



**SRQ**

MODERN ARCHITECTURE ON THE GULF COAST

# MODERN HOME

COLLECTION 2015

## Life Outside

Thomas Balsley on  
creating modern parks  
in a public process

**PUBLISHED WORKS BY**

DSDG, Inc. | Sansara | NC Ferguson Construction | SOLSTICE Architects | Murray Homes | Apex-Studio Suarez | Jake Brady





"We can't just create structures using extravagant amounts of glass. We have to find a way to cut down the cost on some of the finishes, but still have that punch. Our clients want all that wow and pizzazz the larger modern homes have in a smaller, less expensive version."







# Small Modern

Mark Sultana, a partner at DSDG, Inc. Architects in Sarasota, creates small modern houses that leave big impressions.

**F**arewell, pre-recession modern McMansions. This is the age of the mini modern (residences smaller than 2,500 square feet) and Mark Sultana of DSDG Architects is at the forefront of the style. “Not everyone who wants modern can afford a 10,000-square-foot mega-million-dollar house, but maybe they can afford one for \$300,000 to \$500,000,” says Sultana, a partner at his Sarasota firm along with architect Thomas Denslow. “People who can afford that don’t think they can get a one-of-a-kind modern house. I hear it all the time, ‘We’d love to have that but we can’t afford it.’ They don’t realize that they probably can.” DSDG specializes in custom-designed homes, commercial spaces and multi-unit residential complexes. But creating modern houses, especially with minimal footprints and affordable price tags, is what drives Sultana. When it comes to small modern construction, “smart design” features are achieved on a budget using cost-effective finishes and materials. Hurricane-resistant impact glass, spray foam insulation and cabinets and appliances that cost less than imported brands are part of the package. Though the firm handles traditional and elegant Mediterranean styles too, Sultana greatly prefers modern.





“People are just tired of the same old same old and they want something different. It’s important to all of our clients that the house we’re designing for them is one of a kind.”

“The first modern house I ever designed was one I did for myself in 2003,” Sultana says. “It’s really what I was trained in school to do. If you put a sloped roof on a building in school, they threw your model in the garbage. It’s been my passion. It’s what I love to do more than anything else, so being able to bring it to more people so they can enjoy it feels awesome to me.”

In 2010, Sultana’s firm was commissioned to build its first one-story modern house in Sarasota’s Southside district, and to keep the square footage between 2,400 and 2,800. The budget for a home like this is \$150 to \$250 per square foot, compared to \$350 to \$600 (the typical cost for a large modern house). The structure still has to meet the

same hurricane requirements and green codes, so Sultana finds other areas for adjusting corners.

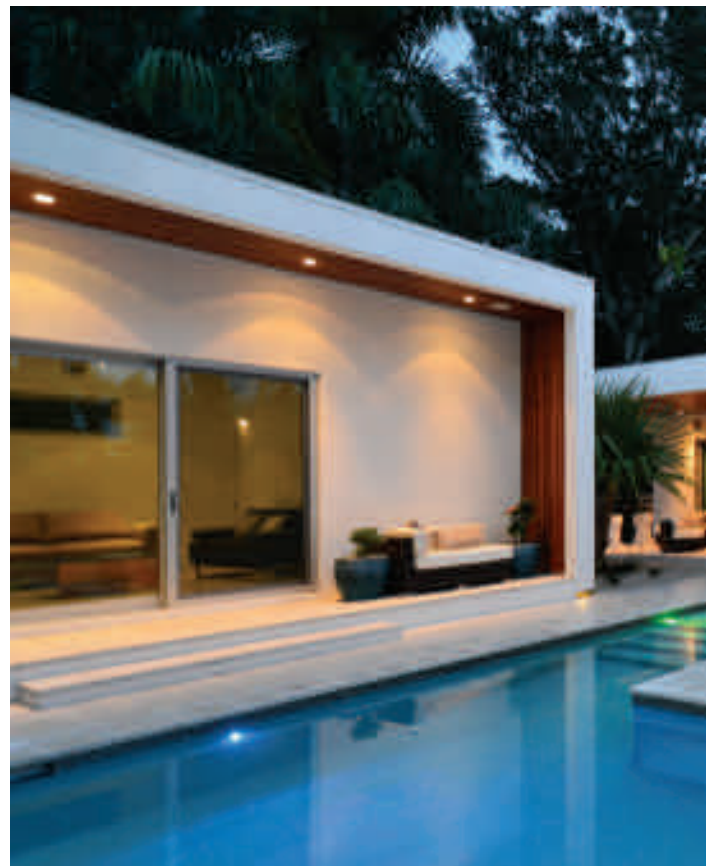
“It’s challenging because we can’t just create structures using extravagant amounts of glass because glass is expensive,” Sultana says. “We can’t do large cantilevers. We have to find a way to cut down the cost on some of the finishes but still have that punch. Our clients want all the wow and pizzazz the larger modern homes have in a smaller, less expensive version.”

One solution is to suggest polished concrete floors or bamboo rather than using tiles that run \$10 per square foot. Instead of doing large areas of extravagant, expensive finishes, Sultana will focus on one feature wall to finish. He will tile an

