

Going Dutch

by SUE MAYFIELD GEIGER on DECEMBER 24, 2016 *Coast Monthly*



PHILLIP AND BETH CONTRERAS' DUTCH COLONIAL HOME IN THE KEMAH COMMUNITY OF WATERFORD HARBOR MIGHT LOOK SMALL FROM THE OUTSIDE, BUT INSIDE, THE LARGENESS PREVAILS. PHOTO BY STUART VILLANUEVA

Kemah house stands out in a sea of Mediterranean architecture

The architectural expressions of the Caribbean islands were the inspiration for the multi-level, stark white house Phillip Contreras designed and built for his family in 2008. With its Spanish-influenced, sculptural parapet entrance, Andalusian-styled chimneys and tucked-away courtyard, this Dutch Colonial house stands out among the Mediterranean styles that dominate the Kemah community of Waterford Harbor.

Contreras, an architect and builder, had the house plans swimming around in his head for some time. His wife, Beth, an interior designer, knew she wanted a lot of natural light, no hallways and very few interior doors.

“We had previously lived in a period home in the East End Historical District of Galveston with several rooms and hallways,” Beth Contreras said. “I wanted everything in this house to be totally open.”

She got her wish. The 4,400-square-foot house, on a 60-by-130-foot lot, might look small from the outside, but inside, the largeness prevails.



PHILLIP CONTRERAS DESIGNED AND BUILT THIS MULTI-LEVEL HOUSE FOR HIS FAMILY IN 2008. HIS WIFE, BETH, AN INTERIOR DESIGNER, WANTED AN OPEN SPACE WITH A LOT OF NATURAL LIGHT. PHOTO BY STUART VILLANUEVA

Through Peruvian wooden double doors, an inviting veranda with fireplace and sitting area offers a view of the L-shaped lap pool surrounded by queen palms. Marble steps lead up to a second floor, which serves as Beth Contreras' Pilates room. A spiral stairway ascends to a third level with access to an outside deck overlooking the harbor.

"We used to have our office on this floor, but we outgrew it, so we moved our business to a nearby office building," she said. "We're not sure what to do with the space now — maybe make it a library."



TWO BLEACHED MALAYSIAN TEAKWOOD COFFEE TABLES AND SLIP-COVERED CHAIRS IN THE GREAT ROOM. PHOTO BY STUART VILLANUEVA

After descending the two sets of stairs back to the ground floor, guests sometimes get confused about where to go next, she said.

"Our original plan was for guests to walk through the veranda, continue out toward the pool, step upon the glass tiles that cross over the pool and then come through what we envisioned as our front door that leads to the great room," she said. "But, because there is another door immediately to the left of the veranda, most people tend to want to enter the house at that point, so we just let them come in however they wish."

The door opposite the veranda, also made in Peru, opens into the one-story section of the house where ceiling heights climb from 14 to 21 feet. A powder room, dining room and combination kitchen/great room with clerestory windows and faux-finished plastered walls, project a muted, serene ambience. Ten matching crystal chandeliers hang down below the rafters.



White, shabby chic slip-covered sofa and chairs, an antique settee and matching Swedish side chairs surround two bleached Malaysian teakwood coffee tables. An interesting corner treatment includes a vintage slag glass church window, over-sized decorative mirrors, lime-washed clay pottery and architectural pediments. A Gustavian Mora clock occupies another corner.

The focal point is the magnificent floor-to-ceiling marble fireplace made of Italian limestone designed by Phillip Contreras. It mirrors the faux-painted kitchen vent hood — also designed by Contreras — and marble kitchen island. Distressed white oak floors are evident throughout the house; linen drapes and plantation shutters are the main window treatments. Although the home's furnishings are an exquisite mix of Swedish, African, Peruvian and French antiques, the art is quite modern.



“I wanted a pop of color since the house is predominantly white,” Beth Contreras said.

Bleached driftwood benches greet visitors who actually come through the door that's meant to be the entrance. This is the two-story section of the house containing the master bedroom, master bath, exercise room, laundry room and sauna, as well as two upstairs bedrooms with Jack-and-Jill bath, plus two more outside decks.

The master bedroom is traditionally furnished, but two lime green velvet chairs add to the contemporary playfulness of Beth Contreras' design personality.

An assortment of decorative mirrors rest atop marble countertops in the master bath. Natural outdoor light shines through the window above the tub where two stunning, hand-carved Peruvian doors serve as privacy shutters.



This special attention to detail is something the husband-wife team takes seriously — not only for the home they built for themselves but for their clients.

“I grew up in the construction business, but I got an architecture degree because I was more interested in design,” Phillip Contreras said. “But now I’m back into building as well to oversee my homes from start to finish. They are unique and one-of-a-kind — all customized for each individual.”

The couple have projects in Texas and Florida, so they live a busy life. Their three grown children and one grandchild keep them grounded — but not for long.

“We love what we do,” she said. “And we like to change things up a little.”



THE VERANDA WITH FIREPLACE AND SITTING AREA. PHOTO BY STUART VILLANUEVA