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FOR THEIR CREATIVE FAMILY

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AT HOME IN THE WOODS

Mark Sultana reimagines modern living for his family, finding fresh perspectives in his personally designed and built country residence. **WRITTEN BY ANNA RACHEL RICH | PHOTOGRAPHY BY WYATT KOSTYGAN**



“People often tell me my work has a lot of life to it and I think that comes from the color I see outdoors”

— Brigitta Wagner Sultana

T'S ALWAYS FASCINATING TO OGLE THE SELF-DESIGNED HOMES OF HIGHLY SUCCESSFUL ARCHITECTS—

observing the space where personal and professional life intersect without client expectation at play. When the significant other is a talented graphic designer and fine-artist herself, you know you're peering into a thoughtfully-designed space where great work can emerge when inspiration strikes.

Principal Architect Mark Sultana, of DSDG fame, has settled in his fifth personally-designed and built home—located on a two-acre Foxfire West lot plucked from the Sarasota Market in Summer 2014—and

doesn't intend on moving his flock anytime soon. “This is the first time I've said, ‘I love it here and I don't want to leave,’” admits Sultana, recalling the undertaking of two past projects completed with his wife, Brigitta Wagner Sultana. “I knew we'd only stay in the others for two to three years,” he says. “This one is different, but I didn't know it until I saw the finished project and heard my wife say she didn't want to move anymore.”

If change keeps the creative eye awake, what better way to nurture artistic vision than trade your urban dwelling for a verdant lot of country soil? Like switching from caged to free-range, exchanging your fast-paced city life

HOME CREDITS

Architect/Interiors: DSDG Architects, Mark Sultana. **Contractor:** Mark Sultana. **Vendors:** Baker Land Cleaning, Coast Outdoor Services, Southwest Concrete, Universal Structural, Avery Roofing, Masco, Downs Glass, Simpson Stucco, B&D, Mullets Aluminum, Overhead Door, Aqua Services, United Electric, Blue Water Pools, Eurotech Air, Wicked Smart Homes, Tarxx, Region Solar, Cucine Ricci, Marvins Woodworking, Powers Drywall, Nettles Concrete, European Marble, Porcelawosa, Tile Market, GE Appliances, Sticks and Stones, Apricot and Shutter Elegance.

for a tranquil, wooded haven is liberating. The fresh taste of freedom this rural roost offers the young family is just what the Sultanas craved.

Anyone who has survived a personal construction project or home renovation understands the inevitable stress from constant decision-making and unexpected delays. Consider then what assuming both the design and building aspects of the process would entail. “I don't know how many architects build as well as design,” notes Brigitta. “Mark is always conscious about keeping everything within budget and really has the best insight into how much materials cost and how to keep everything moving on schedule.”

When early summer monsoon rains turned the Sultanas' schedule into a sappy waiting game, there was little more to do than vigilantly monitor forecasts. Saturated soil prohibited cement from being poured and the lot was a soupy trap for hopeful trucks. Pushing their timeline back two months, inclement weather turned out to be a strange blessing. “The flooding revealed just how much we needed to raise the foundation. Now we're safe from the rains because everything drains away from the house,” says Sultana. Apart from initial set-backs, construction moved swiftly, enabling the family to settle into the secluded residence this past June.



Mature oaks and towering pines provide privacy while surrounding the warm, modern ranch with a vertical sense of time. A 30-acre manmade lake bordering the property's backyard sets the stage as a rugged wonderland, casting a slew of all things winged, tailed and spotted to perform for curious onlookers. When asked what he's most looking forward to about the relocation, Sultana recalls enjoying the seasonal changes during the eight-month construction. "When I worked on the job site during the winter, I knew my kids would love it out there." While the weather is cool, the wildlife is cooler. Armed with their cameras in one hand and bird books in another, Sultana ventures out with the troops on their UTV, documenting species as they explore. "the kids have recorded bluejays, cardinals, giant woodpeckers, tons of hawks, ospreys—all in one day," he says.

Bringing the outdoors inside along the back of the house, large southwest-facing windows

