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NEW JERSEY'S HOME & DESIGN MAGAZINE

APRIL/MAY 2010

shore casual

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Rumson, Sea Girt,
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Bold patterns and bright colors set the tone for fun in the children's TV room. "When they're not outside, the kids love to hide upstairs in this room and play video games or watch movies," the homeowner says.

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PHOTOGRAPHER: PATRICIA BURKE
DESIGNER: SUZETTE DONLEAVY



chic *at the* shore

A Sea Girt cottage pairs high style with family fun

AS SELF-PROCLAIMED "JERSEY SHORE PEOPLE," the owners of a vacation home just two blocks from the ocean in Sea Girt have fond memories of childhood summers spent in nearby Bradley Beach and Avon-by-the-Sea. They wanted to continue that tradition with their own children. "We purchased this particular home because it is a typical 'Sea Girt' cottage," the wife says. Indeed, the exterior — with its cedar shingles, striped awnings, and wraparound porch — has all the trappings of a traditional beach-town retreat.

Inside, the homeowners chose a sophisticated, yet relaxed style. The home reflects the personality of the sea

itself — calming and exhilarating at the same time. The interior design is grounded primarily in a neutral palette: walls in subtle shades of tan and gray create a peaceful ambience. But this understated backdrop sets the stage for furnishings in eye-catching patterns and colors.

Smart and Stylish

To fashion a cozy refuge for themselves and their three boys, the homeowners looked to interior designer Suzette Donleavy for guidance. Donleavy, owner and principal designer of Well-Designed Interiors in Shrewsbury, worked closely with the wife to create striking yet soothing spaces.



Earth tones in the living room and family room envelop the family in warmth. “We tried to make the house feel relaxed and not fussy,” the homeowner says. “The family room and living room are comfortable places where you can put your feet up and read a book or watch TV.” Distinctive pieces, such as a copper-topped table in a reading nook and a wing chair adorned with doves, give the home one-of-a-kind flair. Woven bamboo shades in both rooms provide a bit of exotic charm while maintaining privacy and allowing light to filter through.

In the master bedroom the wife asked for a little more sophistication, Donleavy says, and that’s exactly what she got. The room’s clean lines and refined furnishings bring to mind the elegance of a 1930s movie set. Mirrored

night stands reflect a variety of bedding fabrics and patterns. Soft tones ensure the combination is restful rather than raucous.

The kitchen is a study in crisp whites and gentle grays. Classic elements — bead-board detail on the ceiling, white maple cabinetry, and a granite countertop — define the space. “The result,” the homeowner says, “looks clean and timeless.” A contrasting brown-and-beige window treatment creates a focal point without disrupting the room’s unruffled composure.

Pieces that Pop

The deft mixture of eclectic accessories with a softly hued backdrop proves that elegance and exuberance can go



Opposite: Rich wood tones and furnishings in shades of green give the living room warmth and sophistication. The coffee table is made from ecologically harvested West Indian mahogany. The natural theme continues with woven bamboo shades and a rug of abaca, a member of the banana family grown for its fiber. **Above:** The living room and dining area looked like a bowling alley, designer Suzette Donleavy says, until she added a half wall to create two distinct areas. Details make the wall look like it’s always been part of the home’s architecture. **Left:** Located two blocks from the beach, the home embodies a relaxed, seaside attitude. “We didn’t want to change that cottage look,” the homeowner says. A wraparound porch framed by masses of hydrangeas and colorful awnings offers a shady place to relax. “We sit and visit with friends and love people-watching,” she adds.



Far left: Snug seating, a cozy throw, and overstuffed ottomans invite folks to relax in the family room. Throw pillows on the sofa match those on the adjacent kitchen's banquette. Regarding the photo on the wall above the sofa: "It is a great conversation starter," the wife says. "Everyone wants to know who it is."
Left: Built-in cabinetry throughout the home allows for lots of storage. Picture frames, glassware, and other knick knacks on these shelves between the family room and breakfast area reiterate the home's color palette. Parchment-covered books tie the look together.

hand-in-hand. Though the homeowners' design tastes run toward the refined and chic, the décor also reflects their sense of fun. In the kids' TV room, for example, they "wanted more whimsy," Donleavy says, so she used their turtle pillows (on the window seat in the opening photo) as inspiration. The color scheme is an arresting combination of browns and bright greens in various patterns. The wife delighted in helping to create this room for her family. "This was a place I could dare to have a little fun," she says. "We all love the space."

Donleavy adds that while she and the homeowners enjoyed choosing quirky items — such as the octopus print in the breakfast area — they were able to interpret a

fun-loving style in a sophisticated way. "Some of the pieces we chose had a little bit more novelty; but they were not 'cute.' They were well-done."

Fun and Functional

Well-done can also describe the home's efficient design. Built-in storage spaces keep clutter to a minimum in the relatively modest home (about 1,900 square feet). "Built-ins are a big part of the design," Donleavy points out. "They serve a great purpose." Bookshelves, banquettes, and window seats tucked into corners provide storage in areas that would have been dead space otherwise.

