

By Tiffany Bakker Photographed by Sharyn Cairns

Worth the wait

Deborra-lee Furness takes her time perfecting an East Hamptons retreat for the hitherto unsettled Jackman family.

The approach and entry to the Hamptons home of Deborra-lee Furness and Hugh Jackman, a collaboration between Furness, Stelle Lomont Rouhani Architects and LaGuardia Design Group landscapers. *Details, last pages.*

THIS PAGE in the gazebo, linen **drapery** from Australia's Hale Mercantile Co. **OPPOSITE PAGE** in the pavilion, bespoke built-in **sofas** by Deborra-lee Furness with Eleanor Donnelly of Stelle Lomont Rouhani Architects; **upholstery** by Upholstery of the Hamptons, in **fabric** by Holland & Sherry; Furness wears a Bonnie Young Grecian **tunic** and a Moschino **cardigan**.



If you're an architect looking to work with Deborra-lee Furness, you're going to need nerves of steel. "I'm a bit of a perfectionist and a commitment-phobe, which is not a great combination," she smiles over a grilled chicken salad and a Diet Coke — "my one vice" — at the Kit Kemp-designed Crosby Street Hotel in New York's SoHo.

That suite of personality traits might explain why the East Hampton holiday home that Furness and her husband, Hollywood megastar Hugh Jackman, had bought for the summer months remains in the design phase almost four years on. The couple and their children, Oscar, 18, and Ava, 13, along with pooches Dali and Allegra have all cosied up in the property's guest house instead.

"[The main house] has taken so long to build because I keep changing my mind," confides Furness, who has designed the entire retreat in conjunction with Bridgehampton-based architecture firm Stelle Lomont Rouhani. (She also collaborated closely with the architects on key furnishings and pieces.) "And then we'd travel to Greece or Japan or Morocco, and I would get inspired by my surroundings, so I'd come back and go to the architect and say, 'I've got a great idea!' And the architect would be like, 'Oh my God, here she goes again.'"

The unexpected upside of Furness's indecision has been the restoration of the 435-square-metre wooden cabin they're currently inhabiting. Previously occupied by an artist, it has sat on the land since the 1970s. "I'm a complete modernist, and the shack was tan tiles and a lot of tan wood," Furness says, "which wasn't my usual design style." Still, she conceded it had great bones, so she and Jackman — along with architect Viola Rouhani and interior designer Eleanor Donnelly — decided to honour the shack's history by going entirely with wood, painting the exterior black and bleaching out wooden floorboards. "I love opposites — I'm very into black and white," says Furness. "All the interiors are neutral tones and I think the architects were pushing me towards doing the main house black, but it will be white — the Jungian, the yin and the yang."

She adds: "I'm not usually a wood girl — I'm more of a stone girl — but when you transition something completely, what's the point?"

Furness charts her passion for design back to two key influences in her life: her late mother, Fay Duncan — who was awarded an Order of Australia medal for her tireless charity work — and her profession. "We moved 12 times," recalls the Sydney-born Furness of her peripatetic childhood. "People would say, 'Is your mother a diplomat?' And I'd say, 'No, she just likes to decorate.'" >>



STYLUS: MICHAEL FISHER; MAKE-UP: SARAH PATCH; STYLING: ROBERTA TULLI; HAIR: GUY

THIS PAGE, FROM LEFT in a hallway, woven stool by Sylvester and Co in New York; sculptures by Rogan Gregory; driftwood found by Furness on a mountain in Morocco; walls in bespoke tadelakt finish by Chet Mitrani. **Kitchen** by Scavolini USA with Stelle Lomont Rouhani Architects; By Lassen ML42 oak stools, from Horne. **OPPOSITE PAGE** looking into the house from the pool area, sofa by James Perse Furniture; stool by Tina Frey Designs; custom bunk bed arrangement by Deborra-lee Furness with Stelle Lomont Rouhani Architects; stairs to bunk beds by Lucas Cowart/Stelle Lomont Rouhani Architects; fireplace in tadelakt finish with steel log storage insert by Deborra-lee Furness with Stelle Lomont Rouhani Architects; Berber rug from Morocco.



