



ALLIGATOR ALLEY

KYLE AND BETH ASPLUNDH ENLISTED TOP DESIGNER JACKIE ARMOUR TO TRANSFORM THEIR JUPITER ABODE INTO A FOREVER HOME FOR THEMSELVES AND THEIR ALLIGATORS (YES, ALLIGATORS)

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PHOTO BY EDUARDO SCHNEIDER



Natural lighting pours in through the family room's windows.

In the world of crocodilian conservation, Kyle Asplundh stands out. Son of utility tree-trimming magnate and altruist Carl Hj. Asplundh Jr., Kyle fell in love with wildlife at an early age. Raised in a comfortable suburb outside of Philadelphia, his appreciation for the great outdoors was fueled by vacations spent at his parents' homes on Palm Beach Island and Florida's west coast, where he wiled away the hours fishing, airboat riding, and catching turtles. The coastal excursions also developed his deep-seated respect for American alligators and crocodiles, which cooperatively coexist in South Florida. It also resulted in the first of many alligator acquisitions.

"My husband has had [an alligator] since he was 10 or 12 years old," says Beth, Kyle's wife and high school sweetheart. "His parents just allowed him to have one, and one grew to many."

When the couple decided to relocate to Florida to be closer to Kyle's family and Beth's grandparents who reside in Delray Beach, they knew they would need enough land—at least 10 acres or



The Asplundhs' home mixes rustic furnishings with textures one might find in Yosemite.

more—to realize Kyle's lifelong dream of erecting a private sanctuary dedicated to rescued alligators, crocodiles, and tortoises with outdoor enclosures that emulate their natural habitats and provide protection from the elements, like hurricanes.

On weekends, the couple would fly in to conduct real estate reconnaissance, first searching in Wellington, Loxahatchee, and The Acreage before turning their GPS north to Jupiter Farms. There they found a bucolic estate that backed up to Riverbend Park and was outfitted with a 2,000-square-foot, three-bedroom home, a pond surrounded by cypress trees 24-feet deep, and a field with an irrigation system.

In December 2014, they moved in. While Kyle worked on the construction of his wildlife facility, Beth spearheaded smaller design projects and built a

pool. Less than a year later, the couple, who entertain often and frequently have family, friends, and out-of-town guests stay over, realized they needed more space.

"As ridiculous as it sounds, a three-bedroom house for two people just wasn't cutting it," Beth says. "I was constantly doing



A neutral color palette adorns the master suite.

The ceiling's soaring effect was achieved by partially elevating the roof and building out the northern wall to accommodate a covered lanai overlooking the pool.

For the overall design playbook, Jackie mixed rustic furnishings and accoutrements with hues and textures similar to those found at Yosemite, a national park she had recently visited that left a lasting impression.

Touring the Asplundhs' residence for the first time, she remembers, "I just couldn't stop taking pictures of all the color combinations. When you look at the stone from the mountains then at the pebbles in the sand by the trees on their property, it's almost visually overwhelming."

Jackie purposely kept the main rooms aesthetically neutral. In the master bedroom, low-profile furnishings, like a stump table and a pair of Lee Industry chairs, offer clear sightlines of the rural and soothing landscape. A handmade rug, one of many plucked from a prominent rug store Kyle's late-sister-in-law had owned, warms the floor while honoring her memory. Additional floor coverings balance out the copious wood tones and weave in more color and texture. A custom, 8-foot-wide bed, similar to one the couple slept in during a trip to Montana, graces the western wall. From the horizontal perch, the couple can catch panoramas of the verdant preserves and local wildlife such as



A peaceful master bedroom balcony overlooks verdant preserves.

laundry and feeling like my house was closing in on me."

She credits her husband for finding their current digs in Ranch Colony, a luxurious, gated golf and equestrian community east of I-95 and approximately three miles west of where they were living. They purchased the 20-acre property in 2015, which, save for a garage, was empty, and decided, they would sit on it.

The tipping point for Beth came when their neighbor's Ranch Colony property went up for sale. "It was like, 'Okay, now we have to make big adult decisions about the future. Do we really picture ourselves here with more land?'" The answer was yes, they did.

After nearly a year of negotiating, the Asplundhs found themselves the newly minted owners of a second 20-acre estate, this one imbued with a circa-1990s house, a large pond, and enough capacity for a new sanctuary that would feature a state-of-the-art breeding program for endangered crocodiles. At press time, Kyle has already bred Chinese alligators twice in captivity.

At first, Beth debated about hiring a decorator, then conceded

she needed a pro to realize her dream home. "With the internet at your fingertips it feels like you can do it yourself, but as soon as I started to think about paint colors, I said, 'Nope, I cannot.'"

They hired Harold Smith of Smith & Moore Architects in Palm Beach and JMA Interior Design principal Jackie Armour, who had come highly recommended by a tennis pal of Beth's. They tasked the creative duo to transform the rundown residence into a cozy setting with a modern farmhouse-chic charm. "We're country-ish kind of people, so we wanted a home that would fit our personalities really well," Beth says.

Because Beth and Kyle planned to keep the property for the long haul, they wanted a master suite that would be a tranquil oasis and act as an escape for when guests slept over.

Relocating the first-floor master bedroom upstairs and removing the wall separating the new master from a guest room provided additional square footage for a walk-in closet and a luxurious en suite bathroom covered top-to-toe in shell stone.

wild hogs that roam freely around the property.