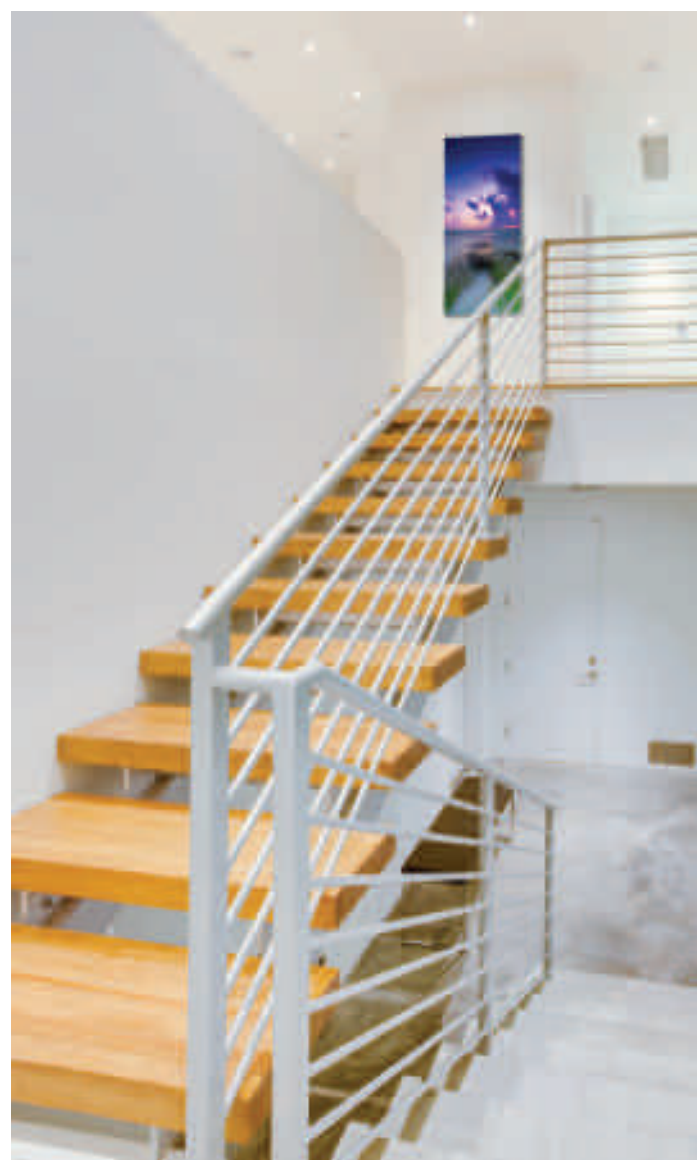
accent wall in a bathroom, not the entire bathroom. For cabinetry, Sultana will stick with a standard rather than a custom line. Instead of 10-foot-tall sliding glass doors, he will only do eight feet.

“You don’t have the grand spaces like you have in the larger houses, so you don’t have 24-foot high ceilings; they might only average 10 to 12 feet. The cooling of those spaces is actually much more efficient,” Sultana says. “Electricity bills range from \$60 to \$120, even in the summer. The houses all have low-pitched roofs, which are white to reflect the sun and they all have open floor plans.”

Concrete, bamboo, hurricane glass, light-emitting diodes (LEDs), solar water heaters and aluminum or vinyl for window frames (rather than











**FIRM** // DSDG, Inc. Architects **CONTENT WRITER** // Abby Weingarten  
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high-priced woods) are some of Sultana's go-to eco-conscious materials. Large sliding pocket glass doors bring the outside in and clerestory windows add lightness to the entire interior.

Sultana's small modern projects span the local map, from South Sarasota County to Longboat Key to Punta Gorda. Sultana even created the first Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) Platinum-certified house in Charlotte County. According to Sultana, homeowners are as satisfied with the décor as they are with the savings. "People

don't always realize that you save a lot of money when you're building a new house with the current codes with all the exemptions and credits you can get because it's less of a risk for the insurance companies," Sultana says. "Between the savings you have in electric bills and insurance, it's pretty sizeable. These new houses, they're so tight that, when you close the door, you feel it like a vacuum."

From the energy-efficient features to the compact yet open floor plan, the concept seems to suit most lifestyles.

"It's so user-friendly. It's for

your everyday life or when you're entertaining multiple people because it's easy to clean and there are low-maintenance materials and yards (which is important because you don't want to waste water irrigating lawns and end up with a huge water bill)," Sultana says. "We use trees native to Florida, succulents like agaves and cacti, low-maintenance grass and shell aggregate or crushed limestone. It really takes care of itself." Though Sarasota is known for its modern architecture since the 1950s, Sultana says the modern style

has only truly regained popularity in the last four to five years. He has not been asked to do a Mediterranean home in three years. "I think people are just tired of the same old same old and they want something different. It's important to all of our clients that the house we're designing for them is one of a kind," Sultana says. "It's not like a development, where you drive down the road and you see the same house over and over and it's just a different color; that's not the lifestyles the clients want. They want something unique and we give them that."

■ MODERNHOMES

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"We use trees native to Florida, succulents like agaves and cacti, low-maintenance grass and shell aggregate or crushed limestone. It really takes care of itself."



SARASOTA, FL // MK Equity Corporation







# Zen Modern

Sansara exemplifies the principles of Feng Shui and luxury modern design.

It is smartly sleek. It is Zen. It is uniquely customizable to its owner. It is SANSARA—a harbinger of the “warm contemporary” high-rise concept in downtown Sarasota. A 10-story modern mixed-use tower with 17 tailor-made three-bedroom units, Sansara contains condos ranging from 2,650 to 6,200 total square feet that start in the low \$1,000,000’s. The building, which has ground floor commercial space, is located in the historic Burns Court district of Sarasota on South Pineapple Avenue.

Sansara is the brainchild of Matthew Kihnke—president of the Chicago, Ill.-based MK Equity Corporation—a boutique development company that has been involved in real estate development since 1995. Kihnke currently resides in Sarasota, and collaborated on the Sansara project with locally chosen leading edge companies. Each company was chosen for their unique qualities including exceptional standards, reputations and an unmatched level of professionalism and dedication in each of their respective industries. Companies such as: Hoyt Architects, a Sarasota architecture and urban design firm; JKL Design Group, a Sarasota luxury design firm; Kellogg and Kimsey Corporation a Sarasota based nationally recognized construction firm; and Michael Saunders & Company leading the sales and marketing efforts.





Standard Master Bedroom

The building's design is based on Feng Shui, an ancient Chinese system of harmonizing a living space by incorporating the five elements of wood, fire, earth, metal and water.

"The Sarasota luxury condominium buyer is a sophisticated and educated group that come from all across the world, and while diversified, many have similar requirements: location, style, quality, value, customization and community. The newly retired baby boomer generation for example is a far cry from the generation before them. Retirement, and in many cases early retirement is active, participatory and tailor-made. We seek to provide the right blend of urban vitality and creature comforts to our discerning buyers with high expectations. The project is large enough to provide the highest level of service and amenities yet small enough to foster a boutique lifestyle community. And we're proud of our value proposition that is at a price point untouchable in this market for our boutique luxury residences. We provide a lot of technology, both in every day amenities as well as updated construction methods that provide the latest in today's custom development."

The building's design is based on Feng Shui, an ancient Chinese system of harmonizing a living space by incorporating the five elements of wood, fire, earth, metal and water. Sansara's flowing architectural elements were combined to create "a peaceful refuge within the vibrancy of city life that provides a sense of tranquility, harmony and balance," according to Kihnke and his team. And this prototype is uniquely tailored to the Sarasota real estate market.

