Coastal Character

A family’s dream of an idyllic retreat on Georgia’s coast is realized after years of thoughtful renovations and new and traditional

Lori Scott Jackson | Photography Bela Boyd
You never know who you'll meet on Sea Island. It could be a former dignitary, a sitting president, or the executive whose home you are secretly renovating. Such was the case for principal Chad Gohring of Harrison Design, who was executing a study addition for homeowner Lori Nicholson, as a gift to her husband Peter. The two men, having never met, were coincidentally paired as volunteer caddie and player during a PGA event hosted on the island, and Gohring was careful not to flaunt the surprise project as he carried Nicholson's clubs. When Nicholson reconvened, in jest, how his caddie had cost him a stroke by mismatching yardage, Lori couldn't help but reveal that Gohring was actually their architectural designer. "They continue to laugh about the partnering years later and that it's a good thing I have my day job," says Gohring.

The New York-based Nicholsons have continued to work with Gohring to transform their quintessential Sea Island cottage into a perfect vacation home and essential permanent residence. After years of visiting the coastal destination for Thanksgiving, their seasonal tradition turned into a pattern of a second home on the island. "In 2012, we began our search for the perfect property. My son started sending us real estate listings, and my daughter and I took this on as a mission," says Nicholson. "When we came upon our new home, we were drawn to the unassuming exterior, the courtyard entry, and the serenity of the space." While the cottage reflected the understated venue that the Nicholsons desired, its location was mere steps from the beach, the footprints proved to be too tight, and the architecture felt closed off from its lush surroundings.

Two separate renovations allowed for a more practical living space and established a connection to the outdoors. The first undertakings sought to incorporate additional square footage into the 1970s property by carving out a playroom for the couple's three grandchildren, extending the living quarters, and building a breathtaking study that connects to the main house through a hallway. Plans for a master bedroom suite, including a walk-in dressing closet, and pool hall followed two years later and completed the Nicholsons' vision for the home. "With both additions, we made sure that we were sensitive to the original design; we didn't change the footprints. The appropriateness of the new landscaping really reflects the surroundings and ties it all in," says Gohring.

Floor-to-ceiling windows and French doors offer views of swaying palms and oak trees nestled into a well-appointed landscape by
Above: A slipcovered sectional sofa purchased during a trip to Santa Barbara years ago finds a new home in the family room. Below: A smart kitchen design includes pale blue cabinetry and double islands for easy prep work and visual interest. Opposite: Boosting the beat, views of the pool, the sunroom, and the spacious breakfast area are surrounded with Sunbrella fabrics covering all furniture surfaces. A pair of chick-a-dee twin beds, spotted at Cécile Furniture in Boston, made their way to Sea Island and become the focal point of this granddaughter’s room. The pool hall boudoir celebrates color with a Clarence House wallpaper and painted vanity sink.
David Westworth liked both mediterranean and freely blooming. A powerful cadence of sparkling pool water reflecting into the room makes it the perfect perch for Nicholson—a busy media and entertainment industry executive—to start her day.

Together with her sister, interior designer Cheryl Morrifield, they created a light and airy palette that complements those moments of calm throughout the home. “My wardrobe is mostly white, but I love to throw in a pop of color. I guess that transcends into how I thought about my home. Colors that draw my eye are either soothing or interesting,” she says. Painted white floors and ceiling beams brighten up the main volume of the home, while pure white wallpaper by Quadrille and Clarence House make a sophisticated splash. Nicholson and Morrifield implemented a more organic approach to decorating, collecting pieces over time and repurposing cherished items from past residences.

The bedrooms reflect on their memorable experiences for the family and their guests, whether sharing drinks at the dining table or relaxing by the pool. “We always know the family will be delighting in their coastal cottage all the more as they move to the island permanently. We’re building a new tradition for our grandchildren. Gathering on Long Island is the family’s greatest joy,” says Nicholson. “Their house is so charming, it just feels really good,” says Goshling. “It makes you want to come home.”