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Folly house represents latest stage

BY ROBERT BEHRE

FOLLY BEACH - The new house at 316 E. Arctic Ave. is unlike any other on this island, and that's good or bad, depending on who you ask.

Jason Hart, one of three people involved in its design, says, "It's either kind of a hate or love thing, but at least the fact that it elicits response and makes people think about it is a good thing."

Hart designed the house for his father, landscape architect Jack Hart, who in turn acted as the contractor. Jack Hart gave the job to his son, plus his son's roommates Chris Johns and Aaron Malnarick, while all three were still in school. They since have formed CUBE design + research, which works out of Boston and San Diego (www.cubework.com).

The East Arctic house, which they refer to as the Jetty House, represents a sort of third incarnation of this beach community that prides itself on edginess. The first was the small, almost disposable shacks. The second wave was the larger homes with traditional features - like the shacks, just puffed up. The third phase is about new houses with innovative designs, and there are a growing number of examples.

Jason Hart says the design is meant to maximize the views of the ocean across the street, minimize the cost to heat and cool the house and, of course, meet zoning codes.

He says he drew inspiration from the beach's jetties, now mostly covered by fresh sand. That gave them a linear theme. "That linearity became a way to collapse the view, foreshorten the view kind of like a camera box or a telescope. That's how we came up with the body of the house and the siting of the house between that corridor," he says.

Another nice touch is the detailing underneath. Hart says the ground was treated as a fifth facade, and instead of simply a collection of pilings walled off by lattice, the house's underneath has an attractive place to park, plus a small storage area.

"The facade just wraps under the house," he says. "It's not a quarter of the lot you can't use. With less columns, you have less resistance of your structure. That's another consideration."

Instead of porches or dormers added onto the house, the porch spaces actually are carved out of the shell, a move that Hart hopes will help the house better withstand tropical winds while also increasing its sense of privacy.

Hart says the design wasn't meant to blend into Folly, but there were attempts to make it a good neighbor by saving most all of the lot's existing trees, which shield the house from the rear, and by setting back its upper floor to minimize its apparent height from the beach.

Johns notes that Folly has all sorts of things happening architecturally. "You drive up and down Arctic and you see all sorts of houses and styles and materials. Other people have commented that this house just works in that it's unique. It's contemporary and modern-looking, but it's different in that everything else is different out there."

"It wasn't so much us mimicking a vernacular but more of us responding to the beach itself and making a proposal about what should be there," Malnarick adds.

Inside, the building features a circulation corridor, sweeping views out toward the ocean and smaller glimpses in other directions, usually toward a tree.

Hart says the house wouldn't be possible under Folly codes today - the house was permitted before new codes took effect - because it would be too close to a property line. That's too bad, because property lines on Folly match up with each other instead of being staggered. That means it's harder to build a second row home with glimpses through its beachfront neighbors to the ocean beyond.

Perhaps the city can find a way to provide some flexibility on side setbacks while still ensuring that the size of new homes doesn't get totally out of hand.

Shouldn't everyone be able to get the best possible view?

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