

# BREEZY LIVING

A FAMILY REBUILDS THEIR BELOVED JERSEY SHORE  
COTTAGE INTO A COZY RETREAT WITH  
PANORAMIC WATER VIEWS AND CLASSIC CHARM

BY MARISA SPYKER  
PHOTOGRAPHS BY MAX KIM-BEE  
STYLING BY ERIN SWIFT

The shingles are natural  
white cedar. The trim  
is painted Mayonnaise  
by Benjamin Moore. The  
table is teak, and the  
rug is by Dash & Albert.





The walls in the living room (top) are painted Decorators White by Benjamin Moore. The chairs are by Hickory Chair, and the coffee table is by Salvations Architectural Furnishings. The painting is by Michael Marrinan through J. Todd Galleries. Above: Two levels of porches offer expansive views of the Atlantic Ocean.

**FOR ONE DESIGNER AND HER HUSBAND,** paradise is a narrow spit of land in Mantoloking, New Jersey. The simple shingle-style cottage Kevin and Meg O’Kane purchased on the barrier island served the couple and their two children, now grown, for almost 15 years of happy summers. “We’d have a minimum of 10 people staying with us every weekend, and then more over for dinner,” says Meg, who owns an interior design firm with her sister, Mary Haynes, in Warren, New Jersey. “It was everyone’s favorite place to be.” But when their beloved retreat—a bare-bones, early 1900s bungalow with uninhibited views but without air-conditioning, drywall, and insulation—developed structural issues beyond repair, the O’Kanes were forced to make a difficult decision. “We were told it wasn’t worth renovating, so we were left with the alternative of starting over,” she recalls.

Along with Haynes, Meg dreamed up a new design that was essentially a larger, improved version of the original home, with plenty of modern conveniences and open space for entertaining. “She had learned a lot about what she wanted and needed while living in the original house,” says Haynes. “Because we were rebuilding, we were able to include those things.”

At the top of that list was taking better advantage of the site’s prime location and stunning sea views. To achieve this while still honoring the traditional aesthetic of the previous home, they enlisted architects Chris Rice and Dustin Brown of the nearby



The table and chairs are heirlooms. The upholstery fabric is by Schumacher. The chandelier is from Remains Lighting.





town of Sea Girt, who were well versed in shingle-style homes of the area. “As charming as their old home was, it didn’t capitalize on the oceanfront location,” Rice says. “Our challenge was to make views accessible from anywhere in the house without having the exterior facade look like a wall of glass.” To that end, Rice, with Meg’s input, incorporated classic New England details such as red-and-white cedar shingles for the roof and siding, curved balconies, and gabled arches, as well as expansive back porches that intersect the line of sight from the sea to the house.

Inside, they continued the exterior’s traditional cottage style with light, bright materials. That translated into painted, textured shiplap walls, cypress ceilings with exposed rafters, and cerused white oak floors chosen to mask the sand tracked in from the beach. “The idea was to make things as livable and practical as possible,” says Haynes. “You don’t want to constantly worry about upkeep when you’re at your beach house.”

That was the philosophy that drove many of the design decisions, from the sisal rugs—“because you can pick them up and shake them out,” says Meg—to clutter-curbing built-ins for corraling things like books and beach towels. Built-in benches accommodate extra guests in the living room, and drawers beneath a wide window seat are used in lieu of dressers in guest rooms. Open shelving in the kitchen and baths makes essentials easy to spot for weekend guests. “We don’t want people to ever

have to ask for anything,” says Meg. Where the O’Kanes didn’t use built-ins, they incorporated a mix of furniture that combines tradition with fresh, modern ideas. Upholstered chairs, part of a dining set inherited from Meg’s grandmother’s beach home, were updated with a bold coral print. In the living room, a pair of upholstered club chairs complement a rustic iron coffee table that “reminded me of a lobster trap,” Meg says.

Those subtle seaside references carry into other rooms, as well, from the rope-wrapped pendant lights in the side entry to a starfish mosaic that adorns the floor of a powder room. The palette—varying shades of blue from turquoise to cerulean combined with light neutrals—gives the home a sense of place. “My inspirations were blue skies, sand, and sea,” says Meg.

That inspiration is now everywhere she looks thanks to the property’s high elevation, which not only enhances the views, but also protects from storm surge—just three weeks before the house was scheduled for completion, Hurricane Sandy swept through Mantoloking. “The town was one of the hardest-hit, but our home was one of the few that escaped the storm unscathed,” says Meg.

Ultimately, the Jersey Shore’s resilient spirit is part of what keeps calling the O’Kanes back to their retreat. “The minute I drive over the Point Pleasant bridge, roll down the windows in my car, and smell the ocean breeze,” Meg says, “that’s when I know I’m home.” ■ For more information, see Sources, page 107.