



PLACE OF ZEN

A KEY LARGO CONDO TRADES
TRADITIONAL BEACHSIDE
ICONOGRAPHY FOR
JAPANESE-INFORMED CHIC.

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—PHYLLIS TAYLOR

When interior designer Phyllis Taylor and architect Maria Rignack found themselves renovating a Key Largo condo with sharp angles and a challenging floor plan, the Japanese philosophy of wabi-sabi seemed an apt envelope for the project. Derived from Buddhist teachings, the school of thought embraces imperfections and celebrates nature—tenets that have shaped interiors and architecture alike.

Taylor and Rignack’s clients, a prominent Midwestern family, had previously worked with their firm on a Palm Beach-style vacation home in the same resort community. But as the years went on, the family found they needed more space to accommodate an ever-expanding brood. With no acreage to build a guest cottage, the couple jumped at the opportunity to purchase in a new development just a quick golf cart ride away, enlisting the duo to smarten the existing architectural interiors and devise a tasteful, low-maintenance design scheme.

Bringing in natural light was the first priority. The unit was inwardly situated, plunging the entry and hallway into darkness. “Florida sun is our greatest natural resource,” Taylor says. “The quality of that light and how it reacts to color and gives us shadowing is what we count on to make our interiors successful.” So, as a first order of business, frosted-glass doors were added to the bedrooms off the entryway, filtering in soft outdoor light while still maintaining privacy.

Next, organic materials were employed to camouflage the hallway’s door procession. “Essentially we were given white walls, many utilitarian doors and an odd point,” Rignack explains of the corridor. “We decided the best way to address this was to conceal the doors as much as possible.” General contractor James Gregory

and builder Miles Zamora clad the hall in a grainy milpa wood on one side and full-height white marble reliefs on the other. “The selections and applications of colors helped,” Gregory says. “They’re all the primarily neutral, natural tones. The natural light now bounces throughout the condo, and it’s very soft and comforting.” In tandem, the surfaces bring impactful texture to the space, which the team highlighted further with sleek sconces that simultaneously call attention to door openings. At the end of the hall, where the walls converge in that aforementioned point, Rignack carved in as much as the abutting plumbing would allow her, transforming the corner into a chic gallery niche-cum-focal feature.

The unit’s bones proved challenging for the clients as well, having long-favored classic interiors. “We couldn’t throw a traditional style into a modern layout—the space just didn’t lend itself to that,” Taylor explains. “The difficult thing was convincing the owners their sensibilities would still shine through—that the design would be an updated interpretation of what’s important to them and how they like to live.” Entrusting their fruitful long-term relationship, the couple took a leap and embraced Taylor’s contemporary “Zen with zing” vision.

To incorporate the wife’s favorite color—“blue, blue and more blue,” the interior designer describes—antique indigo textiles from Japan were introduced as a jumping-off point. Throughout each room, indigo fragments are sewn into throw pillows, framed as wall art and gracefully draped across furnishings, establishing a color narrative that carries across the hallway rug and powder bath detailing. Japanese references continue with details like the glass and rope pendants in the kitchen, inspired by the culture’s rope and knot art, and in the use of woven textures throughout, such as a living area armchair that nods to traditional basket weaving. Beyond these nuances, a reverence for fine craftsmanship and earthy forms permeates the space, from the intricate built-ins in the master bedroom to the bespoke surface of the indoor dining table: a slab of bleached wood Taylor had cast in white acrylic.

Bringing the wabi-sabi ethos full circle, the outdoor living space is undoubtedly the unit’s most enjoyed feature. Accessible via a wall of retractable glass doors, the expansive terrace flows into the airy interiors, blurring the lines between inside and outside. “The owners enjoy the Florida air and live more in that outside room than in the conventional interior spaces,” Taylor says.

In a happy surprise to both client and design team, the new apartment has drawn unexpected visitors to the family’s beloved vacation destination: the owners themselves. “They thought that this was going to be a house for guests,” Taylor says. “But as it turns out, they’re the guests.” ■



A Niba Designs runner covers porcelain tile flooring in the entry hall of a Key Largo condo. The wood bench is antique, while the driftwood sculpture is a boat fragment interior designer Phyllis Taylor had charred and oiled. “Dramatic lighting highlights the textures of all the finishes,” she says, pointing to the milpa wood paneling and ceiling, reeded grass-cloth wallcovering and Thassos stone wall.



In the dining area, Artefacto chairs encircle a table made of a concrete base by Paola Navone for Gervasoni and an acrylic-cast Guanacaste bleached wood top. In the adjacent living area, an Artefacto lounge chair pairs with a petrified wood side table from Fine Line Furniture & Accessories. David Trubridge lamps hang over a Kelly Wearstler coffee table, resting on a Niba Designs rug.

Opposite: The team concealed a television behind the bar's mirrored sliding doors by Titan Construction and incorporated chrome for reflectivity. The Sub-Zero undercounter refrigerator offers ideal wine storage.

Below: Lindsey Adelman's Knotty Bubbles pendants suspend from the kitchen's tongue-and-groove milpa wood ceiling by E.M. Soberon. Eclectic Stone Touch fabricated the Calacatta Gold backsplash and waterfall island, which is lined with Artefacto's Infinity leather bar stools. The appliances are Sub-Zero & Wolf. Protech e2 handled the home's automation.



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Taylor outfitted the balcony with a dining table, folding chairs and a lounge chair by Artefacto. A metal palm leaf table from Jalan Jalan Collection and CB2's Jelly Bean coffee table join the seating area atop a custom rug from The Rug Company. Pillows from Monica James decorate a Serena & Lily Cliffside sofa.





Opposite: A flexible space that can transition into a family suite, the study features a Kravet cork wallcovering. The shelving and desk, complemented by Artefacto chairs, are by E.M. Soberon. An acrylic table from One of a Kind rests on a Soumak rug from Niba Designs.

Below: Artefacto's Austral II chaise lounges in the study and the custom bed in the connecting guest room are dressed in bedding by Carlotta's Fine Linens. In the bedroom, Gary Reichow artworks from Jalan Jalan Collection are displayed beneath Atlas Fan Company's Irene fan. E.M. Soberon fabricated the nightstand. Another Soumak rug from Niba Designs grounds the space.





Above: Arabescato Bianco marble partners with Thibaut's Kissimsee wallcovering from Jeffrey Michaels in the master bathroom, where antique Japanese paper from Fine Line Furniture & Accessories artfully drapes above Kohler's Purist bathtub. The rope ottomans, below Cerno's Plura flush-mount light, are from Monica James.

Left: Draperies made of Camengo fabric separate the guest bedroom from a lounge area, where a standing lamp, garden stool and mirror from Victoria's Armoire surround a Casulo chair. The sleeping quarters feature a Bernhardt bed and the brand's Bellamy nightstand from Judith Norman, which holds a lamp from Jalan Jalan Collection. Vincent Villedieu artwork hangs nearby.