"Our corporate office in Chicago has been responsible for developing and building many residential mid- and high-rise developments throughout Chicago. Florida was always one of the markets that we strove to break into," Kihnke says. "I bought a project in Sarasota about 14 years ago and that was my first time to town. I fell in love with the area and all that it has to offer, the project was a huge success and provided me with a glimpse into this dynamic market."

With a quick-moving market comes quick-moving demands. Buyers in Sarasota, especially those with a preference for modern architecture, want to purchase more than a luxury private condo; they crave a luxury lifestyle with a built-in community. They don't want to have to leave their place of residence to find entertainment, outdoor living or relaxation. They are attracted to more resort-style living—the kind that gives them the feeling of year-round vacationing. For this, Sansara delivers.

The amenities deck at Sansara is packed with a pool, a private spa, covered cabanas, a large outdoor social space with a fire pit, a bar and a fitness / yoga room. These common areas boast woods, water features, natural stone and various species of native plants. There are individual private, secured parking garages for residence use only.

The unique main lobby and the private double elevator banks both have Asian-influenced décor themes. While the building may have all the clean lines and angles as any sophisticated modern structure, its natural accents give it warmth, personality and vibrancy.

"I'm excited to see Sarasota return to its contemporary/modern architectural roots in downtown. I think we're witnessing a movement in contemporary architecture from stark, cold and futuristically designed to warm and modern. An aesthetic that is distinguished, clean and comfortable, free of ornate design



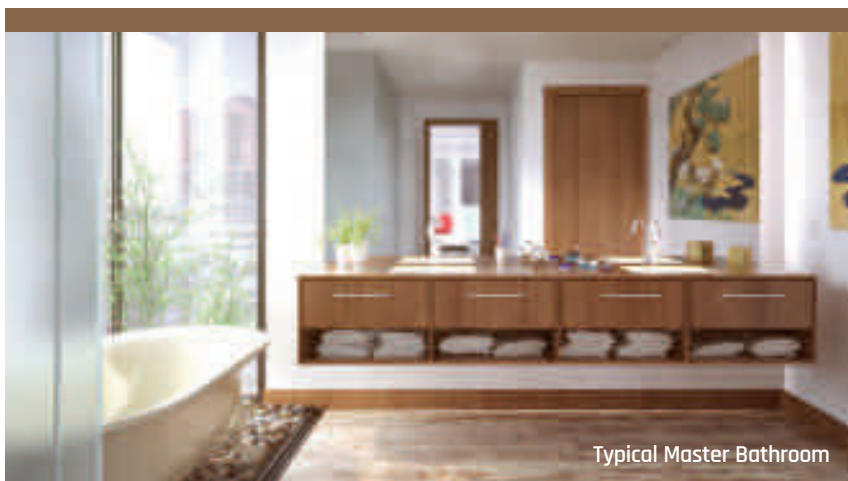


Penthouse Terrace

and fussiness and filled with wood and stone elements that lend to a sense of peace and tranquility.” Some features of Sansara include vibrant city and bay views; the latest in video technology, smart house options and a retractable window wall system that opens onto an expansive private outdoor terrace. Each of the 17 residences at Sansara have at least two and as many as four private terrace areas ranging in size from 460 square feet to 2,500 square feet for the villas. The Penthouse at Sansara has over 1,100 square feet of luxurious outdoor living.

“People can literally come in and hit one button and all the lights turn on, the blinds go up, the music can start and scents can be pumped through,” Kihnke says. In each unit there are 10-to-12-foot ceilings, 8-foot double entry doors, European-style cabinet packages, floating European-style bathroom vanities with under-mount sinks, and options for your appliance package.

“In addition we have a wide and meticulously thought out floor plan that lives more like a home than a typical condominium. Every unit runs through the entire building from East to West with the Living Room, Dining Room, Kitchen, Sun Room and Master Bedroom all facing towards sunsets over the Marina. All with floor-to-ceiling retractable windows out to the expansive terraces. Each unit at Sansara has at least three walls with windows and are “end units.” I spend countless hours tweaking each floor plan so that it flows well and uses space optimally. Every square foot should have a designated purpose. That doesn’t sound like a big deal but as they say, God is in the details.” Intuitive enough to accommodate the needs of its guests and authentic to the tenants of ancient design methods, Sansara signals the future while saluting the past. ■ **MODERNHOME**



Typical Master Bathroom

**MK Equity Corporation** | Matt Kihnke  
[www.mkequity.com](http://www.mkequity.com) | [sansaracondo.com](http://sansaracondo.com)

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# Siesta Sleek

**B**uilding an ultra-modern house on spec was fairly unheard of when Nick Ferguson scooped up a waterfront lot on Siesta Key and got to work. “A house came up for sale when the market was starting to turn,” says Ferguson, the president of NC Ferguson Construction in Sarasota. “I built and designed it on spec when nobody else was doing that, especially for that size. Usually on spec, you would get a Mediterranean or Key West-style home, especially in the \$2-million price range.” Ferguson purchased the property in August 2013. The single-family home on Southport Drive (with 3,195 square feet, three bedrooms and 3.5 bathrooms) was listed at about \$2.2-million when Ferguson was finished. Situated on a private road, the waterfront lot encompasses 16,325 square feet with 100 feet of Intracoastal Waterway views and a boat dock with a 13,000-pound lift.

Nick Ferguson of NC Ferguson Construction envisions and creates a clean, modern spec home on Siesta Key.



"I was gearing it toward a younger crowd; it's laid out that way. Forget about the formal dining room. The kitchen feeds out into the dining room."





"I wanted something very clean and simple with clean lines and a fair amount of square footage, with an open living concept, along with a lot of energy efficiency."

The original house was demolished to make way for new construction, and Ferguson collaborated with architect John Ziemnicki of World Design to begin building from the ground up. The original address was prime. And after the teardown, Ferguson's canvas was blank—a creative's dream.

"I hadn't done anything that modern up to that point," Ferguson says. "Even that house has kind of a transitional, modern look to the outside. I like to mix modern things with more traditional or transitional things." The objective was to achieve the opposite look of formal, blocked-off rooms and replace that worn-out style with more contemporary airiness. The layout would merge the interior with the outdoors, using floor-to-ceiling glass doors and large windows with white finishes to forge the illusion.

