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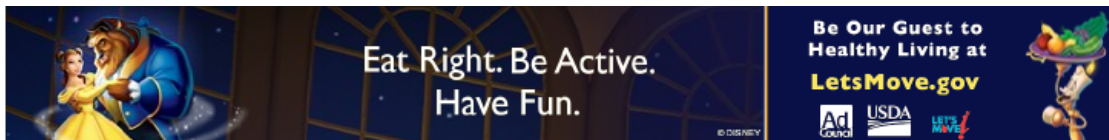
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PROPERTIES

Mexican Beach Residence Makes Anyone Feel at Home



Cathi and Steven House

Just steps from the Sea of Cortez in this remote Baja Peninsula fishing village, Casa Neverending is far from ordinary.

By LIZA FOREMAN
Published: November 3, 2011

CABO PULMO, MEXICO — The sound of the ocean swirls over the white sands — where horses run wild and pelicans swoop above the azure water — and then thunders around Casa Neverending.

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Just steps from the Sea of Cortez in this remote Baja Peninsula fishing village, this house is far from ordinary. It was designed to be completely accessible for a wheelchair, even though the owners,

Patrisha A. Wright, 62, and her partner, Debra Zeyen, 64, do not use one.

Ms. Wright, known by her nickname, "the General," was instrumental in the passing of the Americans with Disabilities Act in 1990 and was a founder of the government affairs office for the Disability Rights Education and Defense Fund. She served as the director of government affairs for the fund until 2005 and still handles special projects for the group. Ms. Zeyen is head of communications for the marine division of Conservation International, a nonprofit organization based in Arlington, Virginia.

"Our main requirement for the design of the home was that the accessibility features needed to be integrated into the design, not an add-on," Ms. Zeyen said. "We wanted a home where you wouldn't notice these features at first blush."

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And that is what they got. The 242-square meter, or 2,600-square-foot, house, completed in 2009, was designed by the architect Cathi House. Mrs. House and her husband, Steven, are the founders of House + House, an architectural firm with offices in San Francisco and San Miguel de Allende, Mexico.

Mrs. House, using the concept of "universal design," in which buildings are intended to accommodate everyone, began at the beginning: a green concrete ramp that snakes above the landscaped cactus garden to connect the house's ground level with the upper floor.

"Everyone prefers the ramp to the stairs," including the local dogs, said Ms. Wright. "Too many buildings and homes look like they have a ramp pasted on the side of the structure. With Cathi's design, we are looking at a piece of art."

The ramp was designed with rest areas, and each of the house's three bedrooms and three bathrooms have a turning radius of about one and half meters, or five feet.

Other features include cabinets that pull out from under the sinks, power outlets that are higher and light switches that are lower than in most homes, and a lift that can be attached to the stone plunge pool out front.

The couple was first drawn to the setting by the clear night skies, the bright stars and the ocean setting. Jacques Cousteau once called the Cabo Pulmo area the "aquarium of the world." In 2002, the couple bought a building plot of about 255 square meters.

The quiet region, which is a little less than 100 kilometers, or 60 miles, from Cabo San Lucas and has only about 100 full-time residents, does not have electrical service or telephones, and the last 15 kilometers into town is over a dirt road. So construction was done mostly by hand, said Mrs. House, and a solar power system and a generator were installed.

The house, made of steel-reinforced concrete, cost about \$480,000 to build. The walls were finished with stucco and painted green, ochre and cranberry red, colors chosen to blend with the surroundings. The floors are polished concrete. The roof is a thatch of palm fronds.

On the ground floor there is an open-plan living room and kitchen, and two bedrooms, each with a bathroom and easy-access shower. The upper level also has a living room, kitchen, bedroom and spa, with sweeping views of the mountains and the ocean. The sound of the waves can be heard in every room.

"The house lets the outside inside and you feel as if you are one with the environment," Ms. Wright said. "For someone who has mobility issues, you can sit of the decks and experience all of it."

A version of this article appeared in print on November 4, 2011, in The International Herald Tribune with the headline: Mexican Beach Residence Makes Anyone Feel at Home.



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