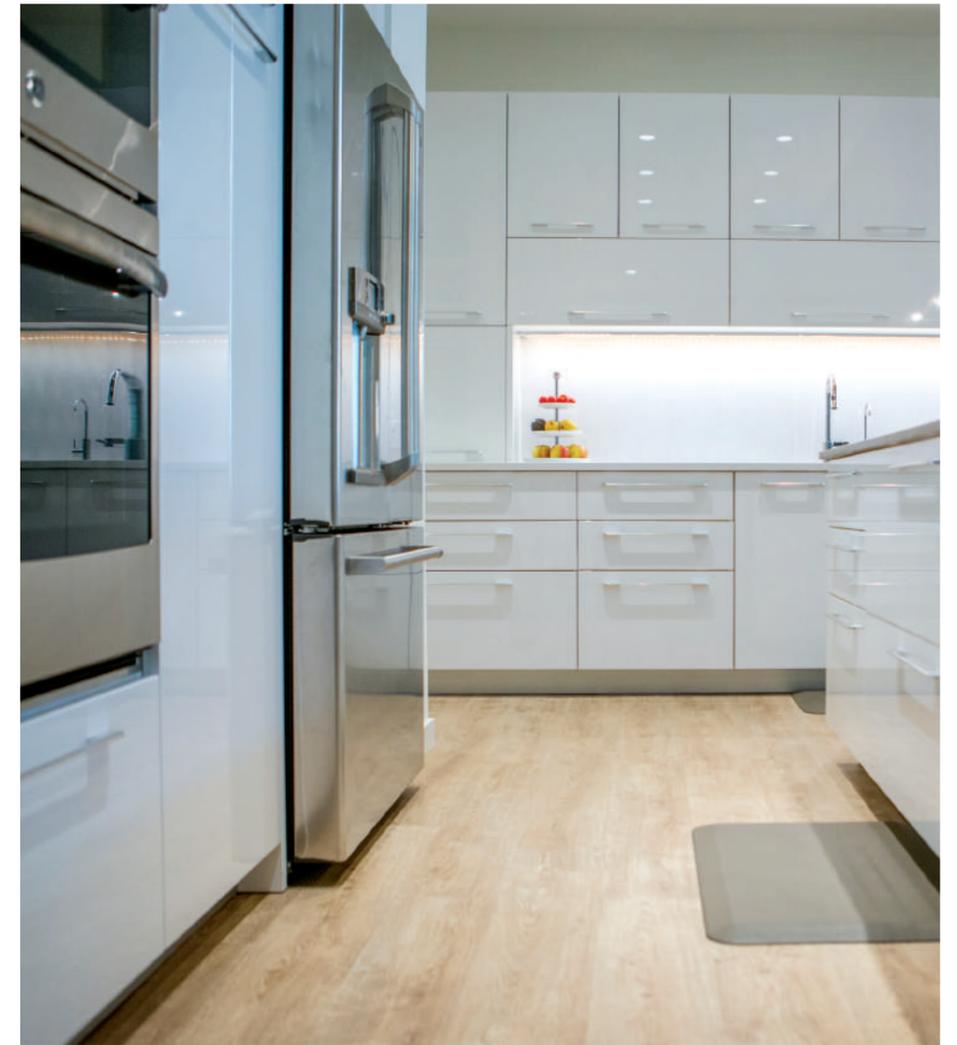
frame the lake with inspiring perspectives. Floor-to-ceiling, hurricane-resistant impact glass welcomes rays to spotlight Brigitta's abstract acrylic-on-canvas pieces that punctuate neutral walls with vibrant dashes of color. "A lot of my work is inspired by nature," says Brigitta. "People often tell me my work has a lot of life to it and I think that comes from the color I see outdoors." Offering plenty of naturally lit workspace options, the home's central great room unites the kitchen, living room, dining room and breakfast nook in an open layout. The playroom and kids' rooms are strategically clustered, centralizing the whimsy while tucking toys away.

Creamy white oak ceilings mirror the durable flooring below, creating an airy congruency that's refined-yet-practical perfectly, reflecting the couple's complimentary aesthetic sensibilities. "It's not a stark-white house like most modern homes," says Sultana. The softer color palette and use of natural materials like limestone around the fireplace



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and entryway juxtapose the straight lines and sleek finishes to create a balanced warmth. Future plans to repurpose salvaged lumber from the lot are in the making. Brigitta envisions a large, pine dining table, serving as a tasteful sentiment that gives a knotted nod to the home’s roots.

Inviting and in-tune with its setting, the home’s high-efficiency design inspires greener living while saving a refreshing amount of green. “Energy costs are next to nothing, barely \$150 for our power bill,” notes Sultana as he rallies off a list of eco-friendly features like solar roofing, complete LED lighting and the highest efficiency, variable speed AC system on the market. Sultana used no-VOC (Volatile organic compound) materials, eliminating unpleasant new-house odors and protecting the family from toxic compounds. Knowing this home was “the one,” the Sultanas sought to craft a dynamic space that’s both

modern and cozy, welcoming changes with every new season. “I’m always rearranging things—switching out vibrant, brighter hues in summer for deeper fall shades,” says Brigitta, adding that it creates a freshness and gives a sort of cohesion between the indoors and out. “I think it’s just how I am as an artist—never content, never finished, always making minor changes here and there.” A blank canvas, of sorts, the picturesque abode is an ideal medium providing artistic relief as the young family grows.

A front-yard vegetable garden will soon grow amid native Bahai grass and ornamental palms. “We want to get the kids involved so they value food and appreciate where it comes from,” says Brigitta. Building beds is on the books, but composting is already a part of their daily routine. Where the soil is rich and things taste slightly sweeter, the Sultanas can finally say they’re at home in the trees. **SRQ**