

WEATHERED
MATERIALS AND
ETHEREAL HUES
LEND A NEW
BEACH HOUSE
AN OLD SOUL.

PAST PERFECT



INTERIOR DESIGN BY OHARA DAVIES-GAETANO
PHOTOGRAPHY BY RICHARD POWERS
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An 18th-century Italian painted ceiling infuses the dining room with subtle color and patina. Custom table. Custom chairs in Browning & Chandler fabric and Samuel & Sons trim. Chandelier, Niermann Weeks. Italian 18th-century cabinet. Rug, Caravan Rug Corp. Curtains of Leitner fabric. OPPOSITE: A French limestone door surround sets the stately mood.

Retractable steel doors open the great room to Pacific Ocean views. Custom chairs in Colefax and Fowler fabric. Custom daybed in Ralph Lauren Home fabric with Samuel & Sons trim. Antique mantel, Phoenician Stone. Curtains of Cowtan & Tout fabric. Valance in Rogers & Goffigon fabric. Antique rug, JH Minassin & Co.

“THE INTERIORS ARE LIKE A FOGGY MORNING. BUT WHEN THE SUN IS SHINING BRIGHTLY, THE WHOLE HOUSE COMES TO LIFE.”





BEAUTIFUL OLD ARCHITECTURAL ELEMENTS CAN BE PRESENTED IN A CLEAN, MODERN WAY.

They can speak of the past, but without the ponderousness. They can even be recast as lighthearted players in a fresh new drama that's all about la dolce vita, American style.

Or so goes the thinking behind this new California beach house planted in the sands of Orange County. Its owners, Laureen and David Demshur, live in Houston, and they wanted a magical place to unwind in style with friends on long weekends. When it came to decorating, they were open to suggestions. But one thing was certain—they didn't want the house to scream its newness. So, in a counterintuitive stroke of genius, they hired the youngest decorator on their short list, Ohara Davies-Gaetano, to give it some depth and a good whiff of the past. "I'm young, but with an old soul," the Newport Beach-based designer says with a smile. "I'm a big believer that a brand-new house shouldn't feel like one."



The gilded four-poster in the master bedroom seems to float above reclaimed French wood planks. Swedish 18th-century daybed in Colefax and Fowler fabric. Daybed pillow in Schumacher fabric. Antique French commodes. Lamps, the Mermaid's Palace. Headboard, Baker. Bed linens, Sferra. Coverlet, SDH Linens. Throw, Adrienne Landau. OPPOSITE, TOP: Custom settee in Nancy Corzine fabric. Art, Nick Gaetano (above fireplace), and Dusty Griffith (right). OPPOSITE, BOTTOM: Italian 18th-century door and sink, Compas Stone.



A custom-made tapestry softens a wall of 18th-century rubble stone. French 19th-century table. OPPOSITE: Chandeliers, Niermann Weeks. Range, La Cornue.



A timeworn feeling seemed like the right mood for the French Provincial–inspired house with heart-stopping views of the Pacific. Davies-Gaetano began a quest for old furnishings and weathered salvage to incorporate into the architecture. “I dragged my fiancé to Europe and charted a course through France, Belgium, Italy, and Spain,” she recalls. “It’s not glamorous—we were dirty, hungry, and cold—but it’s amazing when you find something perfect.”

The rest is, quite literally, history. In the dining room, an 18th-century bookcase, used as a cabinet, comes from a Sicilian nunnery. Airy chandeliers are composites of old Italian altar sticks and antique parts put together by a husband-and-wife team whom Davies-Gaetano encountered in the south of France. Gypsum plaster walls in tranquil hues make a calm backdrop. Their mineral sheen picks up flecks in the flooring of reclaimed limestone block with a softly worn surface—a cool kiss on bare feet.

Because the couple entertain guests nonstop when they’re at the beach, they needed their getaway to be cozy and functionally modern. The great room opens onto a loggia perched over the surf, and Davies-Gaetano designed for it an oversize coffee table as a practical span for the wineglasses and snack plates that weekends generate. Upstairs, she conceived the master bedroom as a serene spot where the Demshurs could take respite from all the fun. For the sitting area, she found a limestone mantelpiece with a heart etched over a date: 1816. “It’s absolutely sweet,” she says.

Considering that this house was put together with fragments from so many far-flung structures, what’s amazing, in the end, is its sense of continuity. From the basement’s hangout spot around a gateleg table to the kitchen’s bas-relief inset over a La Cornue range, an ethereal texture envelops everything in its matte softness. “Like a foggy morning,” Davies-Gaetano observes. “But when the sun is shining brightly, the whole house comes to life.” □

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