Beside the pool, **chaise lounges** by James Perse Furniture; bespoke built-in **sofas** (in the pavilion) by Deborra-lee Furness with Eleanor Donnelly of Stelle Lomont Rouhani Architects; **upholstery** by Upholstery of the Hamptons; **fabric** by Holland & Sherry.



THIS PAGE, FROM LEFT in the bathroom, indoor/outdoor **shower** with pocketing Fleetwood **door** by Deborra-lee Furness with Stelle Lomont Rouhani Architects. In the bedroom, custom platform **bed** with integrated lighting, headboard and night table by Deborra-lee Furness with Stelle Lomont Rouhani Architects; bed **linens** by Hale Mercantile Co; Summit Grande pendant **light** by Tech Lighting. **OPPOSITE PAGE** in the bathroom, indoor/outdoor **shower** by Deborra-lee Furness with Stelle Lomont Rouhani Architects; bespoke **vanity** in Corian and tadelakt finish by Deborra-lee Furness with Stelle Lomont Rouhani Architects; **towel hooks** by Tina Frey Designs.

“I need *order* because there’s chaos outside and our lives are chaotic, so I like our home lives to be *peaceful*” DEBORRA-LEE FURNESS



THIS PAGE in the bathroom, bespoke **vanity** in Corian and tadelakt finish by Deborra-lee Furness with Stelle Lomont Rouhani Architects; **walls** in tadelakt finish by Chet Mitrani; tap by Graff. **OPPOSITE PAGE** looking out from the dining area to the pool, **table** and **sofa** by James Perse Furniture; Fleetwood custom **glass wall** by Stelle Lomont Rouhani Architects; **flowers** by Ovando, New York. *Details, last pages.*



« That nomadic upbringing proved a useful precursor for an acting career. “As an actor, I always lived out of a suitcase. Then I married an actor, so we lived on the road. Even when the kids were little and we were both filming, we’d live location to location,” Furness recalls.

A sense of permanency proved elusive for the clan until relatively recently, and is the reason why, according to Furness, she likes order in her homes now. “Because I lived on the road and out of suitcases, I could never find anything, so now everything is labelled in my house,” she says. Beyond simply being more practical, she finds it soothing. “I need order because there’s chaos outside and our lives are chaotic, so I like our home lives to be peaceful.”

These days the family, who also has homes in Sydney’s Bondi and downtown Manhattan in New York, decamp to their East Hampton shack as much as possible. For Furness, the exclusive beachside enclave — which sits at the east end of New York’s Long Island, and where the likes of Scarlett Johansson, Gwyneth Paltrow and Sarah Jessica Parker also have houses — feels like a spiritual home.

She first visited the area in her 20s while studying drama in New York and had a strong sense she would one day have a house there. A summer spent renting the East Hampton home of fashion designer and close friend Donna Karan on the quieter bayside — away from the glitz and glamour of the beachfront — and Furness was sold.

So, when two adjoining pieces of land sprawled across half a hectare and overlooking a dramatic bluff became available, the couple jumped at the opportunity. “It’s private. That’s why we love it. I thought, ‘Why isn’t this more popular?’ People don’t want to build there because it’s off the beaten track but that’s what appeals to us.”

The main summer home won’t be completed until at least November 2019, but for now, the family is managing in the close quarters just fine. And with just one bedroom and bunk beds in the main living area, they don’t have much choice.

“With the small space, I notice Oscar will be on the top bunk bed, Hugh and I will be watching TV, and Ava will be over at the dining table, so we are all in together,” Furness says. “I like the way we dance as a family in this space, as opposed to our New York home, which is three floors and you can just not see each other. Once we started staying in the shack, Hugh was like, ‘Well, why are we even building the main house? I love it here.’ But then in the mornings we’re creeping around trying not to wake up sleeping teenagers, and I’m like, ‘Hugh, this is exactly why we’re building the other house,’” she says, laughing. “As long as I don’t change my mind again.” **VL** stelleco.com; [@stellelomontrouhaniarchitects](https://www.instagram.com/stellelomontrouhaniarchitects)