There is polished concrete throughout the main living area and Brazilian cherry in the two guest bedrooms. The master suite and spa feature French white oak flooring, a marble shower enclosure, custom wood cabinets (which are also in the kitchen and other bathrooms) and granite countertops. There is a marble waterfall shower in the bathroom and a freestanding tub with Sherle Wagner fixtures, spacious walk-in closets, as well as light-emitting diode (LED) illumination throughout the house.

In the living and dining room are polished concrete floors, custom cabinets (Cambria in the kitchen in the Whitney hue), floating shelves, a center island, and Restoration Hardware lighting and cabinet/door hardware. Outside, there are cypress

ceilings on the lanai, landscaping by ArtisTree Landscape (including shell ground cover and mud-set pavers), and a saltwater pool by Elite Weiler Pools.

This spectrum of services is typical for the 2003-founded NC Ferguson Construction, which is a smaller boutique company. Ferguson, who holds a bachelor's degree in construction management from Central Michigan University, prides himself on guiding customers through every décor selection. He provides suggestions for everything from subcontractors to materials, and pulls from a database that serves clients in Sarasota, Manatee and Charlotte counties.

For the Southport residence, he had a specific type of client in mind during the design process. "The buyer I had in mind for this house

was somebody who, back in 2004 or 2005, might have bought the McMansion and ended up with a huge electric bill and everything that came with having a big house—someone who basically wanted to downsize," Ferguson says. "I wanted something very clean and simple with clean lines and a fair amount of square footage, with an open living concept, along with a lot of energy efficiency."

Ferguson incorporated spray foam insulation into the design, along with rigid insulation on the roof. In the master bedroom, he did an experiment: he took the wood floor into the bathroom and made a tile "bathmat" to bridge the gap between the wood and another flooring material, allowing for a more seamless appearance.



"It's kind of an 'in' thing, having wood floors in bathrooms but, practicality-wise, it's not so good," Ferguson says. "We found a solution for that. We made the tile that was in the shower (marble) come out so that, if you got out of the shower and needed to dry off, there would be a little area of tile where you could do that. That way, you wouldn't get moisture on the wood floor but the flooring also wouldn't look so broken up."

Mathematically, the entire home's construction is impeccable, which is a necessity for super modern structures. "The windows with hurricane glass literally go from the floor to the ceiling, so it had to be perfect. There was no room for error," Ferguson says. Accomplishing an indoor-outdoor flow was a paramount for Ferguson, too, and he designed the residence to be somewhat of a "party house," he says.

"I was gearing it toward a younger crowd; it's laid out that way. Forget about the formal dining room. The kitchen feeds out into the dining room. You can open up the doors and have an outdoor living area that's kind of all one space," Ferguson says. "You definitely get that Sarasota School of Architecture thing here. People either love it or they hate it. In this case, the homeowner loves it. It worked." ■ **MODERNHOME**



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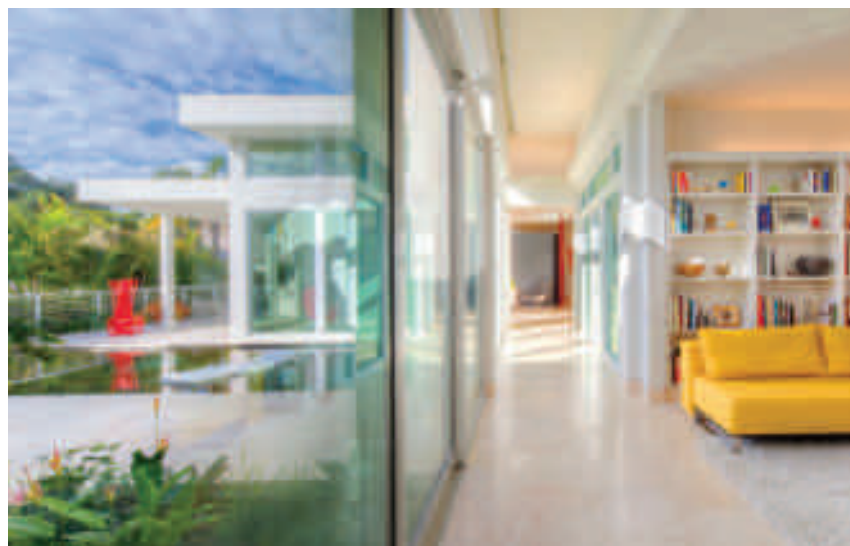


# The Essence of Modern

Architects Jonathan Parks and Christopher Arelt share insights about modern architecture and explain why less is not always more.

## Our Response to Modernism

Our work is seen as a response to modernism—or more specifically—a return to regionalism and artistry, where clients' projects are developed with the “heads, hearts and hands” of all those involved. The ideal project focuses on the craft of construction, using the most up-to-date means and methods available. Most of our buildings explore the use of natural light in a special way while simultaneously revealing the inherent beauty of the materials being used. The design direction of each project is much more about the way of working than anything else; this allows for the final designs to be innovative since nothing is preconceived. The culture of the studio and how we collaborate with clients is an important part of our work and our history. We learned this lesson early on in our careers and have always given credit to our mentors for teaching us these special skills.





### Why Less Isn't Always More

We often joke about how the last year of architecture school and the first year of working in the real world are alike in many ways. You have the same long hours building scale models and meticulously hand drafting. The only difference is that you can stop asking your parents for money. And we still remember our first years at Centerbrook Architects and Planners fondly; we worked hard and enjoyed finding humor where we could. We also thrived on friendly rivalries. As is typical for most young architects, everyone thought that the only good project in the office was the one they were helping to design.

