

# Escape Artist

TAKING ITS CUES FROM FAR-FLUNG LANDS, A NEW JERSEY BEACH HOUSE BECOMES A DESTINATION UNTO ITSELF.

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**L**ucy O'Brien can perform magic tricks with color, and this rambling beachfront residence on the Jersey Shore is proof. "It's a very particular house," the designer notes, pointing to the late-2000s, French-Norman-influenced architecture. Having recently received a slick, all-white interior makeover, the dwelling felt at odds with its own vernacular language—especially the ornate moldings throughout. "We didn't want to rip everything out, which tends to be what they do in Shore houses in this area," the designer recalls. "Instead of gutting, we decided to lean into the architecture, modernize things and just create a sort of magical oasis." And so, what started as a humble refresh became a full-throttle redecoration.

The clients essentially gave O'Brien carte blanche, tasking her with creating a family vacation home with all the luxurious comforts and delicious design moments of a boutique hotel. The approach whirling in the designer's mind—Marrakech and Jaipur meet the Shore—was amenable to the homeowners, as was her directive of "Let's decorate this place to the hilt!"

In the spirit of embracing the architectural detailing, O'Brien looked to historic residences and places of worship across Morocco and India, gathering particular inspiration from Udaipur's fanciful City Palace, which "really helped to solidify the living room palette and the interweaving of gold as an accent color throughout," she says. "It also inspired me to utilize the moldings to create a geometric pattern, as opposed to painting everything one solid color."

It's not exactly easy to make a home with 20-foot ceilings feel warm, but this tactic and other Indophile leanings helped. In a space with "billions of windows," per O'Brien, "layers of saturation, texture and pattern make each spot feel cozy." The eclectic schemes also produced a superpower that the designer didn't expect, especially in the aforementioned living room, where soft pastel

paint colors coat every inch of wall space. "Now that there's so much decoration, you can actually see the ocean better," O'Brien muses. "The space was so white and glaring before. Now, the eye has somewhere to rest—out to the sea."

The homeowners' impressive art collection provides another pleasing focal point that the designer was careful to highlight. Take the dining room, where a prized piece by Alex Katz pops against walls painted a cool shade of periwinkle, a hue pulled directly from the subject's bathing suit. Tucked under the crown molding, the addition of ribbon trim adds maximalist élan, enhanced by a graphic rug and drapes as well as vintage chairs re-covered in chartreuse velvet.

Even rooms designed specifically for the couple's grandkids received a more-is-more treatment. To maximize sleeping space within their small floor plans, O'Brien constructed bunks, adorning them in stripes and scallops in one room, and tortoiseshell as rendered by a decorative painter in another. Leaving no stone unturned, she also transformed the corridor leading to the bunk rooms, now affectionately nicknamed the Gumdrop Hallway, with playful globe lights purchased in Denmark and wallpaper depicting jungle flora and fauna. Together, they give what could otherwise feel like summer camp the tinge of a distant sojourn.

Naturally, the unfettered aesthetic continues alfresco as well. For a terrace overlooking the ocean, O'Brien commissioned an Indian wedding tent as ornate as an engraved brass tea tray. "We got it specifically made because there was no overhead, and it was so incredibly hot," she says. "It gives it functionality and sun protection but also whimsy."

And like any Instagram-worthy boutique hotel, the place is thronged—especially during the summer months, when beachside is the place to be. Before the renovation, the clients' family visited, but now, impromptu house calls and extended stays are much more frequent. "Everybody is coming down; all their children and grandchildren," O'Brien says. "It is a house that draws people, and it's been really special to be involved." ■

A livingroom vignette bringstextiles into focus, from Pierre Frey draperies to Marigold Living pillows to a Fermoie shade atop a Bunny Williams Home lamp. The side table is from KRB and the sectional was fabricated by Rhoads Crossing.

Previous page: Multiple paint colors, including a base coat of Farrow & Ball's Green Blue, enhance the ornate moldings. A Patterson Flynn rug grounds a vintage British Colonialdaybed, Made Goods coffeetableand custom upholstered pieces.



Provides much needed  
an array of Brown  
joined by a cast-stone

