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Tour Aerin Lauder's Indoor-Outdoor Tropical Escape

The stylish tastemaker conjures a dreamy getaway for her family on the Pacific coast of Panama

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Distinctively designed overhanging thatched roofs help provide shade for the compound's buildings.

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Imagine a remote tropical Eden where days are whiled away on fishing boats and surfboards, wildlife outnumbers humanity, and the nearest town is accessed via a bumpy dirt road and a puddle jumper. It's not exactly the first place one might picture Aerin Lauder, the ultra-chic, ultra-cosmopolitan doyenne of her namesake lifestyle brand and scion of Estée Lauder. Which may explain why, even after her husband, financier Eric Zinterhofer, purchased a large plot of land on the Pacific coast of Panama and began an ambitious reforestation and building project there, nearly a decade unfolded before Lauder paid a visit. "It was always a boys' trip," she says of her husband's annual pilgrimages to the Central American country, which began when a classmate at Harvard Business School introduced him to the region and evolved into father-son excursions as

soon as Lauder would allow their two children to join. “They would go down for a week, eat fish tacos and sleep in bathing suits,” she says. “It was paradise—a real adventure escape.” When she finally tagged along, she recalls with a laugh, there was an adjustment period: “The first time I went, I had my Capri sandals and left with sun poisoning. It’s rustic, but that’s what’s so magical about it. It’s a fantasy island. You feel like you’re far, far away.”



Aerin lauder in a La DoubleJ Dress.



The outdoor living room features vintage Italian rattan chairs, teak sofas by Studio Tlalli with cushions of a Perennials fabric, and cocktail tables by Carlos Motta.

The beauty of total isolation didn’t come effortlessly. When Zinterhofer and two friends purchased the 1,200-acre reserve in 2007, there were hardly any trees on his plot of land, let alone infrastructure. To help him realize the behemoth project, he sought out Ivan and Kristin Morales of Miami and Panama-based IM/KM Architecture & Planning. Ivan, an alum of Selldorf Architects who grew up in Mexico, had worked on a home in the region already. “Eric loved that they had great architectural talent, were a husband-and-wife team, and knew the area,” says Lauder. “They really embrace the Panamanian sensibility.” Zinterhofer’s mandate for the couple: a modern tree house in the jungle. “So we had to plant the forest before being able to have the tree house,” Ivan notes with a chuckle. Over time, the couple assembled and oversaw a team of botanists to envision the lush landscape. Today, the once barren cattle ranch boasts 75 species of trees and a wealth of biodiversity: birds, monkeys, crocodiles, pumas, and what Lauder describes as “frogs so enormous that if you kiss one you might find your prince.” The property’s name—Casa Loro—was inspired by the parrots that would wake Zinterhofer and the boys with the rising sun each morning during early visits before the house was constructed.

Zinterhofer wanted the architecture to maintain an open dialogue with nature. “He kept saying, ‘You don’t ever want to be inside in Panama. That’s not the point of being here,’” recalls Kristin. “That was really inspirational to us.” The couple’s response was to pull the structures apart rather than devising one massive house. “The spaces in between are outdoor rooms you can have experiences in,” says Kristin. “It’s this idea of slowing down and really appreciating each space you’re moving through.”



Teak furniture by Studio Tlalli creates a sitting area on the poolside deck. The decorative pillows are made with a Carolina Irving Textiles linen.

It's all in the details. Even the deceptively simple-looking, gently sloping thatched roofs that roll outward to create shade are a modern feat of engineering. "There are no nails," Lauder says with awe. For the roofs, IM/KM collaborated with VTN Architects, a Vietnam-based firm globally recognized for its bamboo pavilions. "The challenge was, how can we create something primitive in construction but make it air-conditioned?" says Ivan, adding that six engineers from New York and a translator completed the effort. The end result, Lauder points out, "really creates that indoor-outdoor, tropical feeling."

