

Chic COASTAL Paradise

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Retro colors and modern décor make for a great escape.

THE BEST RETREATS ARE LIKE A BREATH OF FRESH AIR. DESIGNER Mona Ross Berman creates this feeling by combining bright white walls, cool modern sophistication and funky punches of color. The home away from home she created for her East Coast clients' Strathmere vacation home is as carefree as the summers spent there, thanks to unique furniture that is as fun as it is functional.

Mona's challenge was to recreate the nostalgia of generations of family summers spent in the South shore of New Jersey while creating a durable and practical space that would serve the family for years to come. The solution was a classic, light and airy beach house with retro colors that would give it a fun and inviting feel.



Color travels throughout the room, bouncing from the living-room curtains and pillows, to the modern art on the shared wall, then to the vivid palette of the dining table and finally landing on the bowl of fresh oranges for a final splash of color.





In the living room, strategically placed windows bring in light but leave room for custom built-ins. High ceilings with exposed beams maintain a classic beach-house look.

BUILT-IN SPACE

During the custom build, Mona suggested a few efficient and visually interesting features that would add to the breezy feel of the home. Architectural details like high ceilings with exposed beams gave it a classic beach-house aesthetic, while windows were added wherever possible.

The house needed to accommodate a large extended family, with members ranging in age and activity. To compensate for the wall space taken away by the extra windows, Mona implemented rows of built-in cabinets in the living room to offer convenient storage, making cleanup after playing board games and watching movies a breeze. The couple also expected frequent visits from guests passing through town, so the design had to be clean and open to allow for the constant traffic circling from indoors to outdoors.

A wet bar in the living room allows the adults to entertain inside, while a sprawling deck and outdoor natural shower adds convenience to the children's activities. Dark wood floors conceal trekked in sand for this no-fuss home. Mona selected white walls and ceilings to reflect light all summer long.

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DREAM THEME

Her clients wanted a retro vibe that would have an organic quality without being too rustic, so Mona came up with the concept of “1960s California-surfer chic”—a cool theme that set a clear vision for a relaxed backdrop enhanced by funky touches and the overall elegance of a destination home. Selecting a theme can help to focus a design and keep things on track, but be sure to use it only as a guiding principle to avoid making a home that looks like a movie set trapped in time, Mona advises. Refer to your overall vision when selecting colors and decorative elements with items that resonate with the feeling of your theme. The result will be a cohesive design with depth and character that tells an interesting story.

Part of creating the 1960s surfer feel was to use a retro color palette. The home's design originated



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with the dining-room table, which Mona modeled after a vintage table she'd seen in Miami Beach years before. "When you find something you love, you should build a room around it," she says. The bold colors and chevron pattern did just that, setting the tones for a color palette of turquoise, orange and lime-yellow.

To avoid overwhelming the home with color, Mona created cohesion through repetition. Seeing the same colors coordinated in a continuous order helps the eye grow accustomed to the palette rather than being surprised by it each time. To do this, she used color as a ribbon running through the center of the home's design. "There's a lot of color, but almost none of it is on the walls," Mona points out. Instead, the bright colors appear on throw pillows, vases, artwork, kitchen backsplash and wallpaper, harmoniously connecting each element.

A MODERN SPIN ON RETRO STYLE

To achieve the classic coastal look, Mona wanted an all-white backdrop that would also be modern in its minimalism. Modern elements were added in retro colors to offer a chic balance. Geometric patterns on colorful throw pillows and contemporary sculptures in retro orange warm up simple modern elements. Plastic shell chairs surround the vintage-inspired dining table and an unusual chandelier hangs above with cool elegance. "When people try to do minimalist-modern, they often do too much leather, too much chrome, too many cold materials," Mona observes. By opting for natural woods and mixing hardware, she was able to create warmth and unify styles. **Q**

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Bright throw pillows in geometric patterns blend retro and modern for a fun, fresh look. A wet bar in the living room is covered in natural wallpaper for extra warmth while entertaining.

Opposite: The palette of retro colors explodes on the chevron-patterned dining table. The look is balanced by modern Eames chairs and a warm yet contemporary chandelier.

The kitchen maintains the bright white feel of the rest of the house, while infusing color richly through the turquoise backsplash. With just a few other touches of retro color, such as the fine detail over the window, the palette moves seamlessly through each room.



THE Reality-Based DREAM HOME

Interior designer
Mona Ross Berman's tips on
creating a practical paradise.

Examine your lifestyle and be honest about how you live. Do you host cocktail parties? Do you freak out about spills? If the living room gets a lot of traffic, don't fool yourself into thinking you can make white carpets work.

Get creative with alternative options. If you absolutely have to have the white linen sofas, opt for slipcovers that can be removed and tossed in the washer. In the living room, Mona placed a vinyl woven rug that can be easily wiped with a sponge but has the look of expensive bamboo.

Be realistic with your budget. Classic architecture and custom built-ins are visually dynamic but can be costly. Ask the right questions. Can you make changes yourself or will you have to hire someone to add the aesthetic details you desire?

Decide where you can compromise. It sounds remarkably simple, but it comes down to being honest with your limits and then choosing the areas you're willing to work around to get the look you want. Mona chose marble countertops in the kitchen that are hard to maintain, but the family was willing to work with them to achieve the muted, minimalist look.



Top: Mona balanced modern lines like those found in the dining console by integrating natural materials like warm wood finishes. **Above left:** Kitchen accessories remain simple with just a few vases and bowls set out on the counters. These porcelain fish keep in line with the minimal look while giving a subtle nod to the coastal location. **Above right:** Mona feared that using only chrome and steel finishes in the kitchen would make the modern look too cold. Instead, she integrated brass handles with a contemporary shape to stay on track with her style.



The powder room has a vibrant pop of color with turquoise wallpaper in a modern geometric pattern. To balance the color, Mona chose a streamlined white pedestal sink and complemented it with simple accessories.



GET THE LOOK

Mona reveals how to recreate the retreat décor in your own home.

KEEP THE MYSTERY ALIVE

Part of the allure of this fresh and airy vacation home is that there are no distinguishing factors that tie it to a particular locale. "This house could be in the Hamptons or South Carolina. There's a classic feel to it," Mona says. It's this traditional vibe that makes a home transcend space and time, keeping it mysterious and captivating.

THINK HAPPY THOUGHTS

Nostalgia can be the greatest source of inspiration. If you're looking to re-create a feeling of a weekend retreat or distant paradise, think back to where you've experienced it before. Was it a cool hotel, somewhere in the country, or simply a feeling you had a certain time in your life? Retrace your steps and reinvent them.

PICTURE IT

Whether in your mind or on paper, collect images of places that inspire you. Use these as tools to model your home. Imagine the activities that will take place, and select patterns and colors that will complete the picture. Mona's favorite room in this beach house was the children's room, where she selected bunk beds and vintage wallpaper with sail boats. "It's fun to imagine the special memories they will have there," she says.

