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Sea Change

A trio of designers creates a new take on understated beach chic.

By Alexandria Abramian-Mott
Photography by Karyn Millet

When interior designer Taylor Borsari got a call from longtime clients to completely gut their 4,000-square-foot, coast-hugging Laguna Beach house, she quickly realized she wouldn't be able to tackle the project on her own.

"I was pregnant with my first child when I started this house and the thought of everything that would be involved, plus flying to California all the time, sent me into a panic," says the Orange County native, who now lives in Las Vegas. So Borsari, who previously worked for Michael S. Smith, called upon fellow Smith alum Parrish Chilcoat and Joe Lucas, of Lucas Studio Inc and showroom Harbinger, to help execute the job. "By the time we finished it was three and a half years later," Borsari says. "I had not one but two kids. And I never, ever could have done this on my own."

And no, this wasn't a case of too many decorators messing with the mood board. Instead, after the clients agreed to have three designers work on their weekend getaway house, Borsari, Chilcoat and Lucas crafted a singular vision for the two-story house, one that took typical beach décor and turned it on its side. "We didn't want to go the expected red, white and blue route," says Lucas. "We were looking to do something more that would feel more restrained than that, so it turned out to be more about reining in the color and focusing

LOUNGE ACT The designers chose weather-resistant, high-style pieces for poolside relaxation. The limestone coffee table from Big Daddy's Antiques is paired with seating from Janus et Cie's Amalfi Collection.





Opposite page: Custom-designed sofas, the Jasper Evan coffee table and petrified wood stumps from Berbere Imports create a comfortable and chic living room environment. Massimo Vitali's 2009 "Volcano Sea Ferry" photo hangs above the sofa. Right: Vintage chairs and custom-made chairs were used in the dining room. Urban Electric Company's Virginia lantern hangs above the table, while Mortyn Lawrence-Bullard's oversized mirror from Thomas Loain leans on the wall.



on interesting shapes and textures, and really layering those elements. The idea was to make it beachy, but not in the cliché way."

Clam shells, sea coral and anchor art? It all went overboard. And in their place, says Borsari, was a far simpler plan: Let the 180-degree ocean views star. "The entire design is about keeping the views as the focal point, so everything else has to really play into that idea. But we also kept in mind that even though we wanted the palette to be restrained, we didn't want

this to be another beige Orange County beach house, because we've seen plenty of those before."

Throughout the house, from the upstairs open-plan living, dining and kitchen area to the lower level's bedrooms, the trio of designers relied on lots of texture, organic patterns and plenty of unexpected shapes and materials to create a quiet version of oceanfront elegance.

"Nothing jumps out at you here," says Lucas. "You really have to look, and then the design sort of unfolds quietly."



Opposite page: The master bedroom sitting area features a rug from the Michael Smith Collection for Mansour Modern, an inlaid dresser from Big Daddy's Antiques and a vintage painting from JF Chen. Clockwise from far left: The Moroccan guest room has a custom-made headboard upholstered in Jasper's Eden Square fabric. A view from the pool guest room looking into the bath includes a vintage mirror and ceiling pendant from Hudson Valley Lighting. Ann Sacks tile and antique Paul Ferrante lighting was used in the kitchen.





"We wanted the palette to be restrained, but we didn't want this to be another beige Orange County beach house, because we've seen plenty of those before."

"Even the fireplace in the living room," says Borsari. "We spent a lot of time thinking about how it could be textural and interesting without stealing the scene. So we went with this sparkling graphic tile. It's dramatic without jumping out at you, which is really what we were looking to achieve throughout."

While creating an understated beach house, the designers also had to keep the clients—and their three kids—in mind. Homeowners Dana and Anne White, also based in Las Vegas, use the house as a weekend retreat. Dana is the president of the Ultimate Fighting Championship, and while he doesn't bring his professional life home to Laguna, the decorators didn't take any chances with their work.

"We used a ton of outdoor fabrics inside so that you can have the windows open as much as possible and things are almost impossible to stain," says Borsari.

And pretty much every textile was given the Nanotex treatment, a surface protector that makes liquids repel. "It gives a bulletproof vest to every piece of upholstered furniture in the house," says Lucas. "Because when the family is here, they use every inch of it and we didn't want to make something precious that would fall apart the minute sand got on it."

The designers say they dodged another decorating bullet when the daughter requested a princess bedroom. Instead of doing a pink-on-pink-on-lavender canopied bed with all of the frilly trimmings, they opted for a highly whimsical wallpaper treatment that delivers a sense of feminine whimsy without evoking the Magic Kingdom. "This is a room that the daughter can really enjoy until she's a teenager," says Chilcoat. "And like the rest of the house, there's a timelessness to it that means they can enjoy the house for years to come." ■

Opposite page: A striking lighting piece from Bourgeois Bohème illuminates the stairwell. Custom-made sofas are covered in Icarica Gazzoni linen, available through Harbinger. The antique coffee tables are from Sentiments. Above: The girl's room is whimsical without going princess. Fremental wallpaper is mixed with a canopy bed from Anthropologie and a custom-quilted bedspread made from Peter Dunham's Arabesque fabric.