

Aloha HOLIDAY

On Kauai, a private garden retreat is the setting for a seasonal celebration — Hawaiian-style

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Above: Keiki (children) perch on pillows (featuring Kravet's outdoor fabric, Diamond Rafia) to string fragrant leis incorporating gardenias, orchids and *Plumeria* flowers to give to guests attending a party. Says designer Andrea Lecusay, "The grassy knolls here and there were designed so you can sit on pillows made for the lawn and 'talk story' and make leis." In today's parlance, "talk story" means "hanging out" or "shooting the breeze" with friends and loved ones. **Right:** At the Kauai home of Pixar filmmaker Lee Unkrich and his family, an ipe wood boardwalk, along with an elaborate lighting system, provides safe passage from the garden to the cliff overlooking exclusive Secret Beach on the north coast of Kauai.





Above: To celebrate the completion of the three-year project, interior and garden designer Andrea Lecusay (pictured second from left) and builder James Antony threw a holiday-season party. Early arrivals traversed the boardwalk to hang out on a dining platform at the edge of a bluff. The chairs, by Lecusay, are made of recycled boat siding and rice-plow handles. **Opposite, above:** The teak poolside furnishings were imported from Bali, as were the urns, used here as water gardens. **Opposite, below:** The balé, an open-air Balinese pavilion traditionally used for lounging, is a central design element to the pool area. “The family has their *pupus* [appetizers] and drinks here. They love this space,” says Lecusay. A keypad on the bollard beneath the light fixture allows the family to select one of many wireless lighting “scenes” to fit any mood — day or night.

gathering family, friends and good food is an American holiday tradition. For Lee Unkrich, wife Laura Century and their three children, the holidays also mean hitting the pause button and traveling from Northern California’s Marin County to their vacation home on Kauai, the northernmost of Hawaii’s string of exotic islands.

At *Hale Ho’omalū* (“a place of refuge”), the Unkrich family enjoys a slower pace. The property’s open-air architecture and lushly planted grounds are more alluring than any exotic retreat. “Our friends call it the nicest ‘resort’ they’ve been to,” says Lee, a Pixar Animation Studios veteran whose feature-length film (as director) *Toy Story 3* will be released in June 2010 (he also co-directed *Finding Nemo* and *Monsters, Inc.*). “The garden is our lush, idyllic vision of a Hawaiian jungle.”

Before even reaching the residence, a series of garden elements unfolds. A trio of foxtail palms rises behind a teak seating area near the front door, while a stone Buddha sits atop a meticulous mound of green mondo grass and agapanthus. Gentle splashing sounds beckon the visitor to turn a corner and discover the partially hidden water garden. A pathway lined with orchid-laden palms leads away from the house, through an opening in the hedge, to the shaded and decadent pool pavilion, where towering twin tikis stand sentry. At *Hale Ho’omalū*, each garden feature leads to another, allowing one to relish and discover without fear of missing out on any single detail.

Laura and Lee discovered the two-acre property and its Greene and Greene-inspired home while vacationing on Kauai in 2006. The couple envisioned an island retreat where they could come for brief or extended visits. “We’d been traveling to Hawaii for years, but we had become disenchanted with resort-style vacations,” Lee explains. “We wanted to get off the beaten path and see the real Hawaii.”

The 3,600-square-foot residence is situated in a private enclave at the upper edge of a valley on north Kauai, aptly named the Garden Isle for its verdant tropical vegetation. The diverse terrain includes a forest of palms, ferns and bamboo; a bluff overlooking Secret Beach and

a trail that leads down to the beach and right to the edge of the turquoise Pacific. “One of the things we knew right away was that this is a place to share with family and friends,” Lee says. “It allows us to spread the good fortune of having such a special place.”

To renovate the decade-old home and its sprawling, overgrown grounds, the couple spent three years in collaboration with Hawaii-based designer Andrea Lecusay of Lakshmi Interiors and custom-home builder James Antony of Antony Homes, who built the original home in 1996. Together, they upgraded the residence, expanded the outdoor pool and patio areas, and renovated the extensive grounds into multiple garden rooms designed for entertaining and outdoor living. To Lee, designing a home and garden is not unlike his day job. “It’s very similar to designing a movie,” he acknowledges. “I had a lot of opinions about every tiny little design detail.”

Antony ensured a seamless appearance in craftsmanship. “James was able to locate the same carvers and craftspeople to add on railings, corbels and other details. There isn’t anything here that hasn’t been made by hand,” Lecusay says.

“Lee and Laura very much love old *Hawaiiiana*, and they wanted to create an understated elegance that was reminiscent of Hawaii circa 1900 to the 1940s,” Lecusay explains. “We worked with the Arts and Crafts and Asian-influenced architecture, and blended it with a landscape of Hawaiian plants and Indonesian furnishings to create a serene and tranquil environment.”

When Lee and Laura acquired Hale Ho’omaluu, it was already heavily populated with trees. Fiji fan palms, blue Latan palms, foxtail palms, triangle palms and coconut palms create a “tropical woodland,” which Lee appreciates as a “cool, safe haven from the sun.” They also inherited a family-size orchard with exotic edibles, including avocado, lychee, noni, ‘Cara Cara’ orange and allspice trees.