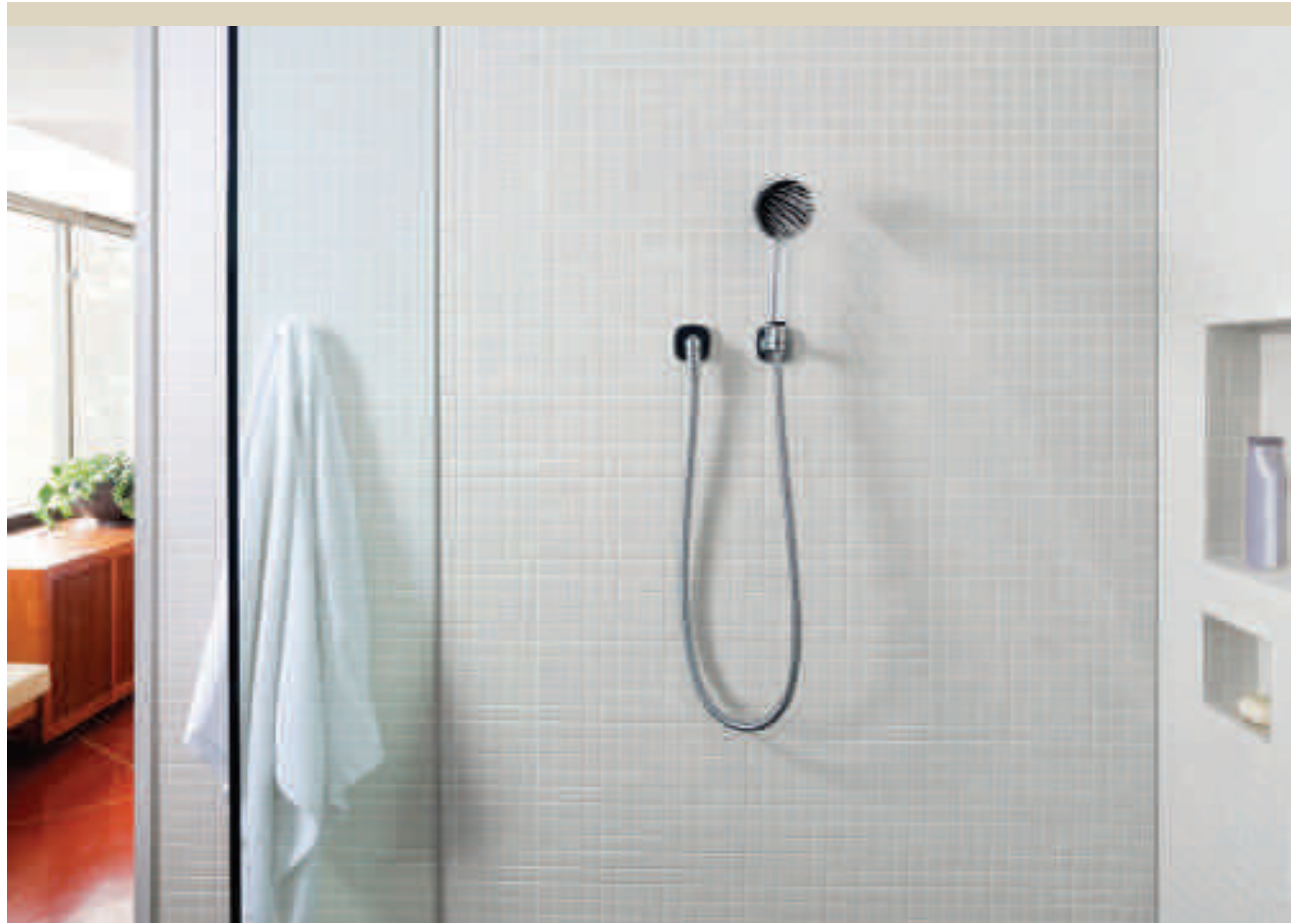








"Most of our buildings explore the use of natural light in a special way while simultaneously revealing the inherent beauty of the materials being used."



Peer pressure can be intense so you manage to find a way to amuse your co-workers while embracing the natural competitiveness that you all have with each other. The source of this amusement was the work itself—or more accurately—how the work was perceived. In good fun, a ranking system was developed where projects were divided into categories. The biggest problem was avoiding those things deemed subjective. For example, if we really liked a design, we had to define what made it exceptional. Unfortunately, the more standards we put down on paper, the more difficult it became.

Eventually, everything seemed subjective. Being just out of graduate studies, it seemed logical to open a few books and bring forward the most current thinking of the day. This exercise was quickly concluded when it was evident that formal architectural training could be summed up with the one encompassing phrase: “less is more.” This is a perfect starting and stopping point for a ranking system, unless you are practicing architecture for a firm founded by the great Charles W. Moore, FAIA (in which case, you learn quickly that “less is a bore”). Seven years of architectural training negated by one man and one phrase.



### Constant Levels of Interaction

Mr. Moore saw things differently than other architects, and he was a brilliant designer and educator. He was able to bring as many ideas people could think of into a workable design so that all participants genuinely felt they had a major impact on the final building (and this was the case whether or not they actually did). The key to much of his work was having all parties collaborate for the common goal. In the era in which Mr. Moore produced some of the world's most innovative architecture, this was not at all the typical practice. Formal architectural training teaches you that design, in its purest form, fulfills functional and aesthetic requirements completely, elegantly and economically. Yet in Mr. Moore's office we can state that this was not how he designed. In fact, he never thought of design in this manner (at least, we personally did not see that in his approach). He had an astounding "mental rolodex" that was used as a springboard to move well beyond conventional thinking. His work soared beyond his peers, but was grounded by his genuine love for his clients and the people involved in his buildings. How people lived and played in his architecture was, to us, the most important aspect to Mr. Moore—the constant levels of interactions that he anticipated and designed with his clients and colleagues.

In the end, we came up with some final rankings, and our co-worker had fun with the discussions. What was certain, however, was that we learned the most not from the work itself but from the man for whom we worked. ■ **MODERNHOME**

By Jonathan Parks AIA and Christopher Arelt AIA

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"I think we've got a very well-rounded understanding and experience of the marketplace, and that's vital for understanding our customers when they walk through the door."



Murray Homes stays ahead of the modern home curve, using global inspiration to create local masterpieces.

# MURRAY MODERN

What builders do with tens of millions of dollars in Miami, Murray Homes accomplishes in Sarasota-Manatee on one-tenth of the budget. Modern homes are one of the firm's fortes, and it takes a kind of expansive-minded expertise to live on the cutting edge of this

trend. "We're at the other end of the alley from Miami, where the average price for a home is \$24 million," says Steve Murray, the Sarasota company's president. "We've got to give that Miami perception here in town for \$2 million, but the quality of the work really isn't any different. My job is to think outside of our geography to offer different imagery locally. It's about evolving the thinking." Clients seeking custom, luxury waterfront residences enlist Murray Homes because of this highly evolved thinking. John and Steve Murray are a British father-son team with more than four decades of combined homebuilding experience in the United Kingdom and Florida.

