



(Above): The Thompson's star-shaped home, under construction in 2003.

(Right): Four different concentric stars can be seen in the ceiling, which is made of birch and includes a skylight. Ohia posts offer structural support and are enhanced by backdrops of copper sheeting to create warmth.



Photos by Charla Thompson



Lucky Star

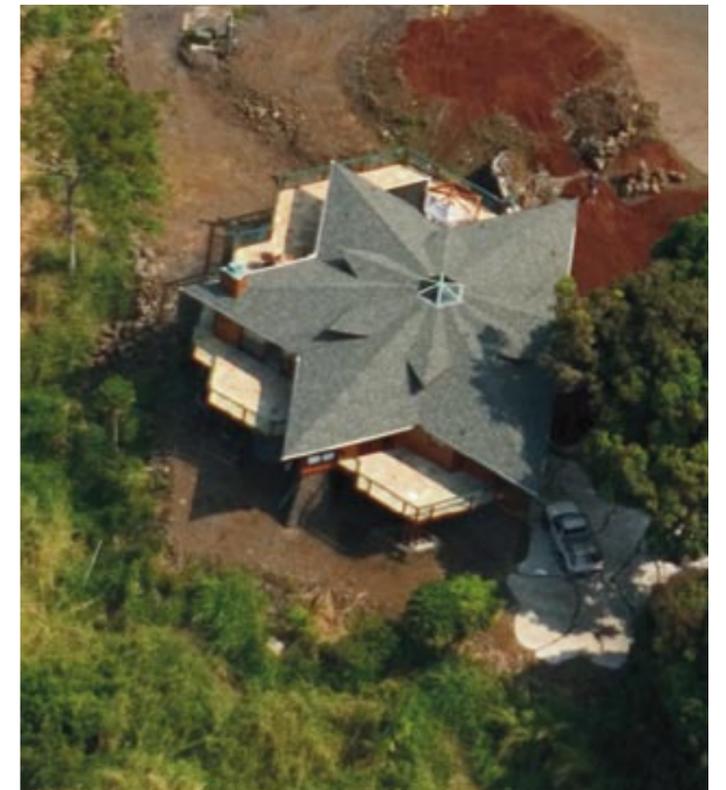
How serendipity, flexibility and sheer determination paid off for these first-time homeowner/builders

By Kristina Anderson

“We walk out on our lanai and we still pinch ourselves,” says Charla Thompson with the excitement of a kid on Christmas morning. “We can’t believe we live here — And, it’s the first house we’ve ever owned or built!”

When Charla and Rick Thompson first conceived their Holualoa home, they figured all they could afford was a basic “box.” Rick recalls their first set of drawings from a local draftsman as totally unsuitable, at which point they went off-island to Palm Desert, Calif., to visit architect Skip Goodell. He proposed a unique, symmetrical structure comprised of concentric stars. From every room but one, the ocean would be visible.

Yes, it was interesting and different, but this plan concerned the Thompsens. The elaborate truss support



“Hale Hoku” as seen from above. The star-shaped home in Holualoa offers ocean views from practically every room in the house.



Quartzite tile throughout complements the rainforest granite fireplace in the living room. Sliding pocket doors made of merbau wood were crafted in Indonesia, echoing the look of mahogany. Recessed uplighting showcases the beauty of the ohia posts.

(Right): The kitchen countertop is made of vein-cut Golden Imperial travertine with a chiseled edge. The surface reminds Charla of petrified wood. A pass-through window offers stunning views of the Kona Coast.



system and five star-shaped design was very difficult to picture. And they worried: Could they fit all their furniture? Would it be functional? Would it turn out to be one of those novelty-shaped homes that was hard to sell later? Would it exceed their budget? Would the proper materials even be available in Kona? And probably most importantly, could they find competent workers here during the height of the West Hawaii building boom?

We're happy to report, that with a little luck, lots of research, and some willpower, the results were more than positive. The Thompson's home is a showpiece with more star quality than they could have ever imagined.

The star-shaped house is at once fascinating. Most every room in the home comes to a point, creating an entrancing, sharp-corner window perspective akin to bay windows. The Thompsons learned later that they had used excellent feng shui principles throughout, without even knowing it. Another advantage: the star-shaped house creates plenty of privacy for every member of the family including daughters Heather and Giselle.

Sometimes, the need to save money necessitated invention. For example, rather than pay for expensive finished fabrication of the travertine kitchen countertops, the Thompsons left the chiseled edge natural, something they noticed living in Europe that gives it character and interest. "We could tell you that was by design, but it was really to save money," admits Charla.

In many cases, when it came to details on their home,

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the Thompsons, who both have a strong artistic sensibility, did not want to take no for an answer. “We took risks on a lot of things, and we also did things that people told us could not be done,” says Rick. “We were not sure at all it would work out, but were happily surprised in almost every case.”

The challenges of owner/builder on such a complex project were so extreme that Rick vows he’d never do it again. However, he concedes that it gave the Thompsons artistic advantages and the ability to change their minds if need be. After buying the half-acre lot in 2001, the Thompsons started construction in June 2003, finally finishing the major work in 2005. “We made a lot of mistakes,” he says. “We had no experience...none at all, in building a house. We’re photographers!”

“I think one of the biggest lessons we learned was that if you shop around, there are lots of really nice materials available that look like a million bucks but don’t have to cost a fortune,” adds Charla, a professional wedding photographer. “For instance, we used ironwood for the flooring, which kind of went against conventional ideas because people implied it was less desirable than other woods available. But we found a guy in Hilo who milled it for us. And we love the result!”

According to Rick, simply finding qualified construction workers was a major issue. After running ads in the paper, he found that most of the people who answered the ad were not qualified and didn’t work out for other reasons. But



Daughter Heather’s bedroom is one of the points of the star. Behind the bed, a triangular window offers space to put plants. Ironwood flooring was obtained direct from a Big Island mill. The wood is extremely hard and features varied tones that resemble mango, koa and ohia.



(Right): Charla designed the paneling for the front door and the wooden screens. Her designs were then handcrafted into finished pieces by artisans in Indonesia.

The master bathroom features a luxurious whirlpool bath set in front of one of the points of the star. Blue-hued quartzite flooring evokes a spa-like feeling, while sconces installed on the mirrors seem to float in mid air. Glass vessel sinks are illuminated with rope lighting.



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one who did came in the unlikely form of Doug Gregory, a yachtsman in town temporarily after sailing the South Pacific for three years. It turned out he was a master craftsman with a degree in interior design, who understood the unique demands of island living and had an appreciation for natural materials. Doug was instrumental in creating many of the structural and finishing touches, such as the ohia carpentry, that make the Thompson house so beautiful.

“We’re very lucky and very grateful that Doug came along when we needed him,” says Charla. “I can’t imagine what we would have done if he hadn’t.”

One of the most impressive rooms in the house is the master bath, which might rival the finest hotel spa room. Sconces attached to the mirrors seem to float in space. Rope lighting under glass basins cast a soft, serene glow.

Downstairs, a full studio complete with bath and kitchen offers the couple space for darkroom, office, tabletop studio and plenty of storage for a total of 4,556 square feet of living area in the home, including the lanais.

Although it took a lot of work and creativity to build their dream home, their experience serves as true inspiration to the beginner.

“Don’t be afraid to dream,” says Charla, in summary. “Don’t be afraid to do what others tell you is impossible. Ours is a real rags-to-riches story. We went from living in government housing to 800-square-foot apartments on Hamburger Hill, to this. With enough tenacity and determination, leadtime and flexibility, you, too, can have the house of your dreams!” **AH**