona's extreme summers and Hawaii's high humidity and sea spray, Ownby also says that the local tastes are surprisingly similar. "With color palettes, materials and design styles, [there is] not a huge sway," she says. However, there is sway from client to client and house to house, and this variety—and the opportunity to make a difference in the lives of homeowners—is something Ownby loves about her job. "[I work in] the space the people live in," she says. "I give someone a beautiful house, a comfortable house, a functional house."

Now that this one-time Midwesterner has conquered residences in a pair of far-flung environments with her minimalist contemporary aesthetic, one question remains: Does the diligent designer wish to stay put in Arizona and Hawaii, even though there are still 48 states to explore? "Oh yeah," Ownby says. "That's a definite." ✨

ABOUT CLAIRE OWNBY

For more information about Claire Ownby and Ownby Design, call 480.575.8448 (Arizona) or 808.322.7446 (Hawaii), or visit www.ownbydesign.com.



Claire Ownby on...

GENERAL PHILOSOPHY

My daily mantra is, 'Do the right thing and treat people fairly.' If you do that, everything seems to be O.K.

FAVORITE COLOR

Tan or taupe.

PREFERRED DESIGN MATERIALS

I love limestone and wish there were more in Arizona—there is a ton on the islands. And I love organic, textured fabrics.

BEST PLACE TO BUY ACCESSORIES

Bungalow in Scottsdale.

STYLE OF HER HOME

A blending of Arts and Crafts with a minimal, contemporary interior.

FAVORITE SPACE AT HOME

My bedroom. It is where I spend most of my time.



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