



# Kawaihae Spirit

Homeowners who lost their home in 2006 earthquake rebuild their dreams

**By Kristina Anderson**  
Photography by Giselle Thompson

The day dawned crystal clear on Sunday morning, Oct. 15, 2006. Nonnie Husa and her daughter Lee were asleep in their newly completed house at Kohala Waterfront. Lee had just arrived from Oregon the night before to join her mom. They planned to celebrate her late father's birthday on Sunday; he had passed away earlier that year, never able to see the completion of his family's dream home.

With the furniture already moved in and everything in place, all was well when Lee and Nonnie retired for the evening. At 7:07 a.m. the next morning, disaster struck.

Lee recounts the events of the terrifying morning as the house literally fell to pieces around them and they barely escaped with their lives.

"I had just been up early walking around to see what landscaping looked like in the light of day. I was so excited; it felt just like Christmas morning. Then I went back to bed and the quake hit in an instant. Beams were falling and dishes were flying. You could see daylight through the ceiling. All the walls ▶



Overlooking the Kohala waterfront, the Husa's extraordinary Kawaihae home features a staggered, terraced lanai that showcases commanding views of the Kohala coastline and Maui. Travertine tile graces the home inside and out.



A wooden bridge leads from the garage to the entry, stretching across a tropical garden landscaped by Jimmy Lawrence of Hawi.

Photo by Kristina Anderson



Nonnie Husa (left) with her daughter Lee.

*"The views from this house are so beautiful, we are compelled to share it with friends and family."*  
— Lee Husa



On the day of the 6.7-magnitude earthquake in 2006, some of the beams in the home actually collapsed, exposing daylight through the roof. Today, the bamboo-paneled ceiling in the great room brings an open and airy feeling to the premises.

were cracked and the kitchen island moved four inches. The entire lanai and Mom's bedroom were tilted at an angle. It seemed like there wasn't a space in the house that wasn't damaged; every plumb line was broken."

Kohala Waterfront, as it turns out, sat in direct proximity to the underwater epicenter of the magnitude 6.7 earthquake. In short, the brand new house — one of the most damaged structures on the Big Island — was totally destroyed in about 30 seconds, taking with it the lifelong dreams of a hard-working family.

Fast forward to 2010. The beautiful residence, with its breathtaking 180-degree, panoramic views, is now completely rebuilt. The furnishings, which were quickly moved out and put into storage before the dwelling got red-tagged (condemned), have been moved back in.

Today, Nonnie, Lee, her brother John and their many guests can once again enjoy the fantastic sights that continuously entertain them from the lanai, which is artfully terraced into the hillside to maximize the view.

"We love whatever we see on the water," observes Lee. "Whether it's the tugboats pulling barges into Kawaihae Harbor, or groups of humpback whales cruising by, it's all wonderful."

Locally designed by Rick Sifuentes, the three-bedroom home is oriented on the lot to take best advantage of the sweeping views, yet it's close enough to the water's edge to hear the crashing surf. Characterized by Nonnie as a "small house that lives big," the home features open truss ceilings paneled in bamboo, antique doors from Indonesia, walls covered in grass cloth and luxurious travertine flooring throughout.

With interior design by Portland-based Georgene Bernards, décor embodies contemporary Indonesian tranquility that reflects the owners' personal warmth.

Local craftspeople contributed their unique magic. Glass artisan Gary Wagner, of Waimea, etched the entryway doors and bathroom glass windows, all of which had amazingly survived the quake. Landscape designer Jimmy Lawrence, of Hawi, conceived the edible landscaping that includes avocados, pumpkins, banana, mango, papaya and herbs.

Perhaps one of the most sentimental of the family's quake casualties was their favorite antique tansu chest, which was "absolutely demolished and in pieces," according to Nonnie. Fortunately, ►



The art piece on the wall was made by Tom Penny of Waimea, who arranged pieces of bamboo he obtained from Bamboo Too in Kailua-Kona.

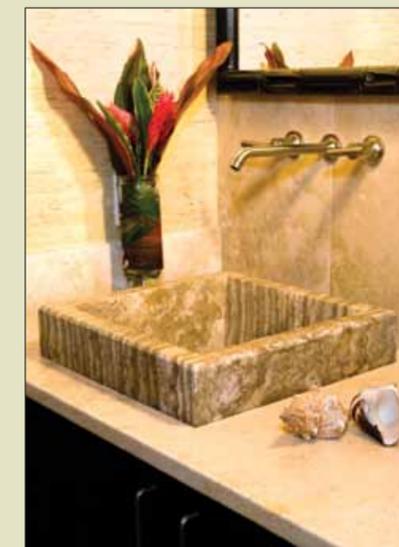


During the quake, the kitchen island actually lifted up and moved four inches. "The home was so damaged, we thought it would have to be destroyed before it could be rebuilt — but for the genius of our structural engineers," said Lee Hussa, homeowner.

*"It's a place of peace and tranquility, a place of relaxing beauty." — Nonnie Hussa*



Each of the three rooms in the house opens up to semi-private lanais tiled in travertine.



A square, travertine vessel sink from Bella Pietra imparts crisp simplicity in the guest bathroom.