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*In Puerto Rico
a modern
getaway opens
its wings to the
view, p.72.*

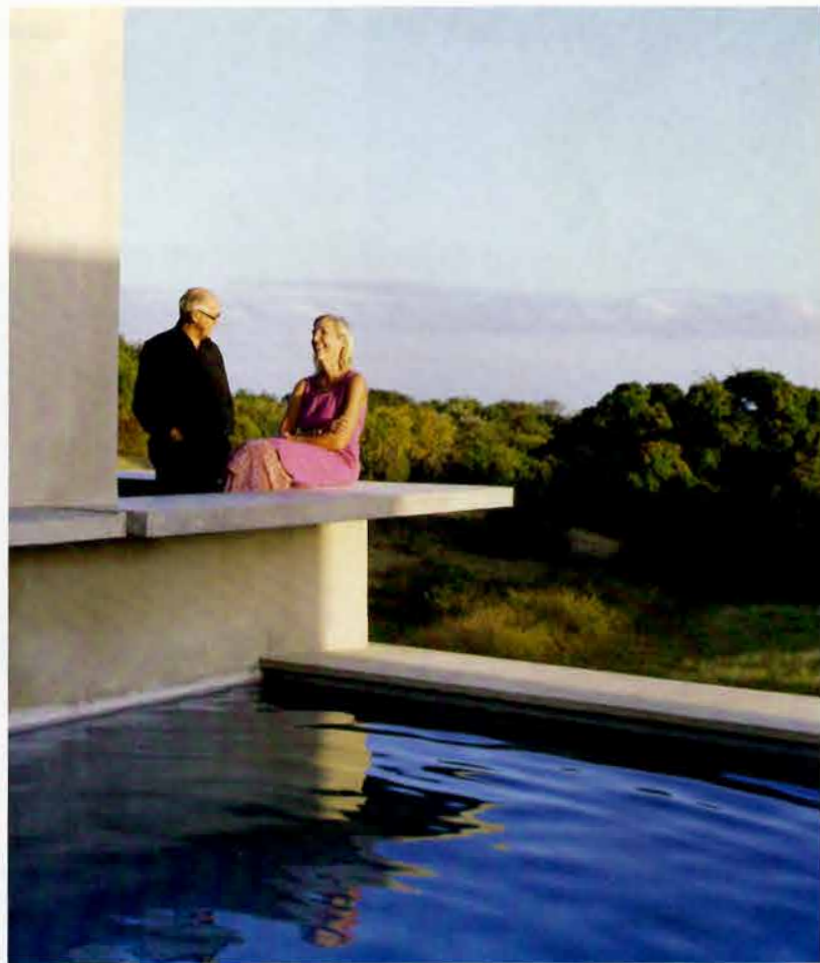
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Connecticut homeowner Donna Gorman brightened the concrete architecture of her Puerto Rican vacation place with vibrant colors and bold furniture. Classic molded Pantone chairs from Vitra surround a custom, cast-concrete dining table. The colorful cushions perched on the outdoor-grade furniture by Paola Lenti are from Gorman's own textile collection; photographs too are by Gorman. Opposite: The designer and her architect, John Hix, share a laugh on the terrace outside one of two identical bedrooms that overlook a pool between the wings of the U-shaped house.





Island Outpost

*On pastoral Vieques, a dot in the Caribbean Sea just east of **Puerto Rico**, textile designer Donna Gorman enlisted local architect John Hix to help her create an eco-friendly and low-maintenance family getaway.*



Textile designer Donna Gorman and Swedish-born financier Roger Johansson discovered the empty, pristine beaches and

bucolic countryside of sleepy Vieques, Puerto Rico, in the mid '90s—back when two-thirds of the island was still used by the U.S. Navy as a site for live-ammo maneuvers. Five years ago, the couple having married and the Navy having decamped, the pair bought a one-and-a-half-acre parcel on the island's pastoral south side, overlooking grassy hillsides where wild horses graze and a sliver of the blue Caribbean beyond.

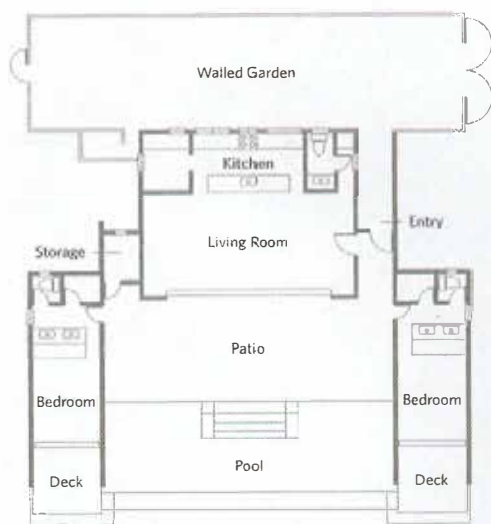
"We bought the land but didn't really have a plan for building a house," says Gorman, who spent more than two decades at the legendary Finnish design house Marimekko. "But we knew that whatever we built, John Hix would design it."

