

beach views, inviting rooms, easy style

Designer Ashley Gilbreath offers fresh ideas for creating the perfect beach getaway.

Text by ELEANOR LYNN NESMITH

Photos: JEFF HERR



Large-scale furnishings and accessories combine with a neutral color palette to create a cohesive flow in a relatively small beach condo. ABOVE: In the living room, two pieces of oversized art make a big impact. RIGHT: Build-in bunk beds allow the two-bedroom home to accommodate more guests. BELOW: The peninsula frames a compact, efficient kitchen while providing space for seating and casual beach entertaining.



home away from home

Rosemary Beach

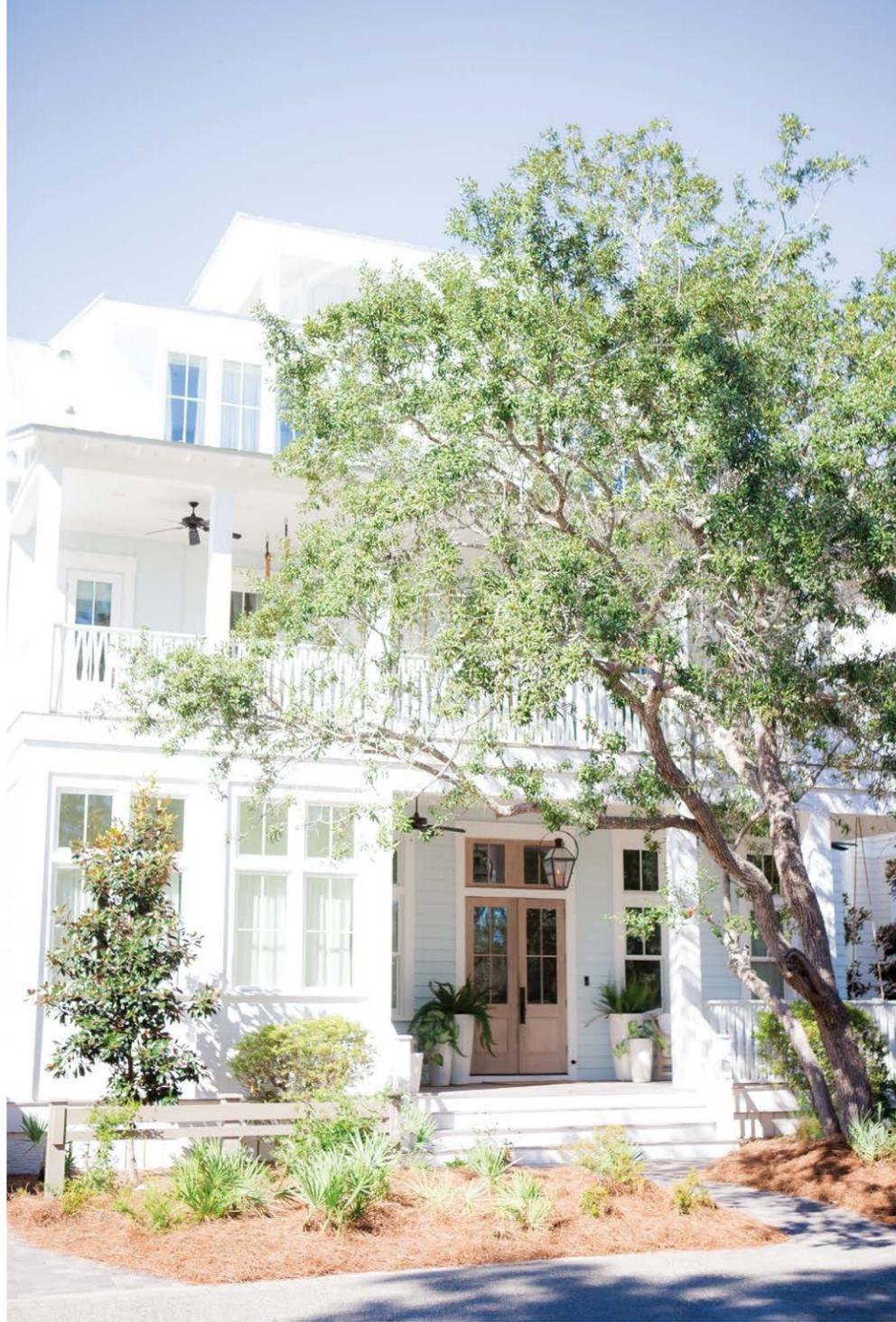
Photos by: LAUREY GLENN

For her own place in Rosemary Beach, Ashley packed a lot of punch in only a thousand square feet to accommodate her family of five plus a dog. A set of bunks in the guest room makes the most of the space, while ship-style lanterns and a rope ladder add nautical touches. The updated kitchen features marble countertops with a waterfall edge and a lap-siding hood of raw cedar. Ashley chose durable finishes and Sunbrella fabrics to accommodate the wear and tear of vacation renters.

