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How one Balboa home's architect created a stylish residence on a wedge-shaped lot

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From the street, Kathy and Tom LeBeau's Balboa home is deceptively simple. It is a pleasant, two-story home with a four-car garage, outfitted in a mix of stone, shingles and bright, white siding. The residence sits on a pie-shaped lot that backs up to Balboa Bay and overlooks the water through a striking, second floor window.

The five-bedroom, five-bathroom family home is a fusion of colonial New England, Cape Cod-style architecture and modern beach cottage.

“Overall, the clients wanted to create something that would stand the test of time,” said Caitlin Smith of Brandon Architects.

But the most defining element of the Balboa residence almost didn't make the cut.

“The large, circular door and window system in the master bedroom is certainly a unique feature,” said Christopher Brandon of Brandon Architects.

He and his team affectionately nicknamed it the “oculus” during the project. Brandon said it was a design risk that paid off.

“The clients were unsure about it at first, but were very trusting and everyone absolutely loves the finished look...the circular feature really ties together all the different lines to the room and focuses your eye on the beautiful view of the harbor. It's like a picture frame you can walk through.”

This room is now one of Kathy LeBeau's favorite places to relax and read with a view of the water.

“One thing that people always say about our home is that it's very peaceful. I feel that in this room especially,” said LeBeau. “The master bath is another favorite place of mine. It's like a palace in there.”

The home's tranquil atmosphere is set with the neutral color palette established by Trish Steele at Churchill Design. Finishes included quartzite, Calacatta and Casaerstone countertops and traditional French white oak flooring combined with paint and furniture colors in soft grays, taupe, and darker-toned blues—colors typical of traditional seaside homes.

In the upstairs office, the family's love for the water continues to shine through with maps of Newport Harbor and San Diego Bay (where Tom LeBeau grew up) displayed on two walls as a more personalized alternative to wallpaper.

Downstairs, the Brandon Architects were challenged with creating a transitional, open floor plan while still maintaining a traditional look and feel. The home is great for entertaining as the kitchen, dining room and great room all exist in one, connected space.

"We really strove to keep the main living spaces open so that entertaining spaces deeper into the home can also benefit from the views," said Brandon. "We depended on different ceiling treatments to help differentiate the spaces."

The ceiling in the living room, for example, features an inset, boxed pattern with a center circle that is punctuated by a modern wood ceiling fan.

Sliding glass pocket doors border either side of the great room to let the outdoor views and cool breezes flow into the home.

Inside this 6,513 square foot house, there is also a large game room with a pool table, big screen TV and bar counter, an enclosed courtyard with a pool and under the staircase, a custom, glass wine cellar.

"Once we figured out the challenging lot and its wedge shape, we had a lot of fun deciding how to create character in the home while still checking off all the boxes of things the client wanted," said Smith. "We didn't want the house to be a massive box on the corner just because we needed to fit several rooms in the plan."

The 4-car garage was one such request with the potential to derail curb appeal and artful design. Brandon and Smith knew that they didn't want the garage doors to become the only thing you noticed about the home.

They found a balance by treating the exterior with different finishing materials. One side has two single-car garage doors bordered by stone and the other side is a two-car board and batten-style garage door surrounded by traditional shingles to match the majority of the home's exterior.

"We designed the home as a classic and timeless addition to the peninsula," Smith said. "One that still makes a statement."

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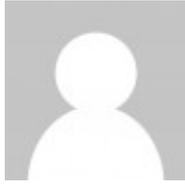
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Kaitlin Wright is a freelancer who had written about the arts for the Orange County Register since

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