

DESIGN



Photos by Braun Photography

Sandy and Dr. J.J. Diaz's new Rockport home sits on a channel that feeds into Copano Bay. Rainey Richardson Interiors managed the project.

HOME

After Harvey devastation, Rockport house rises again

By Diane Cowen
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When Dr. J.J. and Sandy Diaz walked into their newly finished home near Copano Bay earlier this month, it was the first time in months they'd been able to smile during a visit to Rockport, a coastal community devastated by Hurricane Harvey.

They rode the elevator to the first floor of their home on stilts, and their builder and interior designer — waiting outside — could hear them giggle and scream with delight each time they entered a new room.

The San Antonio couple's vacation home was destroyed by the 2017 hurricane, which turned it into a pile of rubble. In fact, all they could salvage from it were a plant that had been on a porch — they found it in the kitchen sink — and a chubby, blinged-out mermaid statue pinned under a portion of the roof.

"This is not a party house, it's



The living room features white sofas with blue and orange accents, all with a coastal feel. The home looks out on Copano Bay.

a family house," said Sandy, 72, as she looked around the big open space on the main floor of the home in the Holiday Beach neighborhood. It includes a roomy kitchen, dining area, bar and a living room with a wide view of other homes plus plenty of still-empty lots.

Thousands of people were left homeless by the storm — a Category 4 hurricane when it hit Rockport — and the city still is filled with homes and buildings under repair.

Sandy and her husband, 89-year-old J.J., a longtime family physician in San Antonio, have been inseparable since 1996 and married since 2004. They bought their Rockport home in 2014 as a weekend place where they could relax, Sandy could fish and kayak and their children and grandchildren could visit.

Rockport was a city Sandy already loved, having brought her daughter, Christy Stewart,

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ZEST



Photos by Braun Photography

The rustic shiplap on this dining-room wall has a surprise: It's peel-and-stick paneling that's easily applied. Colors in the upholstery on the captain's chairs created the color palette that runs through the entire home.

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here when she was growing up, the two fishing for hours at a time as often as they could. Sandy, a native of Cincinnati, moved to Texas when she was 27, a single mom who wanted to raise her daughter in a healthier environment.

After the August 2017 storm, Sandy rushed to Rockport and could barely believe what she saw. She warned her husband how bad it was, but he wasn't prepared for the damage he saw all through the town, let alone to his own home. When they'd returned to their home, the retired doctor told his wife that he didn't want to go back until a new home was built.

Through Stewart, a Houston resident and Clear Creek ISD physical education teacher, and daughter-in-law Claudia Friedman, they connected with one of Friedman's childhood friends, Houston interior designer Rainey Richardson of Rainey Richardson Interiors. She, in turn, brought in Victoria builder Tony Prokop of Prokop Custom Homes, whom she'd worked with on homes in Port O'Connor and Rockport.

Richardson, whose interior design firm is based in her Off White Furniture showroom at the Houston Design Center, has been working on homes in Rockport and Port O'Connor since 2015, when she worked on another home that was on the area's Parade of Homes. When visitors "oohed" and "aahed" over its furnishings, its owner sent them to Richardson, and every job there has led to more projects.

"What matters is food, family, friends and fishing. People don't dress up or wear makeup," Richardson said of the area's laid-back vibe. "It's a very interesting lifestyle, a simpler lifestyle, and I've learned a lot about that in the past few years."

The Diazes made a trip to Rockport to sign a contract with the builder and designer, but aside from that turned over control to Richardson and Prokop.

That's not to say that Sandy Diaz abandoned Rockport completely. In the months after Harvey, she visited often, bringing food, medical packs, tools and even gifts. Around Christmas-time, she found out that 40 teenagers were living with their families in tents and Santa might not make much of an appearance. She bought hoodie sweatshirts and makeup, and off she went for a holiday surprise.

"Before the storm, we knew the people next to us and across from us, and that was about it," Sandy said. "I know so many people at Holiday Beach now. People are still helping each other; so many people still are supporting the community."

For her new home, Sandy told Richardson what her favorite colors were and that she wanted the home to be low maintenance and less traditional than their



Courtesy of Christy Stewart

Hurricane Harvey leveled the Diazes' home when it made landfall at Rockport in August 2017.

'I'm not going to have to call the girls and say, "When are we going to see you?" They're already getting their calendar out, giving me dates.'

Sandy Diaz

primary home in San Antonio's Hunter's Creek neighborhood. The Diazes had decided to put that home on the market and shift to Rockport as their primary one.

First, the new home had to be designed, built and furnished. Then it opened to visitors on the Crossroads Builders Association Parade of Homes this month, when hundreds of people walked through after it won five big awards: Best Craftsmanship, Best Floor Plan, Best Furnishings, Best Interior Design and Finishings and Best Kitchen.

Richardson found fabric in a lively floral pattern with cool greens, blues and oranges. It ended up only in captain's chairs in the dining room and decorative pillows on living-room sofas, but it set the color palette



Stewart, from left, Sandy and J.J. Diaz, and Friedman visit in what is now the Diazes' primary home.

for the entire home.

That meant ceramic tile that formed a starburst pattern brought a fresh touch to the nearby kitchen backsplash, and the island was painted a soft coastal blue. Barstool seats are covered in pretty blue upholstery, and extra seating comes in smaller bright-orange-painted metal stools tucked into corners. In the living room, a pair of white sofas are joined with blue swivel chairs – a functional style Richardson said she uses on nearly every project – and a show-stopping coffee table made of concrete that looks like a slice from an acacia tree.



Daughter Christy Stewart and daughter-in-law Claudia Friedman have claimed this guest bedroom as theirs.

humid climate.)

The kitchen counters are Sil-estone, so no cleanup worries, and the wrap-around porch is made of long-lasting Trex composite decking. To stand up to the sun and any stains, the furniture is made with high-performance fabrics.

The fun corner of the main room is a bar, with a beverage refrigerator, a fancy coffeemaker, shuffleboard table and a couple of comfortable swivel chairs in front of a big TV.

At the back entrance of the home is a mudroom and powder bathroom that have their own cute accents, one being an Airstream trailer door hung barn-door style in front of the bathroom.

Original art is hung throughout the home, much of it painted by J.J., who has long dabbled in watercolor and oil painting. Other pieces are by Clementina Rivera, Erin Shaw and Olivia Moore.

But fishing is Sandy's favorite hobby, and a new fishing pole that her daughter gave her for Mother's Day gives her a fresh start now that she's back on the water. And she expects Stewart will join her once in a while.

"I'm not going to have to call the girls and say, 'When are we going to see you?'" Sandy said. "They're already getting their calendar out, giving me dates. My husband loves people and the stimulation of conversation with young people. We're not two old people sitting on the couch eating our little meals thinking about when we're going to go to bed."

In fact, the family has dubbed the home the Topsy Turtle, and there is, of course, a funny story that goes along with it.

"Turtle Bay is right behind us, and we support turtle conservation, so that's the turtle part," said the good-natured Sandy as she described a party on their waterfront deck. "One time we had a party and I had two margaritas – I'm really not much of a drinker and they were strong. It's a big joke in the family because Christy had just caught a sting-ray, and I fell into the water. I don't know how I climbed out of there but I did. I'm the only one who's ever fallen over."



The kitchen backsplash is a small space, but it's a showstopper with patterned ceramic tile. The large island is meant to accommodate the Diazes and guests.

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