RESOURCES: Ashley Gilbreath Interior Design, Montgomery, 334.262.3232, ashleygilbreath.com
Rental inquiries: "The Parish Life," a two-bedroom loft, is available through rosemarybeach.com

A house at the beach means different things to different people, but almost everyone agrees that the most appealing and enduring vacation homes offer a relaxed attitude, a welcoming stance, and a sense of place. Designer Ashley Gilbreath, who works from a satellite outpost in Rosemary Beach, Florida, as well as her main office in Montgomery, approaches these homes with a unique philosophy—out with the rules and in with the joys of outfitting each residence with a playful spontaneity and a mindset of comfort. She has designed a variety of delightful second homes, including condos, family compounds, and renovated waterfront cottages, with a style that is fun and personal. These four beach retreats along Florida's Gulf Coast illustrate Ashley's distinctive approach to creating gracious environments while proving that the most successful projects focus not only on beautiful design but also on how a family likes to live at the beach.

RIGHT: Nestled behind a twisting oak, this home is a fresh take on a classic Southern farmhouse with deep double porches, sturdy columns, and wide steps. BELOW: An antique mirror and custom-designed bench anchor a sunny corner of the living room. BOTTOM: Tall ceilings in the guest suite allow for a sleeping loft.



the vacation never ends

WaterColor Photos by: HOLLAND WILLIAMS

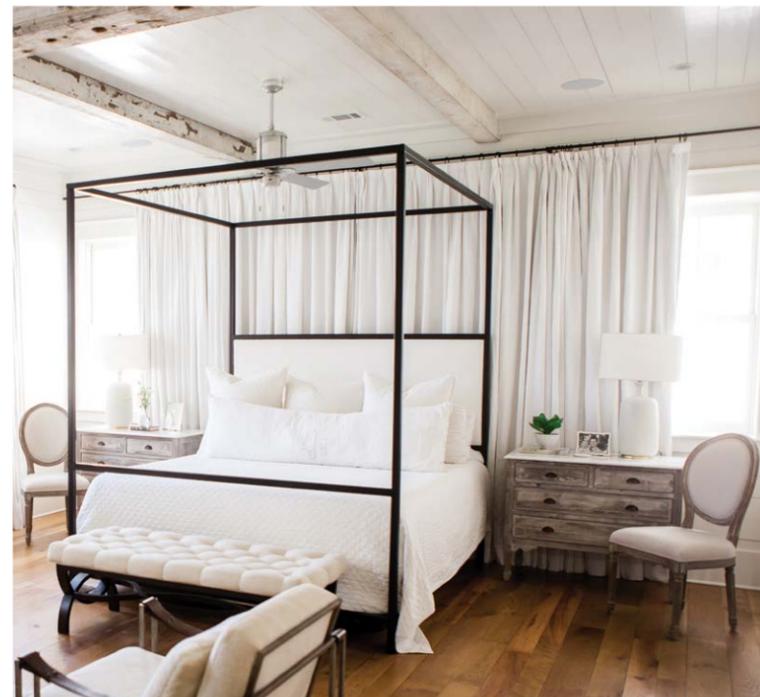
When decorating a full-time residence in the resort town of WaterColor, Florida, Ashley delivered the perfect mix of coastal flair and practicality for a young, active family. With both casual entertaining and family living in mind, the designer installed a large island with seating to anchor the open kitchen. French doors fill the dining space with natural light and open onto the rear terrace for a gracious interchange between indoors and out. To accommodate weekend visitors, which is a regular occurrence at the beach, the guest suite includes two full beds and a loft space.



“I like to incorporate materials that can take a beating. A white cow hide adds a layer of sophistication but is also durable. Think about it, those animals live in the mud.” -ASHLEY GILBREATH



Tall windows crowned with transoms flood the dining room with natural light, while continuous sheer draperies soften the space. ABOVE: Custom-designed bed swings on the front porch provide a great spot to relax.



TOP: A rough-hewn, salvaged beam and a pair of contemporary pendants over the island animate the open kitchen. ABOVE: In the master suite, a contemporary, upholstered, four-poster bed complements a pair of traditional chests on either side.





Photo by: ELEANOR LYNN NESMITH

BACK TO THE BEACH

Emerald-green water, sugar-white sand, and warm days make up the recipe for the ultimate Florida vacation. While every expanse of coastline has its own character and charm, the 20-mile string of coastal communities along Scenic Highway 30A may boast the best the beach has to offer. From Inlet Beach to Seaside to Dune Allen, there's always something new to discover.