"There are all these beautiful oak trees you can see from the window," Jackie says. "You almost feel like you're in a treehouse."

Two guest bedrooms with a Jack-and-Jill bathroom hold court on the opposite end. A spiral staircase leads upstairs to a bonus room in the attic that Kyle's nieces and nephews use as a private retreat while grown-ups have the rest of the house to spread out.

A soothing palette of taupe, cream, gray, and white tones, coupled with wide-plank hardwood floors, ramp up ocular interest and unite the downstairs living spaces, which include a home office and a soundproofed entertainment room separated by a see-through, saltwater fish tank.

Countrified embellishments anchor the living





room as does a wraparound bookshelf the designer conceived in a dark stain.

Elegance and a nod to lodge life take center stage with heavy, stone-topped tables and comfortable leather chairs reminiscent of the traditional wing variety seated beneath a pecky cypress ceiling stained a soft taupe. Then there's the mash-up of metals, like iron lamps and heavily textured couches covered in oatmeal Lee Joffa linen and embellished with nailheads the designer hammered herself. "When you look at the overall scale of the room, every detail helps make more sense of the space," Jackie says.

In the family room, a moose head wall accessory, which came with the property, offers silent assessment of everyone who enters. A bank of sliding glass doors opposite the taxidermy leads out to the sun-dappled patio. Ledge stone used to accent the base of the home's exterior also covers a wall tricked up with an 85-inch flat screen television and a fireplace. Original cabinetry was refaced and accessorized with bright crocodile watercolors and vintage photos of Alligator Joe in Palm Beach.

The room's oversized proportions at first proved a conundrum Jackie solved by creating two distinct seating areas. In front of the television, she positioned a large sectional—perfect for long game day afternoons or a quiet movie night—and placed a set of wingback loungers near the fireplace that guests could use for a fireside chat.

Jackie didn't fuss with the kitchen's flow. Instead, she refinished the cabinetry in a creamy dove white hue, replaced the hardware, and flowed in an island, quartz countertops, and a subway tile backsplash.

Situated between the kitchen and family room, a breakfast wing with windows on three sides pulls in beryl hues from the pond and native flora. Classic bamboo blinds were selected, in addition to an expansive table ideal for an impromptu brunch or savoring a second cup of coffee.

In the dining room, dark paneling, similar to the deep hue in the living room, brings fresh contrast and an added layer of depth. Metal details, like open cage light fixtures and table railings, cue an industrial edge. A playful triptych with vibrant, outdoorsy

shades offsets the upholstery's neutrality.

The entire project, lengthened by add-on projects and some structural delays, took nearly two years to complete, but the Asplunds just chalked it up to experience.

When they weren't tending to their other businesses (Kyle also owns Hydra Motor Works, a high-performance automotive shop in West Palm Beach and recently acquired a resort on South Bimini), the couple would stop by the work site regularly, whether for a meeting with their contractor, Frank Tricarico of Metz Construction, or simply to observe the work in progress.

For Beth, who enjoys trolling real estate online and watching home design shows like *Fixer Upper*, the experience left her with plenty to contemplate. "I was really happy when it was done, but I learned a lot and I was like, 'I kind of want to keep doing this!' It was so much fun."

As for the taxidermy moose head, the couple's keeping it. "He's a great mascot with a friendly face," Beth says, smiling. "And although he's not native to Florida, he still represents our love for wildlife."

Jackie Armour launched her eponymous, Jupiter-based company, JMA Interior Design, in 1996. Since then, she's designed some of the most eye-pleasing residences and yachts in the country and on the high seas. Here, she dishes on design trends, DIYs, and upping a room's "wow factor."

Her design style

I like a lot of pattern and color and mixing antique and modern pieces. I don't mind mixing metal colors, like brass and polished nickel. I think when you start to match things too much, though, it just becomes very staid and flat looking.

Telling a home's story through design

I'll bring in family memorabilia or heirlooms that have been passed down. If we don't have that, we come up with our version. It requires getting in touch with what you're really about, which is sometimes the hardest part—that deep dive.

Home design shows: love or loathe

They're wonderful because they've opened up a new arena for people to understand interior design and what we do. The bad part is that, on television, they're working with very unrealistic numbers and time frames. So, people think, "Wow, we can do all this stuff to our house," when the reality is they really can't because they have misinformation.

Great design needn't reflect your reality

I had a client whose house had a very global feel and was heavily textured—no head mounts just tons of African textiles and some art. It looked like she'd been on an African safari when she had never even been to Africa before.

Favorite (and least favorite) current trends

Shiplap, I love. I wish the all-white kitchen would go away. We [designers] are so tired of them.

The sign of a good interior designer

In my world, if you're not super organized and tech-savvy, you're not going to thrive. If I'm on a job site and [in need of] a plumbing spec or a drawing, I can easily access it from the Dropbox app on my phone. Many people are still dealing with paper, so if they forget to bring something to the job, it's time and money wasted for the homeowner.

Simple ways to "wow up" a room

Spray paint. I once had a client who didn't have a big budget but wanted the house to look relevant. We took all the furniture outside and sprayed it white. The place looked amazing. They couldn't believe it.

DIY tip from the top

Go to the grocery store and buy one of those flower bunches for \$3.50. Get a small, square glass vase from a craft store, like Michaels. Cut the flowers short and put them in the vase with water and pebbles or sea glass at the bottom. It's an instant floral arrangement for under \$10 that looks professionally designed.