They are well traveled. They have familiarized themselves with new design techniques for years in every corner of the globe. They think far beyond the Florida box.



Architect John Potvin







"I think we've got a very well-rounded understanding and experience of the marketplace, and that's vital for understanding our customers when they walk through the door," Steve Murray says. "If you come to me saying, 'Here's who I am. Here's where I come from. Here are pictures of what I'd like. Find me a lot,' we'll find out what makes you tick. We'll find the land. We'll show you budgets and architectural styles. We'll ask the right questions to draw the right answers out."

Steve Murray's family-run firm (which has its own in-house realty department) is famed for using the most

efficient technologies and building materials for historic renovations, office buildings, investment spec houses and individual dream homes. A full-service resource, the firm can identify vacant land, conduct feasibility studies, negotiate lender financing, manage budgets, assist in design and construction and even market and sell a property.

Steve Murray previously operated a construction company in London, England during the 1990s before moving to Sarasota and starting Murray Homes. He joined forces with his realtor wife, Bev, and brought Murray Realty under the company's umbrella.

Steve Murray has built more than 100 new and remodeled homes, and he has coordinated the bidding, billing and subcontracting for each project.

"We're a boutique realty company that specializes in waterfront homes as well, which is unique. I've been a realtor since 2000. My wife is my broker," Steve Murray says. "We do upper-end construction and, for clients who want that, we really do everything for them."

To maintain this one-stop identity, Murray Homes has amassed a rock-solid database of recommended subcontractors. The main entities the firm collaborates with are: Michael A. Gilkey Inc. Landscape Architects & Contractors, Pool Design Concepts, Ferguson Showroom (kitchen and bath), Architectural Marble Importers, Cucine Ricci (kitchens), Mullet's Appliances and Wicked Smart Homes (home theater systems).

Inside a Murray Homes modern structure, state-of-the-art green features are standard, and nontraditional acute and obtuse angles (instead of typical right angles) are signatures. The modern, abstract, angular, geometric look is evident throughout the Murray Homes footprint, especially in the cabinetry and kitchen islands.

"We do timeless contemporary designs—modern homes that aren't fad houses—so that, for investment purposes, they would still be marketable and

sellable in 15 to 20 years. You can't pigeonhole yourself so far in left field that you can't sell it," Steve Murray says.

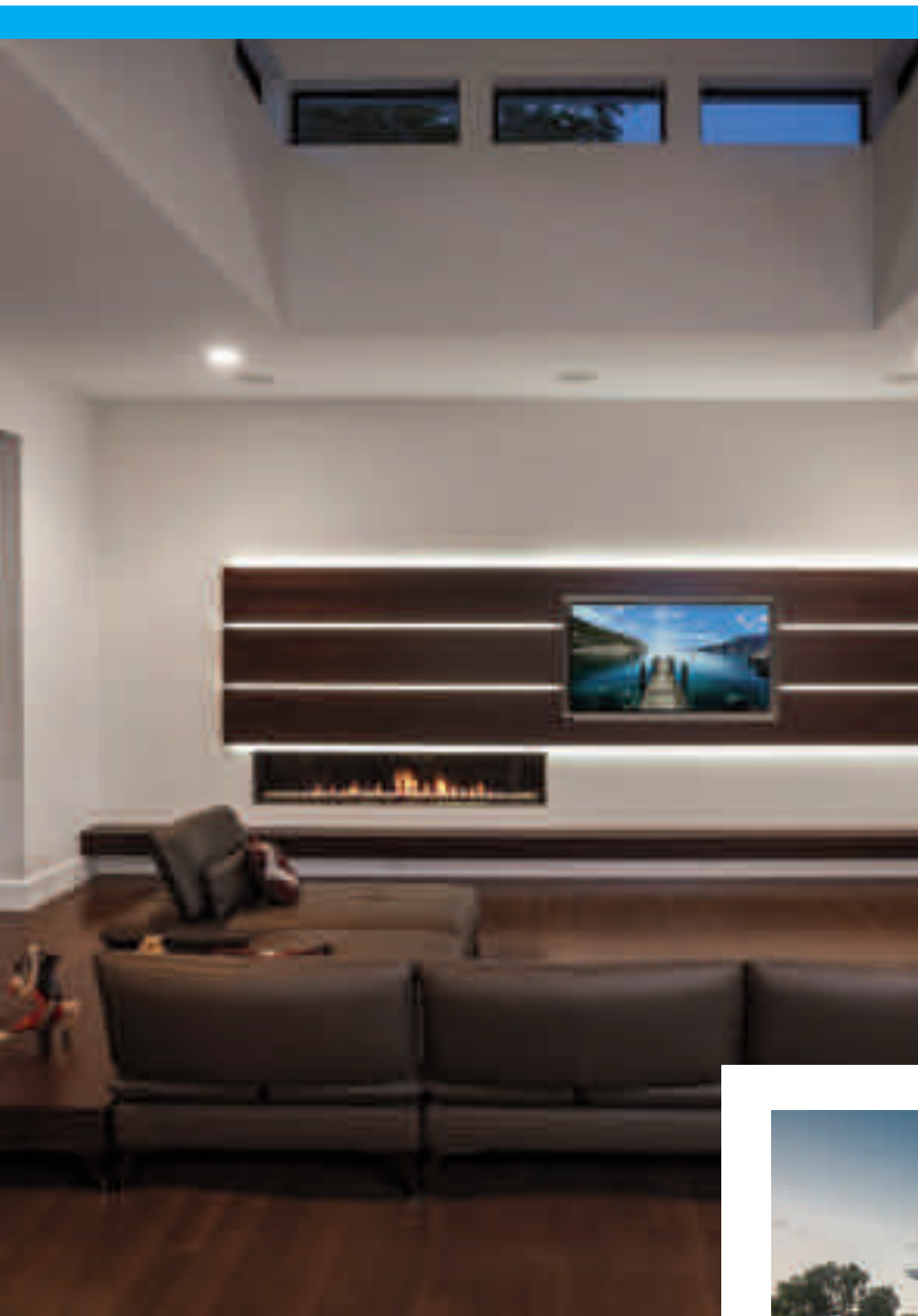
These days, Murray Homes clients are buying houses in areas like Bird Key, Longboat Key and Harbor Acres, spending upwards of \$2.5 million per lot, and they need houses that will have longevity. Murray Homes is also expanding into Lakewood Ranch with a warm, universally appealing British West Indies-style prototype that will likely be beloved for years to come.

