Barefoot MANOR

*A PAIR OF MANHATTANITES FIND BREEZY
REFUGE ON THE MELLOW CAROLINA COAST.
AND THEIR ELEGANT DESIGN LEANINGS?
THEY CAME, TOO—WITH AN ISLAND SPIN*

Tropical de Gournay wall
panels depicting an old
island church elevate the
sunny dining nook off the
entrance hall. The custom
painted floor pattern is by
Suzanne Allen Studio.
Opposite: Architect Beau
Clowney designed a cozy
pavilion—with a vaulted
cedar-shingle roof and a
bank of bifold shutters—
steps from the Atlantic.

Designer Jenny Keenan (top, left) adapted the owners' gilded antique console (above) for the beach by pairing it with wicker chairs by Soane Britain. Top, right: The home's flared central staircase blends Barbadian influences with those of downtown Charleston's historic manses.

Collections reign in the living room, where a foursome of French garden prints and a sweetgrass basket from a local weaver hang above an assemblage of antique ginger jars. A selection of marine curiosities is displayed in a simple acrylic trunk.

C HARLESTON-BASED INTERIOR DESIGNER Jenny Keenan accepts a natural rule of thumb: A house with spellbinding ocean views from nearly every window just doesn't require the same kind of rigorous, high-calorie interior design that a darker, more metropolitan space might. A light hand can be as brilliant as the sea outside.

Keenan's clients had just built the 4,900-square-foot oceanfront house when she met them—they were fresh out of Manhattan, where they'd lived for 25 years, and were on the cusp of moving to the little town of Sullivan's Island, South Carolina. And while they wanted the new house to feel more relaxed, they also wanted to transfer some of the coziness of the layered decorating style, brimming with pattern, that they were used to. "Their previous home had rich color in every room and very detailed window treatments," Keenan says. "Everything was very 'dressed.' It was a refuge inside the city, so it had to be a world unto itself. But this house is so open: There's greenery and water in every window, breezy porches and dazzling light. You don't want to distract from any of it."

Fortunately, this informal elegance is Keenan's stock in trade. She gave the interiors a Lowcountry-meets-British Colonial air, cross-pollinating a raft of family portraits and repurposed furnishings from the former home with a fresh collection of vintage and new pieces. And a tropical lightness prevails. Blue-and-white porcelains mingle with ikat and Indian-print textiles. Campaign-style tray tables, soaring four-poster beds, and palm and bamboo lattice-print wallpapers are both classic and effervescent. (Even the owners' cherished 19th-century, marble-topped console with gilt carvings found a place in the beach house: Keenan flanked it with a pair
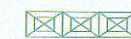
Opposite, clock-wise from top, left: The cockatoo pillow fabric is by Bob Collins & Sons. The stairs' stripe is Old Navy by Benjamin Moore. The guest room wallpaper is by Quadrille. The tablecloth fabric is by Michael Devine; the ottomans are Etsy finds.

of wicker hall chairs, and hung a whimsical new shell mirror above it.)

It's a lighthearted brand of chic that fits in perfectly with Sullivan's Island, a quiet old beach community 20 minutes and two bridges away from Charleston. The roughly three-square-mile island has long been a low-key refuge for an innately stylish set: In the early 19th century, it was where wealthy shipping merchants living in Charleston's formal homes retreated for the summer to modest cottages amid live oaks, palmettos, sand dunes, and beach grasses. Many of those cottages still stand, mixed into a growing cache of taller, newer houses. But the glitz factor remains low. It's historic but not precious, sophisticated but genuine, family-friendly but not a madhouse.

Among those who understand the community in a deep way is Beau Clowney, the architect who designed the home. (He's also a 2017 Coastal Living Trendsetter; see page 27.) A Charleston resident who has long kept a vacation house on a tiny cay in the Bahamas, Clowney has lost count of the number of beach houses he's designed on Sullivan's Island over the years, but it's somewhere between 15 and 25. In many, he's blended elements gleaned from Caribbean architecture, including a rich vocabulary of shutter types, with the traditional details of Lowcountry houses: hipped roofs, exposed rafters, and breezy center hallways. It's a natural marriage of classic styles, he points out.

