

## Breathing Room

*Once a simple pass-through, the breezeway is being reimagined as a place to live, shaped by Southwest Florida's gravitational draw outdoors.*

Good design takes cues from its setting. Great design uses the setting as a brief, creating spaces that live in harmony with the surrounding environment. Recently, we've noticed architects transforming the traditional breezeway—a simple covered pass-through designed for natural ventilation—into something far more substantial: a fully functioning outdoor room. We're calling this evolution the breezeway lanai.

Before air conditioning became standard in Florida, the breezeway was an essential part of regional architecture, connecting two parts of a home while encouraging airflow. Now, designers are expanding its purpose, maximizing form and function with stylish features and innovative materials. These covered, open-ended spaces connect entry points, separate private quarters and encourage longer stretches of alfresco living. "It's not the heart of a home, but it's maybe the lung of a home," says Michaela Henning of locally based Hlevel Architecture.

Michaela and her fellow architect husband, Brandt, incorporated a breezeway lanai into their own Naples home, designed to catch cross-breezes and built with low-impact materials without sacrificing polish or practicality. "We wanted to practice what we keep preaching," Michaela says. They designed the breezeway as an outdoor room, complete with an outdoor kitchen, seating,



Matthew Millman



“It’s not the heart of a home, but it’s maybe the lung of a home.” —Michaela Henning, Hlevel Architecture

In their personal home, Hlevel Architecture's Brandt and Michaela Henning added a breezeway lanai to separate their suite from the rest of the house. Opening spread: San Francisco's Walker Warner centered the home on an open-air great room.

a television and room to linger. Positioned between the primary suite and main house—where a kitchen, home offices and kids' rooms cluster—the breezeway gives the couple privacy while linking the wild preserve out back to the manicured front lawn.

Material choices in the home favor durability and reuse. The lanai's ceiling is formed from warm-toned, moisture-resistant PVC panels that meet green building standards, while the floor uses locally sourced sand-set shell stone pavers. Walls rely on mold-resistant insulated blocks, left exposed to keep the home's construction legible. Retractable screens keep bugs out, and hurricane shutters close the lanai when storms threaten.

Sarasota-based DWY Landscape Architects' David Young's designs align conceptually with breezeways, optimizing access and views with open-ended outdoor rooms, often including water features and lush plantings. "They're designed not just to move air, but to frame views, manage microclimates, choreograph arrival, and create moments of compression and release," he says.

MHK Architecture, known for prioritizing Old Florida principles, often employs the feature in larger properties to connect guest homes or garages to the main structure. "It is very rooted to the area that you're designing—the climate," MHK's residential director Maureen Minker says. "So it ends up being kind of a cultural thing, too. Our breezeways are going to look a lot different than, say, the ones in Asia."

Island design influences our subtropical region. Max Strang of Miami-based Strang Design crafted two breezy lanais in a stunning 10,000-square-foot estate on Elbow Cay island in the Bahamas. On the main floor, he designed an alfresco living room



Dan Cutrona

In this home by Miami's Strang Design, Max Strang opted for an all-encompassing alfresco entertainment area that performs as a dining space and a built-in cabana for the pool.



and kitchen. “It’s the barbecue area; it’s the cabana for the pool,” Max says. “It acts in all of those different capacities.” Upstairs, sunshine filters through an outdoor rec room with a shuffleboard table set up for casual play.

In a Hawaii residence, architect Greg Warner of San Francisco’s Walker Warner turned the lanai into the main living area. The

kitchen and dining spaces occupy a semi-enclosed area with strategic openings, while the living room remains open on both ends to catch the breeze. Sliding glass doors connect to additional interior rooms. With communal life concentrated in this open-air core, the design maximizes ocean views. “That constant visual connection defines the experience,” Greg says.” [▲](#)