Murray Homes has found a way to do modern without alienating any client bases and to roll with the ever-evolving décor tides.

"In the past six or seven years, the local marketplace has gotten a bigger desire for modern. Pre-recession, 95 percent of all architecture going up was what people had seen before. There was the Spanish Med, the traditional, a little bit of coastal, some Key West," Steve Murray says. "Then there was the occasional modern house. You'd see this beautiful house go up and it would sit on the marketplace because there were no buyers for it."

Inferior designs were rampant for years. Then the bubble burst, the developers had to hand the keys to the banks, and the vacant buildings begged for transformation. Murray Homes took over. "The recession affected the desire for modern enormously. Before that, every piece of





"We do timeless contemporary designs—modern homes that aren't fad houses—so that, for investment purposes, they would still be marketable and sellable in 15 to 20 years."

land was being picked up by a developer or a buyer with money," Steve Murray says.

"As someone with money looking to invest, you don't go to the most expensive, most extreme architect to give you the best design. You go with someone who can

knock it out really cheaply and give you as many bedrooms as they can so you can make the biggest profit. That has all changed." Now, design is in demand. Modern is leading the movement. And Murray Homes is ready.

■ MODERNHOMES



Architect Rick Arieno

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# THE HEART OF MODERN



"My father was born in Cuba and grew up in Puerto Rico. My sister, Ana, and I were born in Puerto Rico and moved to the states when we were 8 and 10. So we were all heavily influenced by Caribbean architecture—a lot of raw materials, woods, exposed concrete."



Father-and-son architecture team Javier and Javi Suarez of Apex-Studio Suarez add warmth, depth and heart to modern designs.

With deep cultural roots in the Caribbean, the team at Apex-Studio Suarez offers a wholehearted approach to modern architecture in Southwest Florida—one that is natural, fluid and holistic. Each design tells a story. Each eco-conscious feature elicits an emotion.

“My father was born in Cuba and grew up in Puerto Rico. My sister, Ana, and I were born in Puerto Rico and moved to the states when we were 8 and 10. So we were all heavily influenced by Caribbean architecture—a lot of raw materials, woods, exposed concrete,” says Javi Suarez, who is a principal at the Sarasota firm alongside his father, Javier Suarez. “While we’re influenced by the mid-century modern movement—which is typically very streamlined, sleek and white—we also do what we call more of a ‘warm contemporary.’”

“Warm contemporary,” to the Suarez team, means bringing in the basic elements of the earth—wood, water, fire and air—and using everything from courtyard water features to new ventilation techniques to do so. In other words, Apex-Studio Suarez thinks outside of the plain white box. Though the Suarezes have completed several modern buildings that fall







within the traditional parameters, they relish the opportunity to add more creative layers to their designs.

They accomplish this with the help of their in-house interior design company, Apex-Studio Santa Maria, which is the brainchild of Ana Santa Maria (sister to Javi Suarez and daughter to Javier Suarez). Both Apex-Studio Santa Maria and Apex-Studio Suarez were launched as boutique firms in 2009 and, together, they provide a one-stop destination for their clients.

"There is a perception, I think, about architecture firms, that there is either a

design firm or a service firm, that you either get one or the other," Javi Suarez says. "We pride ourselves on bringing both to the table."

The "table," so to speak, at Apex-Studio, is always rife with diverse thinkers, both from the firm and the community. Javier Suarez draws from more than 40 years of experience as an architect and urban designer, and provides invaluable insights about structure and practicality. Javi Suarez's background in fine art affords him an artistic perspective, which complements Santa Maria's expertise in interior design.

"As Javier says, we have a great partnership because he pushes me to think about things a certain way and I push him, and we come to a middle with the client," Javi Suarez says.

With this bevy of strengths, the family makes it easy for a client to relay a vision and have it precisely executed. "We do a lot of meetings with our clients, trying to get an idea of what they want. We ask questions like, 'What do you like about this or that?' rather than trying to imitate a picture. We want to accommodate their lifestyle," Javier Suarez says. "A lot of clients don't really know what they want and others bring us 30 magazines. So you need to digest that and figure out what they want when they might not be able to express it."

Sometimes, it is as nebulous as "I want my home to feel like . . ." and it is up to Apex-Studio to finish the sentence. Clients are not always on board with the modern architecture they may have seen in magazines, and Apex-Studio is known for giving the standard look a more universal appeal.

"A lot of people like modern architecture (and we love it too and we've done a lot of it) but some people find it a little cold," Javier Suarez says. "So when you take that modern style and give it a little bit of warmth, people say, 'This, I kind of like.'"

They like the feeling of walking a thin line between living inside and outside. In an Apex-Studio home, the

edge of the property might have a one-of-a-kind accent such as a reflecting pool (even right in the front of the house).

"We like to use tropical elements and give a home the feeling of being in a tropical forest," Javier Suarez says. "We might put in a reflecting pool with a fountain so you hear the water falling all the time. Wherever you are in the house, you're hearing the noise of the water."

For inland homes, this concept of blurring the line between the interior and exterior is a popular one. The same is true for beachfront properties, though Apex-Studio has been known to take a water view to an entirely new level. Such was the case in one particular Bird Key residence.

"For this house on Bird Key, which was on the water, the client said, 'I'm not big on walking into the house and having a view of the ocean right away. I want it to be a progression. I want it to be a little peak here, and when you get to a certain point, boom, you get this expansive view,'" Javi Suarez says.

"Sometimes, a client might not know what they want their house to look like, but they might have an idea of what they want it to feel like, or what they want the experience of arrival to feel like."

Apex-Studio knows how to take a feeling or an instinct and turn it into a wildest-dream reality.

"With modern, we have that contemporary viewpoint out there that focuses on the rational and always having a





"We like to use tropical elements and give a home the feeling of being in a tropical forest. We might put in a reflecting pool with a fountain so you hear the water falling all the time."

reason for the decisions that you make," Javi Suarez says. "But the other layer I personally push for is the subconscious layer—using the things that come naturally, things

you can't necessarily rationally define, but are certain gut feelings you have about a project, feelings that come from years of experience that just work." ■ MODERNSHOME



**Apex-Studio Suarez and Apex-Studio Santa Maria** | 200 S. Washington Boulevard #3, Sarasota, 941-366-8222, apex-studio.com.



