

Creating with History

Find inspiration for year-round beach style in this historic Watch Hill cottage.

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THE MCCORMICKS WANTED TO KEEP THE BONES OF THE HISTORIC HOME AND PLAY UP ITS BEST FEATURES—DIAMOND-PANE WINDOWS AND THE PORCH WITH ITS LOVELY VIEWS.

CALM COMFORT. A white, slipcovered sofa is a practical choice, and a jute rug warms up the white floor while keeping the beachy look. The crisp blue trellis-patterned accent chairs inject a bit of fresh energy into the serene space.

WAVES OF BLUE. Varying shades of blue throughout the front room mimic the changing colors of the ocean. The unique gingerbread trim on the lacquered console adds a bit of whimsy to the room's traditional design.



Clean and white—these are iconic characteristics of beach style.

But how do you translate these characteristics into a home that is warm, cozy and livable all year long? In a historic Watch Hill, Rhode Island, beach cottage, designer Elena Philips created a space that draws from the simplicity and peacefulness of the ocean, but is practical and livable enough for the owners' two young children, two golden retrievers and the guests they entertain while spending summer weekends and holidays at the shore.

[TOP LEFT] ENLIGHTENED PAST. The Watch Hill cottage is a historic home. A Restoration Hardware lamp illuminates the plaque.

[TOP RIGHT] OLD AND NEW. The door's original hardware stands out against blue paint.

[RIGHT] BY THE BOOK. Elena loves book spines and the way they add color to a room's décor. She buys books that complement the room's colors or whose subject relates to the home or the owners' interests. She stays away from black or red-spined books that often look too harsh.



TO GIVE YOUR BEACH HOME YEAR-ROUND APPEAL, COMFORT AND PRACTICALITY ARE KEY. AN OPEN, AIRY ATMOSPHERE IS AN IMPORTANT CHARACTERISTIC OF BEACHSIDE STYLE, AND MAINTAINING VISUAL FLOW AND REMOVING DIVISIONS BETWEEN ROOMS HELP ACHIEVE THIS LOOK.

WHITE AND BRIGHT. The traditional Shaker-style cabinets complement the crisp lines of the countertop and refrigerator. The herringbone backsplash is a subtle but effective way of adding texture that keeps the space from feeling too sterile.



[ABOVE] COLOR POPS. An assortment of cookbooks and a fun print of frozen pops from the Longstreet Collection add color to the simple and chic white kitchen.

[RIGHT] COLOR AND TEXTURE. Cabinets feature a custom paint color from Farrow and Ball, and the walls feature a raffia wall covering of natural fibers from Kneeder Fauchère. The scalloped tile backsplash is a standout feature that is a fun nod to coastal style.

RETAINING HISTORY

Homeowners Katie and Brian McCormick started off renting the historic cottage but loved it so much they bought it when it went up for sale shortly afterward. Brian had grown up in the area and had family nearby. Designated a historic home, the cottage was built in 1897. The McCormicks' intended small-scale renovation of the property turned into a three-year project, in which they added to the porch and created a mudroom, a laundry room, and a basement that included a playroom, workout room and bathroom. But the McCormicks wanted to keep the bones of the historic home and play up its best features—diamond-pane windows and the porch with its lovely views. Inside, the design carries the same spirit. “We didn’t want to detract,” Elena says.

PRACTICAL PRIORITIES

To give your beach home year-round appeal, comfort and practicality are key. “You have to know what you’re interested in, what kind of person you are,” Elena says. Is cleanliness a top priority? How often will you entertain? Knowing how you’re going to live in your home allows you to accommodate what’s important at every step. Elena wanted to take into account the sand that would be tracked in by small children and dogs. She painted the floors, making them easier to maintain, and slipcovered white furniture. Children and guests can come and go from the beach, and the home has an “indoor-outdoor feel.” Furnishings are casual. “Nothing is too precious,” Elena says.





[ABOVE] PRACTICAL AND PLAYFUL. In the girls' bedroom, durable raffia headboards can be wiped clean, and a bright-pink color palette adds whimsical charm.



YEAR-ROUND BEACH STYLE

An open, airy atmosphere is an important characteristic of beachside style, and maintaining visual flow and removing divisions between rooms help achieve this look. Elena carried the white from the floors up the walls and maintained a uniform palette across the rooms. She used colors and images suggestive of the ocean throughout, like the light watery blue on the furniture and in the master bedroom, and an abstract painting that suggests the ocean in the kitchen. "You want to create a language that's consistent," Elena says.

She suggests diverging from the palette only in areas like the dining or powder rooms, where stronger statements are appropriate, and where you can use bolder versions of the hues carried throughout the home. Elena introduced yellow and a brighter, deeper blue in the dining room, as well as bright wallpaper in the powder room. Along with maintaining the visual flow of the home for an airier, more open look, Elena made sure the physical space flowed well too, and removed part of the wall between the kitchen and dining room to create more space.



THE RIGHT LIGHT. A short pendant lamp was the perfect solution to the low, pitched ceiling in guest bedroom. The Moravian star motif is a chic nod to nautical style.

"YOU HAVE TO KNOW WHAT YOU'RE INTERESTED IN, WHAT KIND OF PERSON YOU ARE."



VIEWFINDER. The master bedroom looks out on a balcony and beautiful view. Flowing drapes and an exposed curtain rod draw the eye to the view without detracting from it.



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PERFECT BALANCE. Elena plays up the master bedroom's symmetry with jute lamps in each window and a pair of coral art prints.



ROOM WITH A VIEW. The porch, which was extended during renovations, looks out over the property, which includes a small natural pond.

In order to keep a beachy home inviting all year long, it's important to introduce warmer elements to your palette, as well as items that break from the clean-lines aesthetic. The texture of the rug in the living room, as well as the raffia wall covering in the dining room, softened the home, and the rounded lines of sofas and dining chairs give visual rest.

PAST AND PRESENT

Fusing traditional and modern elements is a practical choice for your beach home. Elena describes the cottage's aesthetics as "transitional style, with traditional elements." Fusing traditional and modern elements keeps the home from looking too trendy or needing frequent updates. The clean lines of modern furniture are an important part of beach style, while the softer lines of traditional furniture keep the home livable and comfortable. Elena suggests using more modern elements in rooms where a very crisp and clean aesthetic is appropriate, such as kitchens and bathrooms. She installed modern fixtures in these rooms, as well as a Calcutta marble kitchen counter.

Her overall design advice? Combine pure white and clean, modern lines with warm textures and rounded traditional furniture for an iconic beach-cottage style that welcomes you year round. 

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