

## **Furnishing our new home**

Having reserved our building plot in Florida last January 2005, my husband Mike and I spent the summer at home in the UK in warm anticipation of sunshine and outdoor living in our new golf and country club community. Our home would be completed towards the year end and my thoughts soon turned to the challenge of furnishing a brand new home from many thousands of miles away. I began to realise just how difficult this would be – where should I buy furniture - should I make the twelve hour journey to walk local showrooms and if so, how would I find them – what would it all cost - what colour schemes would look right – exactly how much furniture did I need – what sizes would fit, what were delivery waiting times – where would I stay until our house was finished – how long from order to delivery – how did I find someone to hang wallpaper, what about choosing and fitting carpet - this was fast become a logistical nightmare. I needed help!

Of course I knew there were a number of shopping mall off-the-shelf solutions but a few telephone calls had me realising that this would be a ‘one size fits all’ approach and the result simply would not be of the right quality for our beautiful new home. So, I needed an interior designer, a professional with creative flair and the ability to listen and interpret my vision into a disciplined project and manage this to a completion date with a maximum budget. Aside from furnishings we needed all kitchen equipment, linen and the dozens of household items I would have no time to buy - a total ‘turnkey’ solution. How did I find such a person? I searched the internet and eventually shortlisted six or seven and sent a specification of what I wanted, the timeframe, my budget, and asked them to respond explaining the process they would use. I was interested in how quickly I received responses, how closely they had understood the brief, how they explained the process and what ideas they had.

To my surprise, most took at least two weeks even to reply some did not respond at all, and disappointingly most sent me a general rather than personal response. The response which stood out by miles was from Shelly Riehl David, who made it absolutely clear that her intention would be to get into my mind and make turning my personal vision into reality. She did this initially over the telephone, discussing my taste in colours, and textures and style of furniture and then by email where I gave my reaction to specific furniture websites she asked me to look at. When she was satisfied she had built up a good feel for what I wanted she put together a ‘story board’ for each room in the house and sent these to me by email attachments. Each story board depicted the all the furniture proposed for that room, light fittings, pictures, rugs, ornaments, etc. set against the background colour of the appropriate wall fabric. This worked extremely well and was an ingenious approach to overcoming the thousands of miles between us.

In addition to the furnishing, Shelly’s husband Carl put forward a proposal to procure and install the entire TV, music, telephone and computer systems. It quickly became clear that his expertise in all these areas is second to none and with our specific leisure and business needs in mind he helped us make selections for all these items after a number of telephone and email consultations.

After several rounds of 'fine tuning' emails and an item by item costing for the entire house contents, we agreed everything and I gave the go ahead with a three month completion date early in December. Despite Hurricane Wilma's best efforts to throw us off track, and Thanksgiving falling in the middle, not only did Shelly and Carl complete the project right on time, they came in precisely on budget which was a terrific achievement given its scale and complexity.

Mike and I were pretty nervous on the flight to Miami to see our new home and we had agreed that Shelly and Carl would be there waiting for us. There were attacks of nerves – what if we had made a huge mistake and were in for a big disappointment? However we needn't have worried! Walking through the front door was an amazing experience – the entire house was absolutely sensational – a wonderful blend of rich colours and textures that achieved all my objectives of combining good taste with comfort and practical living. The furniture all looked fantastic. Absolutely everything was there, a completely functional kitchen, immaculately made beds, everything for immediate living right down to paper clips in the study. The music system was operational throughout the house and our new laptop up and running. As far as I'm concerned, Carl is right up there with Bill Gates in the wireless world.

Shelly and Carl work as a perfect team, combining design flair with technical knowledge and business sense and as their clients we were their number one concern throughout this project. I cannot recommend them highly enough