Considering all the care and attention paid to the natural surroundings, it's no surprise that sustainability was a driving force—as it turns out, as much by necessity as by intention. "When you see how isolated it is, you realize that just getting the refrigerator there is a huge undertaking," says Lauder. Once the forest was mature enough, various woods were harvested on-site and a vast number of the furnishings were sourced and crafted locally. "You can't just buy furniture in Panama," says Kristin. "So over the years we've found people who want to learn and have a special talent, and we've trained them. Now they are very much in demand." So much so that the couple have expanded their practice. Now, Studio Tlalli, the furniture wing, employs eight craftspeople who assemble each piece of furniture by hand on the reserve. Ivan and Kristin hope to eventually commercialize and export the designs. "The house has had a much broader impact than just the architectural result," says Ivan. "We're also proud of the positive social and environmental impact in the area."



The tub is clad in encaustic cement tile by Clé.



In the primary bedroom, a vintage bench stands at the end of a Studio Tlalli four-poster. Patterson Flynn rug.

The final element was, of course, the decoration. Aerin called on close friend and longtime collaborator AD100 superstar Daniel Romualdez. “She said, ‘Can you help me make this feel bohemian, colorful, and warm?’” recalls Romualdez, noting that his own getaway in Ibiza (*AD*, June 2017) served as a catalyst. “If you look at the architecture, it’s quite masculine. Then Aerin comes in and layers a soft touch.” Many of those “layers” came from travels they’d taken together over the years—a pair of vintage rattan chairs from Italy that Romualdez calls “modernist instead of preppy,” a sculptural Gambone jug in a guest bath, rattan Atelier Vime pendants that crown the dining table and kitchen island, and punchy textiles from Carolina Irving, Creel & Gow, and Pierre Frey. “We identified the elements that were going to be bulletproof to the salt, that would bring the color, texture, and whimsy,” says Romualdez. “We didn’t want to over-accessorize. We were conscious of the setting. It had to be casual, but I felt like it had to be personal too. The last thing you want is for it to look like a resort.” For Lauder, it was also an opportunity to showcase offerings from her highly successful home collection—eye-catching ceramics, raffia placemats, even a new dishware collaboration with Carolina Irving & Daughters.



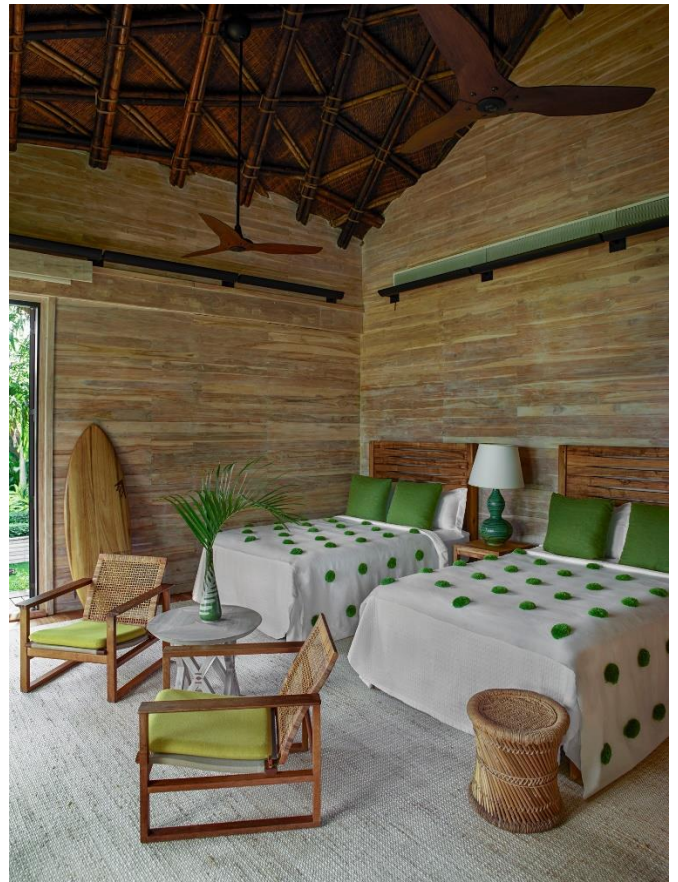
An Atelier Vime pendant hangs above the Studio Tlalli dining table surrounded with Serena & Lily chairs.
Ceiling fans by Big Ass Fans.



