COMFORT ZONE

BEACHY ACCENTS AND PERSONAL TOUCHES MAKE A FAMILY FEEL RIGHT AT HOME ON BALD HEAD ISLAND, NORTH CAROLINA

BY MARISA SPYKER • PHOTOGRAPHS BY TRIA GIOVAN • STYLING BY ELIZABETH BEELER
he called it The Blue Pearl. The lonely cottage that rose from the beach
grass on the banks of Bald Head Island was
painted a delicate shade of sea foam blue, and
it had been a must-see on Tiffany McWhorter’s jogging route
for years. “I was in love,” she says. “It was sitting there sad
and vacant, but I knew it had so much potential. It was one of
those things I always thought I’d only dream about owning.”
Fortunately, some dreams do come true. After the four-
bedroom house sat untouched on the market for years, the
list price came down—and Tiffany and her husband, Fred, a
home remodeler, were first in line to buy it. “We knew that it
needed to be totally renovated on the inside,” says Tiffany,
who runs a home decor shop on the island. “But that’s what
attracted us to it. We could start from scratch and turn it into
an incredible home for our family.”
The couple tackled the project together, starting with the
home’s dark Ponderosa pine–clad shell. “It looked like an old
hunting lodge inside,” says Fred. Adds Tiffany, “I don’t think
anything had been updated since the ’80s, but the structure
wasn’t necessarily in bad shape.” So, rather than stripping
the walls and ceilings completely, they opted to cover them
with glossy white paint, ridding the home of its cave-like feel
and instantly brightening the rooms. To make the interiors
more beach-friendly, Fred replaced wall-to-wall carpeting
with oak floors washed in a weathered gray.
The layout—a wide-open living space flanked on both sides
by wings featuring two bedrooms and baths each—was just
right for the couple and their teenage daughters, Carson and
Wallis, except for one minor setback: a small, galley-style
kitchen. “Our world centers around cooking,” says Tiffany.
“If we’re not outside, we’re usually in the kitchen, so we
needed enough room to work.” To increase square footage
without taking away from the living and dining rooms, the
McWhorters took down an exterior wall and borrowed space
from a screened-in porch. The kitchen was completely gutted
of its dark-pine cabinetry, replaced with modern materials
like a granite-topped island, stainless steel countertops and
appliances, and a mosaic backsplash. “We chose a shimmery
white tile because it reminded me of the pearly shells we
pick up at the beach,” says Tiffany.
Jars filled with those pearly shells are one of many beachy
items that Tiffany used to decorate the interiors—in fact, the
style of the home was directed
by one sea-inspired piece in particular: a glass-and-seashell chandelier she had specially
made by North Carolina artist Louise Gaskill for the dining
area’s wooden table from a
neighbor and painted it white.
The chairs are from Dovetail
Furniture, and the two lamps
behind the sofa are from
Lampworks.
room. “I asked the artist to use vintage blue glass to bring in the colors of the ocean,” she says. “Then I planned the subtle blue and green accents throughout the rest of the home around that piece.” Shades of sea foam, teal, and blue punctuate the living areas—from a pair of glass table lamps to a collection of vibrant tableware in the dining room display cabinet—and flow into the bedrooms, where the master’s blue-and-green patterned duvet and accent pillows add a lively touch. “I kept the decor simple but comfortable,” says Tiffany. “I didn’t want any one element to take away from the views. What’s important is what’s out those windows.”

That’s where you’ll catch the family exploring the island by bike together, or admiring the sunset while hunting for shells. “We’ll often see dolphins or huge ships sailing by from the shore,” says Fred. “The view just goes on forever.” The beach is what brought the McWhorters to Bald Head Island many years ago, and it’s where Tiffany snagged what would become her most prized possessions in the home today: framed black-and-white family photos she took when her daughters were young. “The girls have grown up here,” she says. “Having those personal photos reminds me of all the great memories we’ve had on the island.” And The Blue Pearl is sure to provide for many more.

For more information, see Sources, page 119.