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Architectural design: Gina Finocchiaro created an accent wall of seashells for a beach house. PHOTO BY JEREM JONES PHOTOGRAPHY

SHELL ACCENT WALLS, GRASSCLOTH, TURQUOISE AND LARGE-PATTERNED DHURRIES ARE JUST A FEW OF THE LATEST TRENDS IN BEACH-HOME STYLE.

BY CHRISTIANNA MCCAUSLAND

The homes of the mid-Atlantic's seashore communities epitomize coastal style. Whether on the beach in Ocean City or a creek on the Eastern Shore, the look is casual and calming, creating a style that makes its owners feel like every day is a vacation. Gina Finocchiaro, AIA, owner of Finocchiaro Design Associates and the Annapolis-based home furnishings store Details of Design, specializes in coastal homes. She calls this look "Chesapeake City."

"I find that people in this region gravitate to a more comfortable, functional, tailored interior with a more eclectic look and natural materials," she explains. "People like open floor plans — it's a more casual way of life."

NATURAL BEAUTY

According to Finocchiaro, people go wrong when they try to create a coastal look with too many framed pieces of lightboxes or artwork. She recommends moving away from the blinch and keeping things real by focusing on materials made by Mother Nature. In a recent show house Finocchiaro created an accent wall of seashells, for example, as tiles she came up with while sitting on the half shell in Rehoboth.

"A lot of tiles and backslashes are framed small pictures," she adds. "How wrong can you go with something that draws right out of nature?"

This is a sentiment echoed by architect Jim Hill, AIA, principal of Hill Architects in Bethesda, who says the selection of materials is important for a coastal home to withstand

COASTAL CURRENTS

GREEN BY THE SEA

A MODERN BEACH HOUSE COMBINES GREEN LIVING WITH ARTFUL SPACES.



the elements. In the past, coastal homes were covered with coat after coat of paint. Now he is using more stained woods on home exteriors or green materials such as Hardiplank siding that embrace today's trend toward eco-friendly living while also providing durability.

"You want to use materials that are low maintenance, high trafficking and sand- and water-resistant," he says. The same is true for home interiors. While the outside might need to withstand hurricane winds, waterfront houses need to stand up to big gatherings of family and friends. Rill favors stamped concrete floors and wood paneling on walls.

"We use little to no drywall because it doesn't stand up well to moisture and sand, to people walking inside with wet towels and boogie boards. People are on vacation — they want to be able to spill some wine and not worry about it."

While most wallpaper is considered too formal for the coastal home, grass-cloth wallpapers are on trend now and are another way to bring a look inspired by nature into the home's interior. These papers bring texture to a room and can be helpful when trying to cover wall imperfections.

PLAY WITH COLOR

Perhaps the most notable trend in coastal living is the use of color. Pops of coral, green or yellow now liven up the traditional blue and white scheme. "I love to use blue because it creates that relationship with the water that just makes sense," notes Kelley Praxmire, owner of Kelley Interior Design in Bethesda. "But now I'm pairing different shades of blue with color. For example, in a home on the Eastern Shore I'm using orange. Orange is a hot color these days, and it makes the room less predictable."

Even the blues themselves are getting more vibrant. The soft seaglass shades that are perennially popular are giving way to brighter turquoise and emerald. If committing to color is a little intimidating, update those cool blues with geometric patterned throw pillows in hot colors, but think polka dots and stripes, as florals are passé.

MIX IT UP

The carefree mentality induced by proximity to the water translates into an unfussy interior. To achieve the coastal casual look, leave the matching suites of glossy,





Opposite: This vignette by Fitzsimmons is a good example of a tasteful way to display beach-themed accessories.

ANNE GUMME

Above:

A porch by Proxmire shows a mix of textures and a modern take on a traditional blue and white coastal palette.

PHOTO BY
ANGIE SECKINGER.

"Pay attention to mixing up finishes and styles, and that extends to the outdoors, too, whether it be a patio or porch."

Kelley Proxmire, owner of
Kelley Interior Design

dark wood furniture in the city. The beach style is more eclectic and relaxed as epitomized by weathered or whitewashed wood furniture.

"Pay attention to mixing up finishes and styles, and that extends to the outdoors, too, whether it be a patio or porch," says Proxmire. She says it's not uncommon now to see a dining room table surrounded by eight different chairs or furniture of different materials — teak, iron — in combination. "Have some creativity and ingenuity when you're thinking about furniture."

Upholstered furnishings have become more tailored, evidenced by the current trend toward square, straight arms on sofas and chairs. With that comes a more tidy look. "Slipcovers are big again, although they're not the sloppy ones of the past," says Fiona Weeks, co-owner of Dwelling & Design in Easton. The use of outdoor fabrics indoors has become common — they are fade-resistant and handle spills and roughhousing with aplomb — but the new lines have a softer hand and are available in linens and even chenille. "Linen prints are preferable to cotton prints simply because they offer more texture and a more casual look," Weeks adds.

CREATE THE UNEXPECTED

Certain materials are a given for a coastal home, like sisal rugs and beadboard. To modernize the look, use

these elements in unexpected ways. Beadboard, for example, is commonly used on the wall with a chair rail. However, in a project on the Severn River, Fitzsimmons used it to frame the ceiling, like crown moulding. In another project she's placed it inside a recessed ceiling.

"Sisal rugs and carpeting are still being used," says Dwelling & Design's Weeks, "but usually with an interesting woven pattern. Flat woven carpets such as dhurries have made a comeback. The patterns are large-scale and fun."

The use of outdoor carpets inside has become a popular choice for high-traffic areas like the kitchen and for porches. Kelley Proxmire likes those made by Bolon because the brand offers a range of colors and patterns, "and you can literally take it outside and hose it off," she adds.

APPROPRIATE ACCESSORIES

There is something about a home on the water that seems to attract inappropriate accessories, like one too many "Gone Fishin'" signs painted on driftwood or an overabundance of crab-embellished throw pillows. The experts agree, when it comes to accessories it's best to edit, edit and edit again.

"If you have a lot of little shells you've collected then put them all together on an attractive tray where they



The "Lynnheven" shell lamp by Currey & Company is available at Dwelling & Design.



will have more impact than all spread out," Proxmire states. "Also, I like the drama of going big, like having one large shell on a table."

In her project that featured the oyster-shell wall, Gina Fitzsimmons points out that the wall was the coastal accent in the room with only a few subtle pieces to complement it. To create a division between the kitchen and the living area in that project (and to mask the sink) she, too, went for high drama, placing one large nickel fish on the island. In the home on the Severn River she created a well-balanced coastal tableau by grouping over a console table tasteful antique seagull prints found in an old book and framing the whole with reclaimed shutters.

Lighting tends to be clean-lined and simple, too. "Antique boat lights converted for household use are used frequently, and, of course, there are always the fail-safe polished nickel lanterns," says Weeks. "Our best-selling lamps are two styles made from oyster shells." For those wanting a less marine-inspired look, Weeks recommends frosted glass lamps, available in many colors, or the ever-popular ceramic guard lamp.

Perhaps what sets the coastal style apart is that it is as much about a feeling as a look. When one steps into a beach or bay house there's an immediate feeling of comfort and a laid-back sensibility that encourages sandy feet on the coffee table, sunset cocktails on the patio, and fishing rods and flip-flops to be abandoned in the hallways. The line between the indoors and outdoors blurs in the coastal home so, at its best, the décor becomes a backdrop to the pursuit of a lifestyle.