

Building a dream by the ocean

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Hollywood, MD - For generations, the men in Marnie Oursler's family have been builders. Oursler grew up in Prince George's County and lived briefly in Northern Virginia before her family moved to Calvert County. The 1996 Northern High School graduate had plenty to keep herself occupied. "I played a lot of sports," she recalled. The family trade also kept her busy, as she worked at various construction sites with her uncles and brother, Chris. "I pretty much did everything," Oursler recalled, listing pouring concrete, digging trenches and carpentry as some of the tasks she performed. While it was clear building homes was part of the family DNA, Oursler admitted that at the time, "I didn't love it. It's not something I'd thought I'd do." Being part of a fifth generation of building Ourslers did not figure in her blueprint for life.

After high school, Oursler spent a year at the Naval Academy before transferring to East Carolina University, attending on a softball scholarship. After college she moved to Bethany Beach, DE. It was there she bought a 2-story house, an A-frame, one that she described as "a dump. It was kind of falling apart." With a lot of help from her family and friends, Oursler had the home fixed up in seven months and sold it two months later. "I was studying the market," she said.

In a telephone interview with TheBayNet.com, Oursler explained that while she was involved in a real estate sales career, she used her free time to build an entire house from the ground up. "I got a good deal on a lot," she recalled. With the aid of her father, Calvert County developer Marvin Oursler, her first build was successful and she sold the home for a "good profit." She subsequently built a second house, exited the real estate sales job and along the way encountered a lot of people with dreams of a home near the ocean. Marnie Custom Homes became a thriving venture.

"I built the first LEED [Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design]-certified house in Delaware," said Oursler, who added the certified silver dwelling is on Ashwood Street in Bethany Beach. She also built a house using only American-made materials. That 2012 project created the "We Build America" campaign and resulted in her becoming the national spokesperson for 84 Lumber. The following year Oursler won a national award as the top woman entrepreneur.

Now, the young woman who builds homes, is about to become a guest in your own home. When initially contacted by the DIY [Do It Yourself] Network about doing a show, Oursler admitted she was a bit cautious. "They said 'this is going to be a show about you,' " she recalled. What Oursler will be doing on the program is a slight departure from what she does now. "The show is me doing renovations," she said. "It's aspirational and inspirational—a lot of little tidbits people can take from this."

The program is called "Big Beach Builds." In their promotion of the show, which initially airs March 20, Home and Garden Television (HGTV) stated, "having grown up in a family of builders, contractor Marnie Oursler is using her pedigree to give outdated beach homes a new lease on life. From gorgeous decks that make the most of ocean views, to beach glass inspired kitchens and customized sand-friendly spaces, she's taking classic beach houses that have been around forever and giving them modern updates while still preserving their charm. Whether you have all the money in the world, or a modest budget, Marnie will make your beach living dreams come true."

Viewing a segment of the show is evidence that Oursler is extremely comfortable in front of the camera. "It was me for a long time," said Oursler, who covered all the aspects of getting her business from her imagination to reality. Those components involved salesmanship and consultation about what the finished product would look like. "So, doing this show was just like explaining it for a client," she added.

A synopsis of some of the episodes to be aired includes "a couple turns to Marnie to help them transform their shabby A-frame retreat into a beautiful family beach home. But when Marnie discovers the house is held up by broken cinderblocks, she must use her creativity and a little help from her dad to bring the house back to life."

Marvin Oursler and Chris Oursler will be appearing on the program along with Marnie. Another local who will have some involvement with "Big Beach Builds" is Chris Sciannella of Huntingtown, who worked as a cameraman on several segments. Of Marnie Oursler, Sciannella remarked, "she's very good on the shows. She's the star. She knows what she's doing. She knows the building industry."

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