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LUXURY LIVING ON THE GULF COAST

OCTOBER 2006

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Living large in today's luxurious Florida rooms

By ANN O'PHELAN


No longer just a convenient place to park wet beach towels and flip flops, gardening boots and spades, walking shoes and dog leashes, lanais have evolved into some of the most inviting, versatile and luxurious areas of grand homes along the Gulf Coast.

Unlike the small, screen-enclosed spaces that once so typically defined the term, today's expansive "Florida rooms" beautifully blur the lines between indoor and outdoor spaces for entertaining, cooking, dining and simply living the good life.

They're outfitted with comfy couches piled high with colorful pillows, area rugs stylish enough for a fancy foyer and dining suites deserving of fine

china. They boast state-of-the-art lighting, full kitchens and the best appliances and electronics, fireplaces and, of course, swimming pools and spas.

And when it comes to size, "The bigger the better," says Dan Gerner, executive vice president of McGarvey Custom Homes. Because it's become the center of so many activities, the outdoor square footage demands as much attention to luxury and detail as does the interior living space of today's high-end homes, Gerner adds.

Just turn the pages to see how McGarvey Custom Homes, and several other luxury builders and interior designers, interpret their clients' desires to embrace the Gulf Coast's great outdoors. 



Hand-glazed ceramic tiles in cranberry and tangerine add tropical sophistication to the breezy outdoor kitchen/bar in the Fort Myers home of Carol and Jim Rice in Magnolia Point. The original design of the riverfront home was adapted to accommodate the cupola structure that's connected to the main house by a breezeway. "It brings the pool and the house together so nicely," says interior designer Karen Benson. Guests — and there are many, because the Rices love to entertain — seated at the bar can keep their eye on a flat-screen TV that's mounted high on the wall to the left of the gas grill.

Photo by GARTH FRANCIS