"Many of the Carolinas' earliest settlers arrived via Barbados and other English colonies in the Caribbean," he says. "Their building traditions came

Keenan used powder-coated aluminum outdoor chairs at the breakfast table (above), paired with an upholstered banquette by Verellen. Top: The island is painted Hale Navy by Benjamin Moore and topped with Calacatta Arni marble.
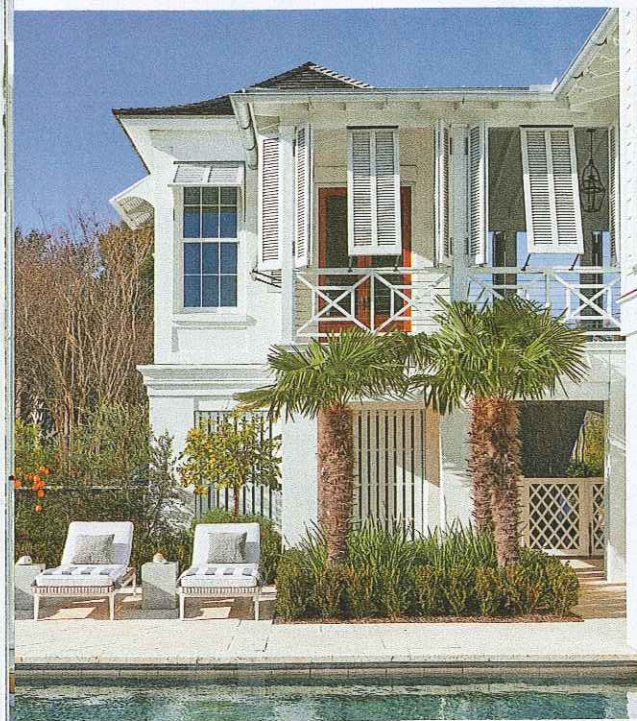
Clockwise from top, left: The custom vanity in one master bath is maple with bamboo detailing. Aqua trellis wallpaper and a carved four-poster bed by Oscar de la Renta keep the palette light in the second-floor master bedroom. Louvered shutter, X-railing, and lattice gate details create a rich pattern play along the pool deck.

with them." One such tradition inspired the glamorously tall flourish he used to embellish this facade—a stylized, stuccoed-concrete version of the flaring staircases common in both Barbados manor homes and some of the grander downtown Charleston homes.

The homeowners, he explained, "wanted a house that was understated, so it would speak to the spirit of Sullivan's Island, but at the same time they have very sophisticated leanings. The challenge for me was figuring out how to reinvent these elegant moments and details in a simpler, quieter way." The resulting design is a series of linked pavilions, each with its own roof, much the way houses have always been built locally and in the Caribbean. They are arranged in a U shape around a side garden and rectangular pool; the pool extends almost to the underside of the house, where shady lounging areas replace the chaotic piles of beach gear that normally collect beneath raised houses along the shore.

Because Clowney and Keenan collaborate often on houses, they understand each other's work well. She reinforced his aesthetic, and in mixing together formal and nonchalant elements, she mirrored his style. Hemp tassel trim on the living room curtains, ceilings wallpapered in high-spirited prints, and a thick navy blue stripe painted like a runner down a milky white staircase are all details that walk the tightrope between elegance and ease.

"It's not a vacation house. They live here year-round and needed a feeling of permanence," Keenan explains. "But this is definitely not a chateau at the beach." The home is personal and feels very much at ease, which makes it fit in well on the island. "The architecture has become grander on Sullivan's over the years," she adds, "but you can still drive down the street and see your grandmother's beach house."

The first-floor bedroom is a throwback to the style of older guesthouses in the Caribbean, with a leafy, tropical fabric by Jasper, paisley wallpaper in natural tones by China Seas, and a faux bamboo bed by Rooms & Gardens in Santa Barbara.