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A Day at the Beach

A SEASIDE HOME IN SOUTH CAROLINA GETS THE ENCORE TREATMENT

Alas, it's impossible to have command over the weather or the tides, but inside a 7,000-square-foot South Carolina beach and carriage house compound, control is both "smart" and precise, yet easy to operate for the family living there.

The three-and-a-half story main house harkens back to the tastefully understated beach homes of New England, replete with handcrafted millwork assembled on-site. HVAC and garages are located underneath the home, the first and second floors contain living areas and bedrooms, and the third floor, with bedrooms/offices, also has a loft perfect

for ocean gazing. The adjacent carriage house has additional guestrooms, kitchen, and sitting room. The houses were designed by Michael Tych, Tych & Walker Architects, of Litchfield, South Carolina.

Enticing as the beachfront setting may be, a \$525,000 (to date) centralized whole-home solution for audio and video with several subsystems rivals the views. Designed, programmed, and installed by Encore Technology and Design, of Columbia, South Carolina, this Seaside project, as it's called, is filled with "smart home" features enabling a high degree of integration and automation

of the large number of subsystems that individually would be difficult to manage, including HVAC and lighting. The project also called for plug-and-play capability to connect consumer electronic devices, and the ability to access, view, and manage the home and its systems remotely.

IN TOUCH

Winner of Crestron's 2007 Ultimate Connected Home Award, Seaside's subsystems, powered by a Crestron Pro 2 Dual Bus Control System, include HVAC, radiant flooring, Crestron whole-home

lighting, security, occupancy sensors, a surveillance system, intercom, a weather station, pool and spa control, motorized TV lifts, and 14 zones of audio. A 10.6-inch wireless touch panel in the kitchen and a six-inch touch panel in the master suite provide whole-home control.

At the front entrance, second floor living room, and guest bedroom suite 3.6-inch in-wall touch panels provide limited whole-house control and local control. Seven handheld ML-600 remotes and a waterproof WPR-48 remote on the patio provide local control of entertainment and lighting. The system is accessible remotely via a Crestron XPanel. One-hundred and sixty-five Crestron lighting circuits use Crestron Cameo keypads. The elegant screw-less faceplates are from Lutron. Lighting control for the carriage house is on the Crestron system, while its AV is a stand-alone system.

"We made sure every room had the same ML600 remote," said Ed Marshall, Encore's vice president of marketing. "We're really focused on appropriately applying interfaces. We don't like putting in a touch panel in a simple media room to control TV; we feel, based on years of customer responses, that's not appropriate use. If you have to use two hands to channel surf, it's not a good experience for the client. We typically use a very simple remote and make it consistent. When we do touch panels we size them for intended use. There are 3.6-inch touch panels, in the main entrance, guest master suite, and upstairs living room, for zone control, not whole-house control. The mas-

ter bedroom has a larger panel by the nightstand to control everything."

UNDER CONSTRUCTION

Seaside was designed for the family of a new client, living in Virginia, who discovered Encore via the company's Crestron relationship, said Marshall, who works from a virtual office in Charleston, South Carolina. With about 21 employees, Encore is based in Columbia and maintains a satellite office in Greenville, South Carolina. Founded in 1998 by company president Matt Carter, Encore focuses on the high-end residential market all over South Carolina and in resort areas such as the mountain and coastal areas of North and South Carolina as well as Atlanta. Coastal projects represent 60 percent of the company's business.

"The beach home was under construction, already framed, when we became involved," Marshall said. "The client is tech savvy and stated that he sees technology as an enabler. This is a large home, and he wanted to be able to manage the technology without spending all his time doing it. He wanted amenities that would add value down the road, but he hadn't put in this level of automation and features in his main residence, so he was a little wary."

Initially, Encore began Seaside with its discovery process, a kind of first pass to ascertain how the client envisioned using the home. "We learned early on from our architectural partners that they were conducting lifestyle interviews to detail what their clients wanted and how clients choose to



Encore Technology's management team, VP of operations Chris Mobbs, founder and president Matt Carter, and VP of marketing Ed Marshall.

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live their lives in order to tailor architectural designs to those needs,” Carter said. “We found that although we have standards that we embedded into Encore’s process and systems—our unique signature—we share the same paradigms, and realize that each client has unique needs and ways of learning. We decided to make our process a little more personal by going deeper into how they will live in the home and how they think and process information. That discussion often helps the client make better decisions about other facets of the home; some have changed pool and room configurations as a result. A custom home is an organic process, and when you ask the hard questions the client has to take ownership. This process helps to bridge our client relationships.”

