



A quirky woven porter's chair, gilded starburst mirror, and lime walls (painted Light Green by Benjamin Moore) set a dressed-down vibe in the living room.

GEORGIA ISLE REVIVAL

A classic 1970s beach house on Sea Island hits the color jackpot—cue vividly reimagined rooms and modern salutes to the island's iconic Southern style



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A great beach house entrance is all about ... balance and relatability. “You can put forth a really pretty, polished air in an entryway, but still make sure it relates well to its beachy setting,” says designer Kevin Isbell. Here, the hall tables and mirror are gilded antiques, but they are paired with informal sisal and rattan, plus a playful green vintage chandelier. “The door is original, but we painted it this great blue to dial down the formality right from the start.” The floral Romo wallpaper, Isbell adds, is a modern take on the traditional patterns seen in Cloister guest rooms. “It’s a nod to the island’s history.”



The genius of using latticework is ... that it makes you feel like you’re sitting outside in a gazebo, says Isbell. He got the idea for the breakfast room wall detail from some original latticework on the windows. “We ended up stripping away that lattice to clear the view to the pool, and instead wrapped the walls in the pattern,” he explains. The gazebo idea was also what inspired the apple green wall color (Key Lime by Benjamin Moore). “It feels very outdoorsy,” says Isbell, who upholstered the chairs and banquette in outdoor-rated vinyl and used a moisture- and stain-resistant treatment on the Moroccan-inspired fabric. “The whole room is super low maintenance,” he says.

Apple green walls and painted chandeliers, whitewashed brick and whiter-still stucco—this isn’t garden-variety Sea Island, says interior designer Kevin Isbell. “Yet it 100 percent belongs.” The home’s setting on an historic isle off the coast of Georgia is perhaps best known for its preeminent resort, The Cloister, and its long history as a five-star, marsh-cloaked escape for a who’s who of 20th-century notables, from sitting presidents to business tycoons. “Like so many historic escapes—Palm Beach and Nantucket, for example—Sea Island has its own style and traditions,” explains Isbell, noting the arched Mediterranean-style facades and classically Southern decorating elements associated with the resort. “And as with anywhere, you have to learn the rules before you can break them.”

His clients, a young New England couple who married on the island close to a decade ago, were game. “I told Kevin, ‘I want a house that fits us, but that still fits in here,’” says the wife. The one they found—a U-shaped Southern coastal meets modern Mediterranean hybrid—

had some pretty solid selling points for a family whose escapes would center on swim, sun, and surf. Not only is the beach club just a short three-block walk away, but the horseshoe-shaped footprint of the main house wraps a courtyard pool. With a crew of four young swimmers, having a view of the pool deck from all sides struck them as a pretty dreamy setup. That the interiors were too formal was something the couple knew they could remedy. They also needed to add a bedroom and rethink the outdoor area. “The pool house was so close to the main building that it nearly closed the U,” notes Isbell. “They needed room to stretch out, to relax and play.”

He teamed up with local architect Thad Truett to add a master suite, open up the pool area, and reimagine the 1970s home in a way that syncs better with the owners’ sensibilities but also honors the island’s storied sense of style. “I wanted color, and plenty of it,” says the wife with a laugh. “It needed to feel fresh and fun.” Here, Isbell’s lessons for turning a formal, buttoned-up beach home into a colorful, kid-friendly vacation pad that’s as relaxed as it is beautifully refined.



A smart way to emphasize the outdoors is ... to go with natural hues indoors. “Natural palettes, like sand and woody darker browns, work well with what’s out the window,” says Isbell. On the sunroom’s soaring domed ceiling, for example, he opted for pecky cypress paneling, and below it, chose a taupe trellis-pattern sofa fabric, a sandy-hued Ming-style coffee table, and a pair of rattan armchairs the owners found in the attic. A series of arched windows and French doors are new, but were styled after the home’s originals.



White shiplap walls call for ...

a riot of color in the furnishings. “We wanted to go a little crazy here,” says Isbell of the pool house living room, where aside from a few naturals, such as a sea grass rug and a raffia-covered coffee table, all of the varied hues are bold. Painted green side tables, a sofa upholstered in a John Rosselli tie-dye patterned fabric, and yellow drip-glaze pottery lamps sing against a crisscross blue-and-green print by China Seas on an armchair and stool. “We even trimmed the draperies in a lilac tape,” says Isbell. “That helps tie the color of the furnishings to the white walls.”

Choose shell-encrusted furnishings that ...

have a bit of history to them. “I always look for pieces that are old and very well designed,” says Isbell. For instance, this mirror has an artful symmetry, particularly along the sides, “and a great color scheme that goes with anything,” he notes. “Shells are a tricky category of decor because they can come off kitschy or chaotic, but a great vintage discovery—we found this one right here in the house, amid renovations!—can bring so much fun to a beach house.”



Kids' bedrooms need to be ... very adaptable. Isbell designed the daughters' “pink room” (painted Tippy Toes by Benjamin Moore) to be sneakily versatile. The purple, yellow, blues, and neutrals are all tied together in the drapery fabric, so if the girls—now 8 and 6—decide pink is out, the room can go an entirely different direction without replacing any furniture. Isbell lined the rock-and-roll drum shade in disco-hot silver foil.



To create the ultimate guest room ...

blend the most soothing and striking colors of the shore, from soft blues to hot turquoise, marshy greens to sunset coral, with organically inspired elements. In this pool house bedroom, Isbell layered the coastal hues over a foundation of naturals like a sea grass rug, wicker bench, and 1970s faux-bamboo headboard. “The right mix of colors and textures reminds us where we are, which brings its own brand of serenity,” he says. ■