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A CABINET DESIGNER BRINGS HER EXPERTISE TO A FULL-SCALE RENOVATION PROJECT, HELPING TO MANIFEST A SERENE AND FUNCTIONAL VACATION HOME ON A CANAL

BY GAYLENE SALOMONS

When Chicago-based home-builder Julie Laux from J. Jordan Homes found a simple home on a canal in the Seagate neighborhood in Naples, she thought it might make for a good rental property—especially because it was only steps from the beach. Instead, it evolved into a personal passion project. Along with a team of talent, she completely renovated the home, originally built in 1989, creating a minimalist yet relaxed coastal retreat for her family.

One of those talented team members was Laura O'Brien, tapped for the kitchen and cabinetry design and fabrication in the home. After completing her degree in interior design and fine art at Illinois State University, O'Brien decided to focus on architectural and space planning. "I was always a very organized and creative person; I love order," she says. She has since amassed more than 30 years of residential and commercial



experience. In 2009, she opened **O'Brien Harris**, a cabinetry company headquarterd in the River North Design District of Chicago.

O'Brien planned every nook and cranny of the kitchen-centric space of the modern Naples home—with the goal of making it as un-kitchenlike as possible. She also added her touch to the primary bath, closets, pantry, and storage spaces. O'Brien relays she loves thinking about how things function. Because the home is extremely contemporary, considerable thought went into creating a clean, edited, and artful space.

"Every detail is intentional," says O'Brien. First, she chose light-colored woods for the cabinetry, matching the home's ethereal atmosphere. She concealed appliances in the open kitchen behind panels. She even extended those panels higher, allowing for added storage for rarely used items. A tall wine fridge occupies a hidden corner of the kitchen, while a large marble island functions as the main dining table. A bank of cabinets, containing multiple drawers and shelves, lines a nearby wall in the great room space.

O'Brien hid the cooktop in a niche. "It's a small space," she explains, "and a bit unusual." Her rationale is that, in the Southwest Florida climate, "outdoor space often trumps indoor space," implying the cooktop would not likely be used often, especially when an outdoor kitchen and good takeout are available. "It was an easy solution," she adds.



RYAN HAINEY

The oven, microwave, and coffee pot are all hidden in the curved pantry, a jewel box of a space tucked next to the staircase. This unique, accessible area makes it easy to grab drinks and morning coffee and can be completely closed off with sliding wood doors when not in use.

In the primary bedroom, O'Brien created a special walk-in closet space. The dream dressing room blends faux-suede paneling, a large window with bench, open handbag displays, and a dedicated sunglasses drawer, merging function with indulgence. Although not a large space, it met the needs of the owner—who loves clothing and shops for quality



Laura O'Brien, founder of O'Brien Harris, a cabinetry company headquarterd in Chicago, meticulously planned the many storage spaces in a Seagate home.

RYAN HAINES



over quantity. "It feels like a special moment when you step inside," remarks O'Brien.

A cohesive aesthetic runs throughout the home. The two and a half bathrooms, although compact, maximize efficiency with wood vanities (some curved), large mirrors, light-colored tile, and windows. Interior designer Lauren Warnock of NavyBlack Studio, based in Chicago, layered numerous textural shades of white

throughout the home, ensuring each hue responded harmoniously to both natural and artificial light.

O'Brien, who comments she likes "taking a room into the realm of great design," helped achieve an undeniably tranquil and compact vacation home that is sophisticated yet eminently functional—one that will surely be enjoyed for years to come. *(obrienharris.com) <<*



THE WALK-IN CLOSET (ABOVE) IN THE PRIMARY BEDROOM (LEFT) OFFERS A WINDOW BENCH, SHELVES, DRAWERS, AND PLENTY OF HANGING SPACE FOR THE OWNER'S MUCH-LOVED WARDROBE.



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