It’s imperative in our industry that either a firm **WORKS WELL WITH A DESIGNER** or that the staff has a **DESIGN MINDSET**

—Matt Carter, President, Encore

The process also honed in on prioritizing according to budget, Marshall noted. “Each of our projects has a designer and a team of techs, and we try to get to the value of what we’re doing early on, especially when a client hasn’t had these kinds of systems before. At Seaside, we put in a subset of the fully envisioned system that allowed for expansion and growth. As the client saw the value of what we were doing—such as the motorized lift in the living room rotating nearly 360 degrees—he wanted a number of things to be added back including audio, lighting control, and a motorized lift in the carriage house.”

WARMING UP

As the project took shape, the client decided to integrate the weather station as well as the radiant flooring, both new subsystems for Encore as well. When the temperature drops below 40 degrees, or, at the client’s preference, the flooring warms up.

“The challenge here was that the mechanicals were not developed in the client’s radiant flooring system when we came into the project and no one was clear as to how the warm board should interface with HVAC,” Carter explained. “We gave the



Seven handheld ML-600 remotes and a waterproof WPR-48 remote on the patio provide local control of entertainment and lighting. The system is accessible remotely via a Crestron XPanel.

specs to the mechanical engineer, and we integrated the Crestron temp sensors and built them into baseboards. We had to evaluate solutions with all parties to determine what the considerations were that we should be looking at in creating a properly engineered solution. If the system is on all the time, it can dry out the expensive wood in winter, so we had to ensure that we had humidifiers and dehumidifiers. There needed to be a balance be-

tween a warm board and the HVAC that maintains steady humidity.”

Because the home had been framed when Encore came on the scene, the infrastructure, with only one designated equipment area, was insufficient for the scope of the project. The solution was to build out four separate mini hubs, three in the main house and one in the carriage house, which has its own surround sound processor and controller.

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(Top) As the client saw the value of what Encore Technology installed initially—such as a motorized lift in the living room rotating nearly 360 degrees—he wanted a number of things added, such as audio, lighting control, and a motorized lift in the carriage house. (Bottom) The Seaside project is filled with “smart home” features enabling a high degree of integration and automation of the large number of subsystems that individually would be difficult to manage, including HVAC and lighting.

THE PERFECT FEATURES

In addition to the Crestron system, Seaside features Runco video displays, James Loudspeaker audio gear, and B & W in-ceiling speakers. “We have a philosophy: 99 percent reliable is 100 percent unreliable,” Marshall said. “The one time a remote doesn’t work, the whole system can be perceived as faulty. We look to partner with manufacturers who are reliable and have high-performing equipment and Crestron and Runco are two of those. If something goes wrong, we know the manufac-

tures will stand behind us. We love James; they have some innovative products such as the Power Pipe subwoofer with a snorkel. All you see is the toe kick, just like a central vacuum cleaner sweeper vent. B & W are our bread-and-butter for in-ceiling speakers and or clients love them.”

One of the Seaside client’s favorite lifestyle features is in the master bath where occupancy sensors are integrated to automate lighting as you enter the room. “We call it ‘light without thought,’” Marshall said. “Some of these smaller features have the biggest

impact. Once you get into these features you find out what’s important to various clients, and convenience is a big thing at Seaside. The client likes the fact that he doesn’t have to go to the wall to flip a switch. Right now it’s only installed in the pantry and master bath but we may extend it to other areas for phase two. We may also integrate photo voltaic solar panels into the Crestron system. We will be upgrading some of the speakers and are looking at going to higher-end models of speakers in a few areas.”

Outside, a series of six B & W speakers are mounted under benches attached to a railing around the perimeter of the pool. A waterproof Crestron remote is used for control of audio, lights, and spa. “Many of our projects are second homes, and the trend is toward these lifestyle features and away from dedicated theaters, except for movie buffs,” Marshall said. “Some of our anecdotal feedback is that clients hadn’t utilized the dedicated space and would rather have media/multifunction room beyond watching sports or a movie. We’re hearing the same from architects and builders. The very high-end homes are moving to media/pool rooms or bar/media rooms and we will be designing one for Seaside.”

BEAUTY IN THE DETAILS

Aesthetics and attention to detail are still mainstays of high-end projects such as Seaside, said Carter. “We looked at the wainscoting, ceiling height, and stain finishes in the house and realized we could integrate the keypads if the wainscoting was raised. We could get creative. The client wanted the house to retain its period feel and the high-tech didn’t fit with it. We thought about how to design a better end product and maintain the feel. The whole team makes these decisions on how to tailor it. We had the builder make samples, with the woodworker, of the wainscoting, and from that we were able to come up with a style that allowed the keypads to blend in; you have to pay attention to find the keypads.

“It’s imperative in our industry that either a firm works well with a designer or that the staff has a design mindset,” he said. “There’s a difference between a designer who’s an engineer and a designer who is trained to look at the aesthetic as well. We train and work hard to get our designers up to that level. Our job is not to slap up a keypad. Had that happened, this elegant solution would not have been provided, and the sum of all the attention paid would have been a less than exceptional result.”

Karen Mitchell is a freelance writer living in Boulder, Colorado.