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ORANGE COUNTY EDITION

## ■ CLEAR HORIZON ■

WRITTEN BY LIZ ARNOLD  
PHOTOGRAPHY BY DAVID HEATH

INTERIOR DESIGNER MELINDA GRUBBS SPENDS HER DAYS BRINGING OTHER PEOPLE'S DREAM HOMES TO FRUITION. But one day, as she thought of her children preparing to take off on their own, leaving empty rooms behind, Grubbs found herself wondering about her family's next generation—and where they could all comfortably come together. "I was getting itchy for a project of my own," says the principal of Laguna Beach-based Melinda Hartzell Grubbs Interior Design, Inc. "Our lifestyle was changing, and I realized that it called for a different type of home than what we'd been living in. We built this house with that in mind."

She and her husband David began scouting for a place to build, and when they came upon a sleepy old house in Emerald Bay in Laguna Beach, she immediately recognized the lot's potential as the site of their new home. Situated on a steep slope atop a granite bluff, the property had 180-degree views of the beaches and Catalina Island. And, best of all, it provided a front row seat to the dazzling Southern California sunsets.

<b>INTERIOR DESIGNER</b> Melinda Grubbs, Melinda Hartzell Grubbs Interior Design, Inc.		
<b>ARCHITECT</b> Christian Light, C.J. Light Associates		
<b>HOME BUILDER</b> Chris Dyer, JC Dyer Corporation		
<b>BEDROOMS</b> 4	<b>BATHROOMS</b> 4	<b>SQUARE FEET</b> 6,000





**CREAMY CENTER**  
 A soothing palette of cream, beige and taupe creates a meditative state in the master bedroom. The bed is from Nancy Corzine; the antique water pots were found at Charles Jacobsen.



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Grubbs razed the house, hired Newport Beach architect Christian Light, of C.J. Light Associates, and together they designed a warm, contemporary stone-and-glass dwelling with 6,000 square feet of space for her family of six (and optimistically counting).

Given the home's proximity to the water, the team's goals included maximizing the views and creating an optimal indoor/outdoor living experience. Thus, along the ocean-facing side of the house, a 30-foot-long wall of nine-foot-high glass doors disappears into pockets, and limestone floors continue seamlessly onto the balcony. "It's like you're on a cruise ship instead of inside a house," says Light. An open plan on the

**DECIDING VOTE**

The home's site was chosen in large part for its armchair view of the setting sun, of which the architecture takes full advantage.



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main level allows the public areas to spill gracefully onto one another, and in the entryway, where the front doors float in a glass wall, a covered rectilinear area serves as an ordering element. The foyer features a skylight, “further blurring the lines between inside and out,” says the architect, and then the space opens up to the great room and views beyond.

On the main level, Grubbs was influenced by classic contemporary styles that echo the likes of Jean-Michel Frank and Angelo Donghia. She also looked to the architectural principles of Frank Lloyd Wright, incorporating the landscape and the horizon into the interiors. The palette of neutral tones is inspired by the natural materials in view.

**STYLE SELECTION**

Topped with Sierra Elvira marble, this table infuses classicism with a solid ash support and post-and-beam styling. *Bennington Cocktail Table, available to the trade; hickorychair.com*



**ASIAN AESTHETIC**

In the guest suite, a Japanese screen above the bed and an antique Chinese cabinet add Asian touches. The elegant bed and ottoman are by Barbara Barry for Baker Knapp & Tubbs.



**HI-DEFINITION**

The great room's oceanfront sights can be absorbed from various viewpoints. The sofa rests in white oak, which G rubbs says adds a layer of dimension and serves as a transitioning piece. The bronze sculpture, *Orpheus*, is by Richard Macdonald.



**BLUE SKIES AHEAD**  
 Warm fiddleback-figured anigre veneering lines the entry, where a skylight illuminates the area and rectilinear forms help order the space. A wall of glass ahead guides the viewer into the great room.

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In the great room, for example, Donghia armchairs upholstered in a moss-colored mohair reflect the natural vegetation, while a sofa backed with blond wood mirrors the color of the sand. A seagrass rug and a low metal table from Gulassa & Co. add additional organic touches.

Downstairs, in what the family calls the cabana, the decor takes on a distinctively casual, Pan-Asian feel. Encased in glass doors that also pocket away, Grubbs says the style was actually a Jimmy Buffet-inspired suggestion from a son who said that this lower level area, which would be used primarily for entertaining, should have “a change of attitude.” Mom agreed, and the result is a spacious lounge area with Holly Hunt and McGuire furniture, some with striped outdoorsy Perennials fabric, as well as a fireplace and smaller groups of seating. There’s also a kitchen, and a guest suite with its own entrance. “It’s like a little guest house,”

**BOXED IN**  
 Architect Christian Light used light and form to order the home’s spaces, a series of open-to-the-sea rooms that seamlessly cascade onto one another.



**UNDER GLASS**

The lower level cabana area can be encased in glass doors, but since the track is disguised, there's a seamless transition from inside to outside.



**BEACH BLOND**

In the dining room, the European ash table and chairs from J. Robert Scott, covered in complementary hues of leather and suede, extend the tones of the sand. The Japanese screen is an antique.

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explains Grubbs. "You have your sleeping quarters, and then you have the living spaces. There's also a room we planned for kids, from toddlers to six-year-olds. A family could easily stay for a long weekend."

Since Grubbs moved in, she's found that the design perfectly complements the lifestyle she'd envisioned. On a recent Saturday night, 80 guests filled the house for a son's engagement party. Friends and family sipped cocktails at the bar in the kitchen, spilled out onto the balconies and danced in the cabana. "It's very much a family home," she says. "It always will be." **L**



**IT'S ELEMENTARY**

The great room fire surround, which mixes limestone, travertine and nickel, integrates elements found throughout the house. In the background, J. Robert Scott oak chairs, upholstered in rich black suede, line the bar in the kitchen.



**CHRISTIAN LIGHT**

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