“Around the house there were a few black taro plants, old agaves, bananas and some orchids in the trees, but otherwise the (understory) was sparsely planted,” says



Below left: A fragrant gardenia is silhouetted against variegated ginger foliage. **Above:** The barbecue-bar is part of a triumvirate of outdoor-entertaining elements that also includes the lounging and dining balés. **Opposite, above:** Sheltered from the ocean breezes by a cardamom hedge (*Elettaria cardamomum*), the rustic seating is made from reclaimed teak. Brilliant color comes from hibiscus and *Heliconia*, a ginger relative. **Opposite, below:** Hawaiian culture is centered on *ohana*, or family. “And it’s not really *ohana* without *keiki*,” Lecusay says, as children race around the pathways edged with custom-carved tikis draped with leis.



Botanical Décor

With the bountiful landscape as a backdrop, Lecusay worked with floral designer Laurel Randolph of Kauai Floral Arts and her assistant, Mary Lou Harchis, to fashion botanical decorations for the party. Here’s how they transformed local materials into festive decorations:

- They strung floral garlands that are Hawaii’s equivalent of lights. Eighty garlands — made with pale-green and white *Dendrobium* orchids, creamy white *Stephanotis* blooms, crown flowers (*Calotropis gigantea*) and green berries, and finished with shells, seahorses and gold balls — hang from the balé rooftops.
- For the seasonal centerpieces, they selected lime-green *Cymbidium* orchids, white *Anthurium*, huge protea blooms and gold balls for accents.





Island Grown

Dani Felix of Private Chef Kauai created a “fusion pupu” menu for the holiday party, sourced with seasonal ingredients from local growers who sell at the Hanalei farmers market.

- Sweet-potato latkes with chutney, pineapple and candied ginger crème fraiche
- Taro blinis with smoked salmon
- Grilled pizzas topped with a mix of yummy island flavors: macadamia-nut pesto, caramelized sweet Maui onion, sweet corn, Cajun seared ahi, wasabi cream, pickled ginger and fresh mozzarella
- Hawaiian sugar-cane skewers with grilled chunks of coconut chicken and mahimahi
- Lavender-infused walnuts and flax-seed almonds from Kauai Nut Roasters
- Guava-rum punch

To try some of Chef Felix’s recipes, go to gardendesign.com/recipes.



Opposite, above: The tiki in this seating area off the home’s rear lanai (veranda) was chiseled in place from a dying palm trunk by master carver Crazy Al Evans. It often anchors one end of a hammock. **Opposite, below:** In keeping with the turn-of-the-century-inspired architecture, Lecusay set the tables with *Hawaiiana* decor, including calabash bowls carved from gourds and *Acacia koa*, a Hawaiian hardwood. “We laid Lawai ferns all the way down the table and used Lee and Laura’s hazelnut-colored Heath dinnerware, which looks beautiful with the wood bowls,” Lecusay says. **Above:** Chef Dani Felix’s version of a garden salad: Kilauea greens and purple cabbage, Kauai Kunana Dairy goat cheese, Japanese cucumbers, roasted beets, Lone Palm bean sprouts and nasturtium flowers tossed with her Lilikoi dressing. **Right:** Oil lanterns were dressed with *haku*s made from Lawai ferns, the same crowns worn on the heads of hula dancers. The bistro tables and chairs are from Sutherland.



Sharon Fiore, a local garden consultant whom Lecusay brought into the project. Color and texture were missing from the landscape at eye level. To add layers of interest, Fiore filled planting beds and borders with tree ferns, agapanthus, orchids, bananas, taro (*Colocasia esculenta*), ginger lilies (*Hedychium*), crotons (*Codiaeum*), gardenias, honeysuckle, ti plant (*Cordyline fruticosa*), hibiscus and other tropicals. With more than 100 orchids on the property, something is always in bloom.

Perched above the ocean as it is, the bluff, with its platform deck and dining area, is exposed to constant wind and salt water. Here, along the rugged north edge of the property, Fiore planted native hibiscus and dwarf octopus trees (*Schefflera actinophylla*). “They can take the extreme conditions,” she points out. “Because of Kauai’s mountains, wind and weather patterns, this property doesn’t get much rain. But these plants just take off here.”

Thoughtfully planned seating areas throughout the garden encourage its occupants to live on island time, while away the tropical days. Lecusay designed most of the furnishings and had them made in Indonesia. Custom gas tiki torches surround the saltwater pool (a bamboolike copper sheath covers the pole of each), and the trunks of palms are uplit after dark. “The best time to arrive here is at night,” Lee says. “There are torches everywhere — it looks like we’re ready for a Polynesian luau.”

Indeed, the grounds are movie-set perfect for entertaining. Everything from the monkey pod trees to the Buddha statue is lit at night. “We programmed ‘scenes’ into the keypads so Lee and Laura can control the atmosphere with a single touch at different times of the day,” Lecusay says. “There’s a romantic twinkle everywhere.”

To Lecusay, the magic of Hawaii’s culture, alluring plant life and welcoming spirit is embodied in the home and garden she helped to create. “People move to Hawaii because they want to live a casual and luxurious outdoor lifestyle,” she says. “The more time you spend here, the more you appreciate the ambience and the beauty.”

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Above: To Lecusay, the party was a celebration of the Hawaiian spirit. Here, gathered at a custom trestle table built from 100-year-old boat siding, two guests talk story. **Right:** Subtle and evocative, the warm glow of outdoor lighting — part of a wireless Vantage lighting system — and the flames from tiki torches lend magic to this poolside setting.