SOMETHING NEW, SOMETHING BLUE

Nanbu Noodle Bar: Meaning "Southerner" in Japanese, Nanbu is a new noodle house located on Logan Lane in The Shops of Grayton. It's the second outpost of 30A Roux chef Nikhil Abuvala. Nanbu offers poke bowls, dumplings, ramen noodles, broths, and vegan and Gluten-free offerings. With a hip vibe, lively bar scene, and late-night hours, it's already a popular gathering spot. nanbunoodlebar.com

Blue Mabel: If you like Cowgirl Kitchen, you're going to love Blue Mabel Smokehouse and Provisions, located in the heart of Blue Mountain Beach. Breakfast offerings range from barbecue shrimp over a sage biscuit to cherry pistachio granola to Southern hash and burritos. Lunch and dinner selections are equally diverse and delicious. With a full bar, indoor and outdoor seating, and a drive-through window for online orders, there's certainly something for everyone. bluemabel.com

ASHLEY'S FAVORITES

Morning coffee: Fonville Press, where we sit outside by the firepit on chilly mornings while the kids enjoy the playground

Fun family tradition: Going straight to the beach at sunrise with kiddos still in pajamas to find shells

Leisurely lunch: George's in Alys Beach

Spot for sunset cocktails: Pescado or the rooftop bar at The Pearl

Dress shop: Willow and Disco in Rosemary Beach

Romantic dinner: Pescado in Rosemary Beach or Caliza by the pool in Alys Beach

old florida flair

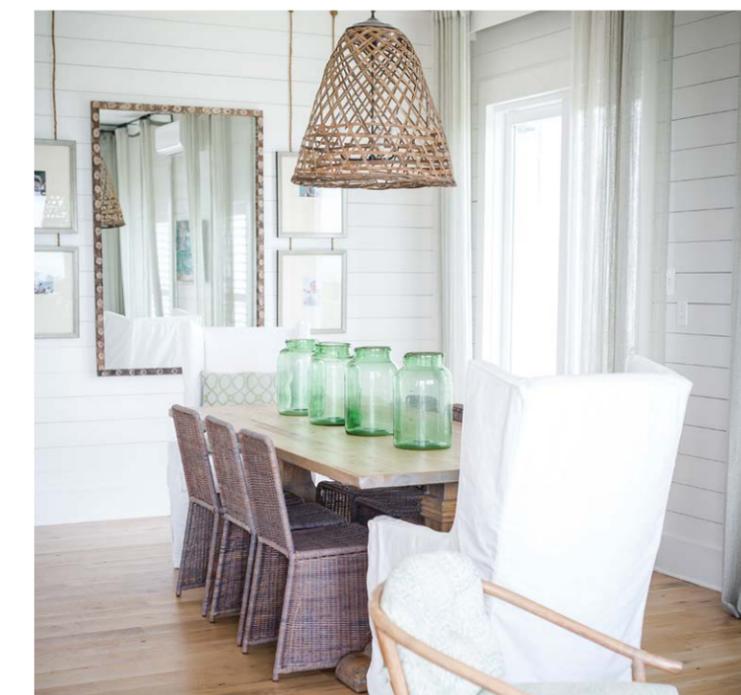
Seacrest Beach Photos by: HOLLAND WILLIAMS

With a jewel of a perch overlooking the Gulf along Scenic 30A, this renovated 1960s cottage now radiates with a classic coastal vibe and a cozy timeworn aesthetic. The palette includes muted tones of greens, blues, and driftwood. Bookcases filled with seaside artifacts flank a tabby wall that accommodates a fireplace and television. The dining table's prime location makes it a central gathering spot, so Ashley chose comfortable wicker slide chairs that can also be pulled into the living room after meals. A vintage wooden surfboard enlivens the open kitchen.

"What's the point of having a place at the beach if you aren't going to make it fun for the whole family?"

-ASHLEY GILBREATH

ABOVE: A durable, striped rug and comfy slipcovered furnishings make for casual, carefree beach living. FAR LEFT: Beach family photos cleverly hung on ropes pair with a large mirror in a weathered frame to create a focal point in the dining area.



windows on the world

Perdido Key Photos by: LAUREY GLENN



“It’s impossible to turn your back on the Gulf and the expansive natural landscape of the adjacent state park. You never forget where you are.”

-ASHLEY GILBREATH

Plenty of outdoor seating and endless vistas ensure this Perdido Key penthouse hosts happy gatherings year-round. Floor-to-ceiling walls of glass flood the interiors with natural light, which prompted Ashley to choose more saturated coastal colors. A beaded-glass chandelier and a pair of large contemporary botanical prints make a statement in the dining area. Ceiling-height, aqua-blue draperies with blackout backing frame the views and soften the main living space while also providing shading when needed. A series of abstract oyster paintings set in a bar niche add to the coastal theme.



FAR LEFT, TOP: With painted bamboo seating and a weatherproof rug, the porch becomes an appealing outdoor room with a view. LEFT: A modern, painted console placed in front of a floor-to-ceiling mirror creates an eye-catching vignette and offers welcomed storage. THIS IMAGE: Bedrooms at the beach are less about size and more about style. Five vintage swimsuits in shadowboxes hang above a single continuous upholstered headboard in a guest room.



BELOW AND FAR LEFT, BOTTOM: The living room and adjacent kitchen merge a modern, open plan with thoughtful furniture placement to capitalize on the views. LEFT: Large, framed tropical botanicals and a beaded chandelier add drama to the dining area. ABOVE: A convenient bar is always a good idea at the beach.

