

Beach Dreams

SULLIVAN'S ISLAND, SOUTH CAROLINA

The Sullivan's Island home of Hartley and Ashley Cooper brings together the beach memories of four different people. Ashley, who grew up in nearby Charleston, recalls halcyon days at his grandparents' cottage on the island next door. Hartley remembers equally happy childhood times at her family's beach house on Florida's Gulf Coast. Interior designer Amelia Handegan, who has decorated multiple beach houses in the area, brought her familiarity and fondness of South Carolina's coastal cottages to the project. And Beau Clowney, the designer of the house's restoration and expansion, spent years studying the island's vernacular architecture.

When the Coopers began searching for a place to raise their family, Hartley's first choice was downtown Charleston. But Ashley wanted their children to grow up in the relaxed island setting and close-knit community he knew as a child. "Sullivan's Island was—and still is—a place where kids ride their bikes downtown to buy ice cream, families relax at the beach, and neighbors get together every day," he says. "The door was always open at my grandparents' cottage with friends coming and going, and I wanted the same thing for my children." Beguiled by this vision, Hartley agreed, and before long, the couple was living in a 1901 Sullivan's Island cottage with their first child.

With the birth of a second child, the Coopers outgrew the small house and turned to Beau for help expanding it. "We knew he had always respected the historic character of the island and captured its vernacular style," says Hartley. After suggesting ways to adapt their current home, Beau showed them a cottage he had already restored and expanded. "It was the first time my husband ever walked through a house and said 'I love

The original green paint of the front porch ceiling remains, just one of the many old-fashioned elements of this Sullivan's Island beach house.





ABOVE: With a low hipped roof and a wraparound porch that connects the main part of the house to a small pavilion-like structure, this circa 1890 beach cottage is a classic example of Sullivan's Island vernacular style. Although the addition designed by Beau Clowney more than doubles the original cottage's size, it is nearly invisible from the street. OPPOSITE: Landscape architect Sheila Wertimer planted sabal palms in front of a ligustrum hedge to create a sense of enclosure along the outer edge of the pool terrace. The hipped roof and white-painted board walls of a small storage pavilion visually unite it with the original cottage.



this place,” Hartley recalls. “He loved the old pine, the high ceilings, everything down to the push-button light switches that reminded him of his mother’s childhood home in Charleston.”

The project began with the restoration of the original late nineteenth-century cottage—a small two-story building with an attached structure Beau describes as a classic Sullivan’s Island pavilion. From the unfinished pine walls and ceilings of the ground-floor rooms to the painted shiplap siding in the bedrooms above, Beau preserved the cottage’s original materials. Reorienting the stairs to accentuate the vista through the house to the garden beyond, he captured the airy feel of traditional Southern center-hall houses. And in the pavilion, where he opened the ceiling up to the beams of its pyramidal roof, he created a room that, though modern in volume, is old-fashioned in material and style.

As he drew plans for the addition, Beau took cues from the vernacular architecture of Sullivan’s Island. “There is a long history here of houses that

Well known for her love of color, sensual textures, exotic textiles, and juxtapositions of antique and modern styles, interior designer Amelia Handegan combines these in a way that never competes with the house’s low-key coastal style. “I love the integrity of these old houses,” says Amelia, who decorated the front sitting room with a triptych by Timothy McDowell, mid-century chairs, and a faded antique Oushak that softens its pine surfaces.





evolved over time as their inhabitants moved nearby outbuildings and linked them to the main dwelling,” he explains. Beau emulated such houses by dividing the addition into two distinct structures joined by slender, light-filled corridors. These transparent connectors include a hallway with French windows on one side and a bar resembling a butler’s pantry on the other that leads from the original cottage to a multipurpose living area.

In this new wing, Beau combined painted shiplap walls and heart-pine floors with a modern, open floor plan. By creating strong focal points on either end of the room, the Coopers’ interior designer gave both living and dining areas individual character. Covering one wall of the dining room with a mural of swimmers inspired by the paintings of Henri Matisse, Amelia transformed the entire room into a work of art. In the

living room, a pair of slipcovered sofas defines a seating area around a mantel of rough-hewn reclaimed pine. Concealing a television above the fireplace, the bold markings of two Pygmy drawings add more visual impact.

At the far end of this long room, a passage-way lined with windows does double duty as a breakfast room, which is one of the family’s favorite spots. “We eat most meals here, the children do art projects on the table, and in the afternoon, I can work and watch them swim in the pool,” says Hartley. Aware of the young family’s casual, busy lifestyle, Amelia decorated the house with that in mind. Combining the comfort and practicality of slipcovers and hemp rugs with a sophisticated selection of art, antiques, and textiles, she created an environment that satisfies the needs of both adults and children.

“It was clear that the interior design needed to be pared down but lively,” says Amelia, who at Hartley’s request integrated shades of orange and coral as well as a few mid-twentieth-century pieces. Although unexpected, exotic elements like the entrance hall’s Oushak rug and antique Chinese lute table are surprisingly compatible with the house’s rustic

OPPOSITE, FAR LEFT: Beau lined cabinets in the butler’s pantry-style bar with painted beadboard paneling and designed mullioned glass doors reminiscent of Southern cottage-style windows. OPPOSITE, LEFT: Luminous blue ceramics and antique coral call to mind the beach house’s seaside setting. ABOVE: Amelia commissioned Kristin Bunting to paint a mural inspired by Matisse’s paintings of swimmers for the dining room. PAGES 104–105: The mural gives a strong sense of character to the dining room, which, with no partition wall separating it from the adjoining living room, could have easily lacked definition. Glass globe lights that hang at random heights in front of the mural resemble bubbles in an imaginary sea.





ABOVE: Two sofas slipcovered with white cotton define the boundaries of the open-plan living room's sitting area. A brick fire surround, rustic pine mantel, Pygmy drawings on bark paper, and chairs upholstered in figured cotton linen bring pattern and texture into the space. "I knew the interior had to be simple, but not at the expense of sophistication," says Amelia. OPPOSITE: Beau designed what he calls "glass connectors" to join the three parts of the house. This hallway, which also serves as a breakfast room, links the kitchen with the bedroom wing. Windows overlooking a garden on one side and pool terrace on the other also forge a connection between the room's interior and the lush coastal setting.



materials and simple details. Such infusions of unexpected color and pattern, including the breakfast room's tangerine-colored chairs and master bedroom's Pakistani wedding shawl, accent every room. Yet the overall feeling of the interior design balances dynamic energy with calm.

Wrapped around a pool courtyard designed by landscape architect Sheila Wertimer, the entire house is suffused with light and surrounded by semitropical verdure. "One of the things I like about the island's old houses is the way they pay homage to the natural beauty around them," says Ashley. "They never dominate." Respecting the island's native landscape, preserving and updating its vernacular architecture, and perpetuating its old-fashioned lifestyle, the Coopers' house offers a new chapter in the story of a place where the old way of life is still intact.

Amelia purchased the Pakistani wedding shawl hanging in the master bedroom on a recent trip to India. Combined with more traditional furniture, including antique French chests of drawers and a four-poster bed, it creates an environment that is both familiar and exotic. "I love weaving together diverse elements to create a thread of continuity," Amelia says. "Nothing shouts and everything nestles together."