# Concrete King

When the regional housing market shifted and became ready for a more modern mindset, Jake Brady was standing by. “In the past five years, the trend went from the Mediterranean, Tuscan, beat-up, acid-stained look to being very clean, linear, industrial, modern,” says Brady, who owns Jake Brady Concrete By Design in Sarasota. “And that’s what I do.” A native of Nova Scotia, Canada, Brady moved south in 1997 and started a Sarasota-based home remodeling business. A decade later, he changed career trajectories, inspired by the book “Concrete Countertops: Design, Forms, and Finishes for the New Kitchen and Bath” by Fu-Tung Cheng (Taunton Press, 2004). “I was good at remodeling houses on Longboat and Siesta Key, but I got tired of that and I wanted to have my own studio. Concrete is outside the box. It’s something clients can really be involved in the process of,” Brady says. “They can custom match a color to a swatch of fabric, get their hands dirty, put glass aggregate into the mold, be involved. It’s an interactive experience and it’s fun.”

To become a concrete expert, Brady trained at the Concrete Countertop Institute in Raleigh, N.C., learning about wet-cast and glass-fiber-reinforced concrete techniques. Today, he creates handmade, custom residential and commercial features—from architectural concrete accents to functional art pieces—all with eco-conscious, durable concrete. When his concrete infatuation began, it was a fairly obscure concept to the local consumer but that has since changed dramatically.



“If you can dream it, we can build it. Your only limitation is your imagination.”



Jake Brady Concrete By Design carves out its niche as the authority on concrete features for the upscale modern home.





"The big change I see lately is that the consumer is coming to me more educated to begin with whereas, in the first years, I had to explain what concrete was about and how they could even use it," Brady says. "Now, homeowners are coming to me knowing that's what they want and their minds are already made up. I've also developed a reputation for being good at it."

He is known for his outdoor benches, fire tables, planters, pillars, water features and sculpture bases, as well as his indoor designs like countertops, dining room tables, conference tables, concierge stations, vanity tops, sinks, shower panels and fireplaces. Brady incorporates recycled glass, wood, shells, rocks and leaf prints into his designs.

His motto is, "If you can dream it, we can build it. Your only limitation is your imagination."

While Brady is a modern home décor master, his designs are not limited to one genre. He has done everything from traditional, rustic, romantic and retro styles to French country, Italian, Asian, Victorian and art deco installations. Precision is Brady's M.O. and he has honed the rare ability to estimate, measure and pour perfect angles.

"It's about measuring 18 times and pouring once. You

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"Now that I've done a lot of commercial projects, people will have dined somewhere where I've done a fire table or a huge bar, and they will contact me and say they want something similar."

wake up at night wondering if you've measured something right," Brady says. "You try to allow for a certain margin of error. Errors certainly don't happen as much as they did in the beginning. You get it down to a science."

His reputation for accuracy has taken him from Washington, D.C. to Miami Beach. He was recently commissioned to partner with a well known bronze sculptor to fabricate a large red concrete towel as the base for a Western Kentucky University mascot, which is now prominently displayed in the WKU Student Center.

"Now that I've done a lot of commercial projects, people will have dined somewhere where I've done a fire table or a huge bar, and they will contact me and say they want something similar," Brady says. Brady has collaborated on residential projects such as a Guy Peterson-designed

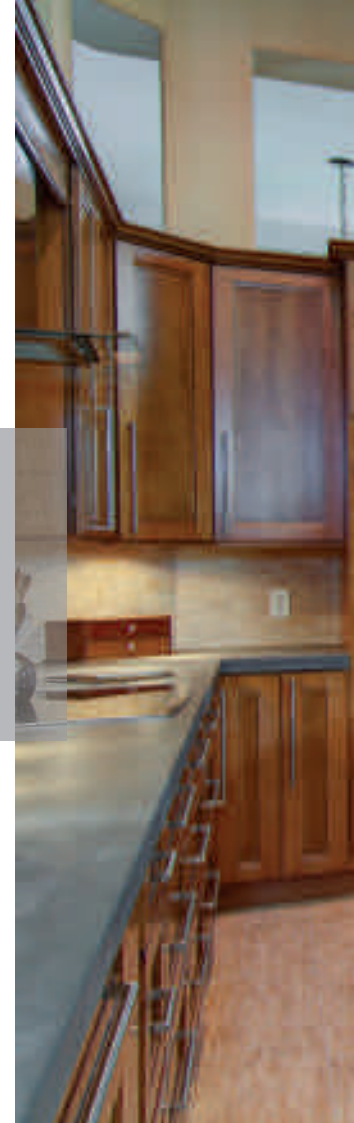
house on Longboat Key with high-end concrete sinks. Commercially, Brady made the planters, dining tables and fire tables for Social Eatery & Bar in downtown Sarasota. He provided the finishing touches on an outdoor kitchen for a waterfront home on Bird Key. He has even been asked to make a 28-foot-long pond entirely out of concrete with a central fire feature. Brady accommodates even the most nontraditional requests.

"Recently, the owner of a penthouse on Longboat Key wanted polished concrete floors but they couldn't do it the traditional way because they needed sound proofing (because they live in a high-rise with people below)," Brady says. "So I thought, why can't we make a floor tile and install that over the soundproofing so the homeowner could still have their polished concrete floors? The homeowner wouldn't have to make any sacrifices that way.

We could make that happen." It is this type of challenge that stimulates Brady's creative spirit. Another scenario that recently pushed him to be inventive occurred when clients on Casey Key requested a one-of-a-kind water feature in the study shaft of their mansion.

"It's called the study shaft because the study goes up and down four floors. The foyer comes up through a glass box. In the back of the house, off the master bedroom, is the study, and it's on a lift. When you're on the fourth floor, it's the highest point on Casey Key you can see downtown Sarasota," Brady says. "Off to the side of this, there is a three-foot by three-foot by 1.5-foot niche, and they want me to do a water feature in there that's 20 feet tall. That's the kind of thing I enjoy doing. Every day for me is different."

■ MODERNHOMES





Shower panels, vanity and an integral ramp sink showcase how concrete can make a bathroom look very crisp and polished.



**Jake Brady Concrete By Design** | 614 Florida Ave., Sarasota, 941-312-5993, [jakebradyconcrete.com](http://jakebradyconcrete.com)