Hix, a Toronto-area architect who studied with master modernist Louis I. Kahn, spends part of the year on Vieques, where he and his wife, Neeva Gayle, own the small, eco-friendly Hix Island House. On regular visits to the hotel, Gorman, Johansson and

their two daughters experienced the architect's environmentally conscious aesthetic firsthand: simple structures that are built of low-maintenance and hurricane-proof concrete, with rough-and-tumble finishes and not a pane of glass in sight—only rolling industrial steel doors and metal-louvered windows separating inside and out. Like most of Hix's houses, this one emphasizes indoor-outdoor living, with open-air showers and sweeping terraces that meld with interior spaces.

The pool almost flows right into the open-plan living/dining room. Cooling trade winds blow through the dramatically large opening and the big, metal-louvered windows in the kitchen at the back, but the opening can be shuttered if needed with an industrial steel rolling door. Paola Lenti's colorful outdoor furniture and Gorman's punchy pillows soften the home's concrete construction. Opposite: Wild ponies graze on the hill beside the house, which faces the Caribbean.

PRODUCED BY LINDA O'KEEFE. PHOTOGRAPHS BY PETER MURDOCK. BY RAUL BARRENECHE.



*What the **Pros** Know*

With abundant sunshine, much higher electricity rates than on the U.S. mainland and difficulty reaching existing utilities, Vieques is a perfect place for a solar-powered house. To avoid the long and costly connection to the nearest electrical lines, John Hix suggested that his clients go off-grid and power the house entirely with electricity generated by the sun. The architect mounted three sets of photovoltaic panels, tilted to catch

maximum rays, on the roof. One powers a 50-gallon water heater, another the pool pump and filter system and the third generates enough power, stored in large batteries, to run lights, appliances and ceiling fans. To save additional energy, a small cascade that flows into the pool (part of the filtration system, typically a huge energy guzzler) runs only in full sunlight. "We live perfectly comfortably with full solar," says Gorman.







Gorman and Johansson gave Hix a very simple program: one large living space and two identical bedrooms. "The bedrooms are purposely small," admits Gorman. "The house is about

being together in the living areas." To capture views of the Caribbean, Hix lifted the cast-concrete and concrete-covered masonry structure almost a full story above the bottom of the hillside site. (Doing so created plenty of room for storage, including space for a pair of massive cisterns that hold rainwater.)

Luckily, both the cooling trade winds (there is no mechanical air-conditioning) and the views were to the southeast, so Hix oriented large floor-to-ceiling openings in the rooms in that direction. "The property would potentially be surrounded by development, so the idea was to put 'blinders' on the east and west sides to emphasize the view toward the water," explains the architect of the two nearly windowless concrete facades.

Gorman added texture and tone to some concrete-plastered walls, blending paints herself for hues ranging from blue gray to bright orange. Vivid throw pillows from her textile collection brighten up already color-saturated furniture from Italian design house Paola Lenti—all of it outdoor-grade. "If you come out of the pool and want to sit on the sofa, it's not a problem. If you spill something, you can just hose it down," enthuses Gorman.

That mix of style and practicality runs through the entire house. "It's a very simple house, but everything works together to make it a magical place to live," Gorman says. "At night, it's absolutely amazing to see the stars almost in your face as you sit on the patio or lie in bed. When I'm here, I know I couldn't be anywhere else."

In the master suite, a vintage 1980s Marimekko fabric by Fujiwo Ishimoto hangs on the wall of a closet separating the sleeping area from the bathroom. Furniture includes a custom bed and Peekaboo nesting tables from CB2. Gorman designed the pillow fabrics; the bedspread is a reissued 1950s Marimekko fabric by Finnish designer Maija Isola; Tolomeo sconces are from Artime.

Details

(1) Architect John Hix built all the doors, including the front door shown here, from inexpensive, pressure-treated southern pine. The entry, flanked by a concrete wall painted in a custom blue-gray shade, opens onto the palm-lined terrace and pool.

(2) Homeowner and textile designer Donna Gorman sketches at a desk of polished cast concrete tucked into a corner of the living area, just inside the front door. The Panton chair is from Vitra.

(3) Gorman stands on her daughters' bedroom terrace, overlooking the pool deck. The bedrooms' blank concrete walls are like blinders on the house, focusing views southeastward to the ocean and shielding the outdoor living space from future neighbors.

(4) In the no-nonsense kitchen, Hix used polished cast-concrete countertops, simple plywood-fronted cupboards and open, stainless steel shelving from Bradley, an industrial supplier.

(5) Gorman and Johansson's five-year-old daughter, Eve, cools off on a Paola Lenti lounge on the terrace outside the bedroom she shares with her sister, Lilly. It overlooks the hillsides of Vieques and the Caribbean. The owners wanted both bedrooms to be identical, so there is no "master" versus "guest" bedroom debate.

(6) Hix cast the bathrooms' polished-concrete counters with integral sinks and built-in open plywood shelving for towel storage below. Fixtures are a mix of high and low: mirrors framed in industrial stainless steel from Bradley and sleek Dornbracht faucets. To the right is an open-air shower. ▣

See Resources, last pages.



