

## All about *Architecture*

# Island-style architecture maximizes views, green design

By RON RICKERT, AIA  
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Who doesn't dream of having an island hideaway? Even if you can't fulfill that dream literally, you can have an island-style home right here in South Florida. Many of the architectural characteristics that make a house functional and beautiful in Bermuda or in the Caribbean work the same way in Florida.

Because the style was designed for hot tropical climates, it also tends to include natural cooling methods that fit perfectly with today's emphasis on energy-saving and "green" design.

As with any architectural style, it is important to maximize whatever views the lot offers — whether they are of the ocean, a golf course or a backyard pool. Raising the house off the ground a couple of feet is one way to accomplish this, because you will be looking down on the view instead of seeing it from a directly horizontal perspective — a sort of tree-house effect.

Elevating the pool and surrounding it with a perimeter bench is another way to enhance a view, because it creates a visual focal point. This technique also allows you to have stepped terraces, with seating on different levels.

A variety of architectural features define the island style. Traditionally, the bottom story of the home is made of concrete blocks to keep out moisture and to create a sense of permanence, and the second story is wood frame, to be aesthetically pleasing.

Today, new building materials such as Hardi board, which is actually made of cement, allow you to have the look of traditional wood siding but without the risk of termite damage or dry rot.

At the entrance to the home, exterior features like railings and piers, with coach lights at the top, make an immediate statement about architectural style. Many older island homes have a front door of mahogany or other hardwood; this is easy to replicate in a new structure.

Colonial-style shutters reminiscent of Bermuda provide exterior architectural details and protect windows during hurricanes. Even if a home has impact-resistant glass, the shutters will add character and keep out some heat while allowing light to enter.

Enlarging overhangs on rooflines will further protect against the sun. This technique can be effective on the south walls because, in summer, the sun's rays come from more directly overhead. Bahamas shutters are also an excellent

way to help reduce extra heat on the east and west sides of the home.

Today's designs also allow energy-conscious homeowners to have solar panels integrated into the overhangs — a more aesthetically pleasing alternative to having them plainly visible.

Island-style architecture tends to blend indoors and outdoors. One way to do this is with balconies on all sides of the house. They become extensions of the living space, encouraging you to go outside and enjoy the fresh air.

In South Florida, side yards are often neglected or ignored as places to relax. But with the right landscaping, they can offer as much enjoyment as the front and back yards. They can provide an attractive view for a balcony or serve as an intimate garden area.

Island-style architecture usually includes a great room — a combined living and dining room — that provides a spacious, open feel. Glass pocket doors that open by sliding into an exterior wall allow you to create a combined indoor-outdoor great room that seems to be one large living area.

Windows play a major role in island-style architecture. Openings designed to catch cross-breezes with prevailing winds in mind have been around for a long time, and in a Caribbean-style home, they play a key role in comfort. The architect can plan the windows so that air comes in at floor level on the windward side of the house, rises as it warms, and then exits through a transom window on the leeward side of the home.

Windows with smaller openings on the cool side and larger openings on the warmer side of the home will actually create natural ventilation, even when there is no breeze.

Color plays another role in keeping an island-style home cool. In Bermuda, for example, color schemes have been much the same since the 1600s. White roofs reflect away the heat of the sun, while darker hues on the walls of the houses subdue glare and are thus easier on the eyes.



Photos by Jonathan Kolbe

A shady balcony adds to the comfort and liveability of this Caribbean-style home.

A sloping roof also allows for the owner to collect rainwater for irrigation — something that has long been important in the islands and now can help alleviate our water shortage in South Florida.

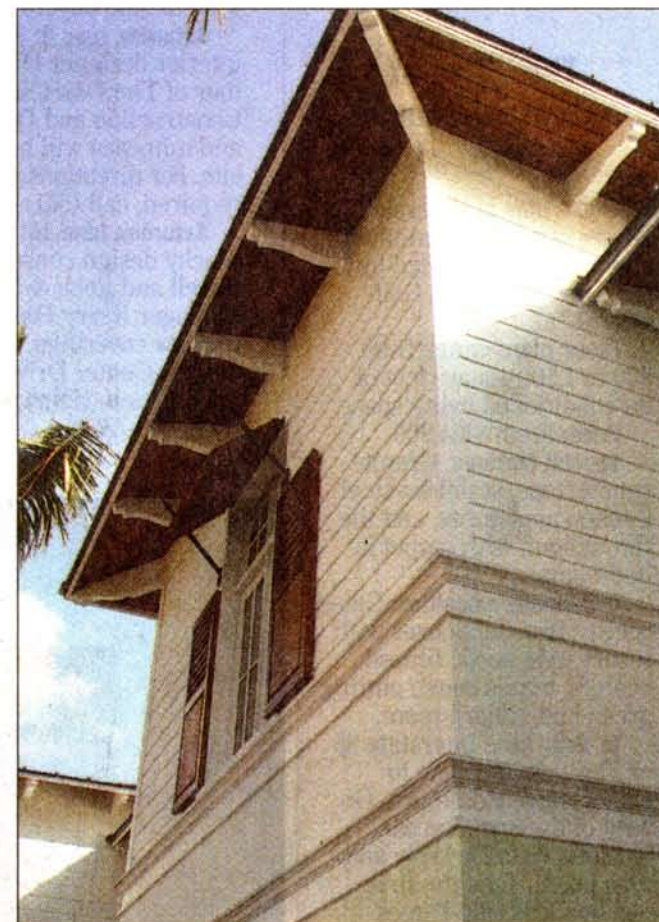
Revolutionary new products offer options for the deck and patio. Curved, sail-like awnings protect from the sun and add to the island-style look of a home, yet they can also resist hurricane winds.

Island architecture is a perfect fit for South Florida and offers an alternative to the popular Mediterranean style. Best of

all: You won't have to travel to reach your private island hideaway, because it will be right here where you already live.

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Wood shutters protect your home from inclement South Florida weather while accentuating the walls.



Photo by Rosario S. Mannino

Island architectural styles are illustrated in the overhangs on rooflines, a deep balcony and wood shutters.

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