



Architecture: Josh Youngner, Joshua G. Youngner Architect **Interior Design:** Mary Beth Wagner, Mary Beth Wagner Interiors
Home Builder: Jared Vann, Sea Island Company **Landscape Architecture:** Rachael Strickland, Sea Island Company



Away We Go

Infused with a vibrant spirit, a classic Sea Island, Georgia, cottage becomes the backdrop to memorable holidays.

WRITTEN BY MONIQUE MCINTOSH | PHOTOGRAPHY BY NATHAN SCHRODER



Made from coconut shells, a Serena & Lily Pescadero pendant floats above the entry of this Mediterranean-style cottage on the Georgia coast. A Kent mirror by Bunny Williams Home and wicker lamp with a block-print shade from The Lamp Shoppe accent the custom chest.

S

ea Island, Georgia, has always been a sentimental destination for designer Mary Beth Wagner. From her first fateful visit there more than two decades ago, Wagner and her husband, John, fell hard for the resort community. Between sunbaked

afternoons by the ocean and languid bike rides past live oaks dripping with Spanish moss, “We decided right then and there that we would make this our summer tradition,” Wagner shares. Three children and many joyful beach holidays later, the picturesque enclave has become the backdrop to myriad milestones and memories. So, in 2018, they claimed a quintessential Mediterranean-style cottage as their own.

Distinguished by its clay-tiled roof, sheltered courtyard and interior rooms with vaulted ceilings, the abode feels tucked away into its surroundings overlooking the Ocean Forest golf course, its serenity interrupted only by the occasional grazing deer. Over time, the couple realized a renovation would be necessary to extract the most out of their vacation home—while also providing a canvas for Wagner’s well-honed design instincts. Her vision? A “comfortable, elegant and eclectic” retreat exuding the island’s classic coastal allure. For the redo, the owners found an ideal partner in architect Josh Youngner, who had already led renovations of the Ocean Forest clubhouse—itsself a paradigm of Sea Island Mediterranean vernacular.

Youngner and Wagner’s first instinct was to dissolve some of the home’s boundaries for more fluid, luminous spaces. They installed “very thin, rail-and-stile windows and doors, which ensured more glazing and more light,” Youngner explains. The original layout was “designed at a time when living and kitchen spaces were still separated,” he notes. Thus, removing the wall blocking the kitchen from central gathering areas freed up kitchen designer Maureen Hodor to transform the area per Wagner’s vision: with appliance-concealing white oak cabinetry, sleek quartz countertops and a burnished brass hood.

Although Youngner borrowed square footage from a side courtyard to establish a practical new pantry and powder room, outdoor gatherings on the property have never felt diminished. Landscape architect Rachael Strickland followed suit with a new pool terrace of cast-stone pavers, then enhanced the lush surroundings by adding a putting

green and inviting teak seating areas lined with crushed coquina shells.

Part of the fun for Wagner was reimagining how relocated rooms might function. Because the home boasted an outdoor dining space and intimate indoor breakfast nook, the designer forwent a formal dining room altogether, choosing instead to establish a colorful sitting room between the kitchen and backyard. Placing a cluster of barrel swivel chairs in the space “just felt more casual for a vacation home,” Wagner notes. Now, “Everyone gravitates here to have their morning cup of coffee.”

In the main living space, the designer similarly eschewed formality in favor of a deep sectional and complementary club chairs in a relaxed ikat print. Moreover, Wagner’s choices throughout the home reflect her love of “transitional mixed with the unexpected,” she explains. For example: Antique elements, seen in French bergère chairs and burl wood accents, balance playful coastal details such as seashells and nautical rope.

Further additions nod to Sea Island’s distinctive milieu. Specifically, Wagner slathered the family room fireplace with tabby, a signature Lowcountry stucco made from mortar mixed with local shells. Here, builder Jared Vann helped source the perfect blend of mottled colors and textures, even going so far as to lead Wagner on a tour of nearby tabby-adorned homes to explore potential applications.

The uniqueness of the completed residence is evident in its every finish, wallcovering and print—from the custom palmetto mural found on walls flanking the main living space and sitting room, to the paisley-adorned headboard in the primary bedroom, to an abstract wallpaper in a powder room that was inspired by sailors’ valentines. “I prefer the mix over the matchy-matchy,” assures Wagner, who plucked fresh hues of green, pink, buttercup yellow and every shade of sky blue directly from the subtropical landscape—as well as botanical paintings by Southern artists including Carlyle Wolfe Lee and Arienne Lepretre.

Oozing classic Sea Island charm, yet brightened for modern life, the Wagners’ getaway reflects their family at every turn, with festive spaces that set the stage for sun-soaked holidays. It’s the backdrop to pool parties, animated alfresco afternoons and lively lunches following rounds of golf. But it just as seamlessly hosts the many moments of stillness spent savoring nature’s tranquility. As Wagner has learned by returning here year after year: “It’s a great place to be when you’re doing nothing at all.”



Above: Inspired by the indigenous palmettos dotting the surrounding landscape, a palm-adorned Caitlin McGauley grass-cloth wallcovering accents the main living space. A scalloped rattan console by Mainly Baskets Home and a bergère chair covered in Taj linen by Peter Dunham Textiles complete the vignette.

Opposite: The same wallcovering appears in the sitting room, which is outfitted with A. Rudin swivel chairs and an RH chandelier. A sunburst mirror from Pierce & Parker Interiors presides over a custom sideboard wrapped in a pale-blue Phillip Jeffries grass cloth.



Left: The intimate in-kitchen dining nook centers around an oval RH table and Caribou chairs by Ochre. Fabricated by Island Drapes and Upholstery, the window treatments feature Houles fabric. The artwork is by Arieenne Lepretre.

Opposite: A Karen Smidth painting hangs above the family room sofa featuring Perennials upholstery and throw pillows in Vanderhurdt textiles. A custom coffee table joins the John Himmel Decorative Arts ottoman and armchairs.





Right: The home's whimsical nature is well evidenced in this powder room. Spiro's vibrant Kandilli wallpaper, an antique mirror encrusted with seashells and Visual Comfort & Co. sconces adorn the space.

Opposite: Benjamin Moore's Wickham Gray blankets the primary bedroom. Playful prints punctuate the space—from the headboard upholstered in Raoul Textiles' Kashmir paisley to a side table covered in Schumacher's Mrs. Howell linen.





Above: To amplify outdoor living options, architect Josh Youngner incorporated an expanded pool terrace where RH lounge chairs compose an idyllic retreat. Poolside views can be better appreciated indoors, too, thanks to arched windows with narrow stiles by Marvin.

Opposite: Landscape architect Rachael Strickland reimagined these areas by incorporating new spaces suited to outdoor gatherings. Within a patio filled with native coquina shells, a teak lounge set by RH holds court with a ceramic garden stool from The Vine Garden Market.