With tidiness and order practically guaranteed, the

homeowners can concentrate on more enjoyable endeavors. "We love to entertain!" the wife says. And this home was made for entertaining. "While the house is tiny, it's very comfortable," she says. "The front porch and back patio offer great overflow for guests."

With plenty of visitors, durability is key. In addition to three very active boys, the homeowners also have two dogs. "Everything has to be low-maintenance for them, the boys, and the friends they bring," the wife says. The friends enjoy sleepovers on the extra-wide window seat in the TV room. The window seat fabric is indoor/outdoor grade for added sturdiness.

Strength and softness; fun and function; good taste and

good times — all come together in this seaside haven. "We love our Sea Girt home," the homeowner says. "It's intimate, yet whimsical and fun. It's easy to be in." ■

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SOURCES Overall: interior design, Suzette Donleavy of Well-Designed Interiors in Shrewsbury; cabinetry design, Jeffrey Kennedy, CKD, of J. Kennedy Design in Pittstown with input from the homeowner and Suzette Donleavy; cabinetry fabrication, Premier Custom-Built Inc. in New Holland, Pennsylvania; cabinetry paint, Benjamin Moore White Dove; walls, Benjamin Moore Davenport Tan; **Kids' TV Room:** pillows, Vizzini & Co. in Red Bank; carpet, Stark Carpet Corp. in New York City; window seat fabrics and trims, Kravet and Robert Allen/Beacon



Hill Showroom in New York City; ottomans, Laneventure in Conover, North Carolina, with fabric by Kravet in Bethpage, New York; window treatment, through Well-Designed Interiors; walls, Benjamin Moore Aura Kona; bookcase wall paint, Benjamin Moore Aura Agave; trim, Benjamin Moore White. **Living Room:** sofa, Lee Industries in Newton, North Carolina; abaca rug, Kravet; Macao coffee table and étagère end tables, Robert Lighton in New York City (T); Tribeca side chairs, Palacek in Richmond, California, with fabric by Robert Allen/Beacon Hill Showroom; brown pillows, Palacek; long pillow, designed by Suzette Donleavy with fabric by Travers in New York City and Larchmont trim by Kravet; Arabesque copper-top table, Global Views in High Point, North Carolina; lighting, Jamie Young Co. in Gardena, California; window treatment, fabric by Travers; polka dot chair, Kravet with Robert Allen fabric; sofa fabric, Travers. **Exterior:** front door millwork, W.F. Sherman & Sons in Manasquan; front door installation, Anthony Pasenello in Sea Girt; roofing, shingling, and porch rebuild, Berardesco Bros. Construction in Brick; trim, Benjamin Moore White Dove. **Family Room:** black-and-white print, Staley-Wise Gallery in New York City; sisal rug, Kravet; dove wing chair, Mitchell Gold + Bob Williams in Taylorsville, North Carolina; wing chair fabric, Donghia in Mount Vernon, New York (T); sofa and ottomans, Lee Industries; end tables, Crate & Barrel; coffee table, Ralph Lauren in New York City. **Kitchen:** designer, J. Kennedy Design; Caledonia granite countertop with cove Dupont edge, All Granite and Marble Corp. in Ridgefield Park; backsplash tile, Princeton Stone and Tile in Princeton; window treatment fabric, Zoffany in Englewood. **Breakfast Area:** banquette cushion fabric, and pillow fabric, Robert Allen/Beacon Hill Showroom; pillow trim, Kravet; light fixture, Vizzini & Co.; table, Ralph Lauren; chairs, Oly in Berkeley, California; octopus print, J. Pocker in New York (T). **Master Bedroom:** custom headboard, bedding, and window treatments, through Well-Designed Interiors; window treatment fabric, Brunschwig & Fils in New York City; sham and throw pillow fabric, GP&J Baker in Dorset, England; night stands, Nancy Corzine in New York City (T); window seat design, Well-Designed Interiors Inc. with cushion fabric by Cowtan & Tout in New York City (T) fabricated by Jim Lukowitz in Manchester; serpentine chest, Kravet Furniture (T); walls, Benjamin Moore Gray Cashmere; trim, Benjamin Moore Glacier White; carpet, Ornament Collection by John Kurtz for New Moon in Wilmington, Delaware. T=To the trade.

Top: "The kitchen is small, yet functional," the homeowner says. White-painted maple cabinetry and soft gray granite countertops and backsplash tile offer practicality and create a light, spacious ambience. Glass doors on the upper cabinetry open the space visually. The beige and brown window treatment complements the serene color scheme without disrupting it. **Bottom:** A smiling octopus watches over the breakfast area. Black seating and throw pillows provide a sharp contrast to the white cabinetry and bead-board wainscoting. This is where family game time happens. "Usually there is a puzzle there in the making," the homeowner says.



Pale blue/gray and soft beige in the master bedroom are a gentle, restful reimagining of sand, surf, and sky. "I love the colors," the wife says. "That was what we started the design process with. With its high ceilings, it feels so big and open."



Bedding fabrics are repeated in throw pillows on the master bedroom window seat. Varied patterns in complementary colors form a cohesive whole. Shelves on both sides of the window seat and storage drawers underneath add elegant function.

As Featured in the April/May 2010 of

NEW JERSEY'S HOME & DESIGN MAGAZINE
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