Vintage stools with cushions of a Pierre Frey fabric pull up to the kitchen's Caesarstone-topped island.
Atelier Vime pendant light; Zellige tiles by Clé; Sub-Zero Refrigerator; Wolf Range.



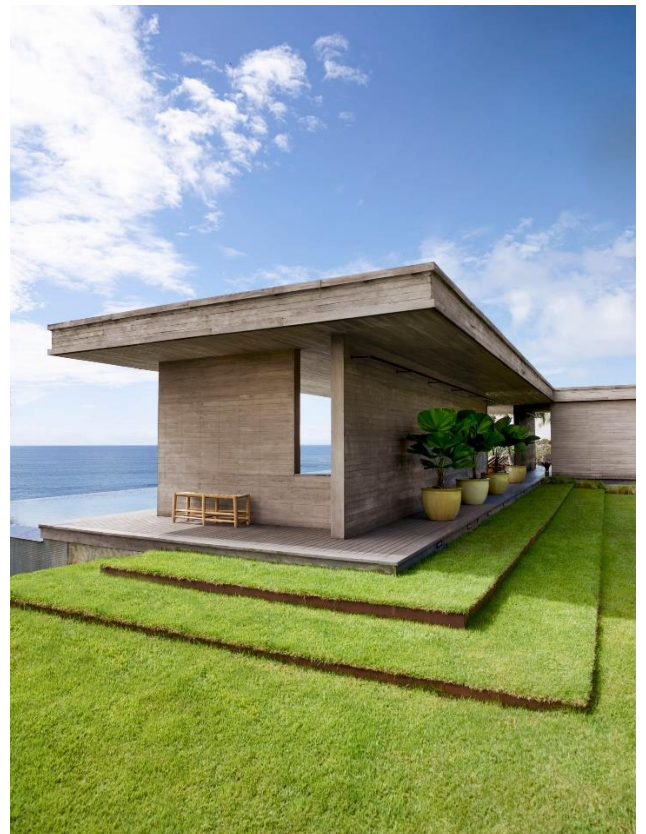
Lauder in a Johanna Ortiz dress at a Studio Tlalli table under an Atelier Vime pendant.



A playfully inviting guest room.



A row of Sutherland Furniture armless chaise longues stands alongside the pool.



The pool pavilion.



The table is set with plates from the Carolina Irving & Daughters for AERIN Collection. Placemats, napkins, and flatware all by AERIN.



The outdoor dining table is set with plates from the Carolina Irving & Daughters for AERIN Collection and placemats, napkins, and flatware by AERIN.



A thatched-roof pavilion at Aerin Lauder's Panama retreat.



A view of the indoor living room.



Distinctively designed overhanging thatched roofs help provide shade for the compound's buildings.

“It’s a completely different way of living,” Lauder continues, pointing out that there’s not even a front door at Casa Loro. While her husband and sons spend their days adventuring, Lauder goes for leisurely walks along the beach or lounges by the pool with a book. The catch of the day gets sliced into ceviche; fruit is plucked straight from the surrounding trees. There’s no florist to call on. Instead, Lauder styles the rooms with fresh cuttings from around the property. “The vegetation is very inspiring,” she says, noting that landscape designer Titi Hernández helped to curate the selection. Of the perfectly laid-back nature of it all, she adds: “There’s something very peaceful about just having a quiet day. The interesting thing about it is, there’s nowhere to go. There is no town with shops to run into. There’s no one to meet for lunch. It’s all about family time. That’s really what makes it so special.”