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california down the shore

A designer builds her dream beach house, bringing a West Coast boutique feel to Long Beach Island.

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For a family of seven in a hurry, the heart of a new-construction home had to be warm, bright, enduring, multifunctional—and kosher.

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When New Jersey-based empty nesters decided to redo their 21st-floor Manhattan “getaway,” they knew it would require an artist's touch.

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A trio of talented design professionals put their heads together to update a classic Rutherford colonial's busiest room.

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The Saddle River colonial didn't need to be gutted. But it did need furniture from two Louis, cubist paintings by the owner-designer—and a vision.



ON THE COVER:

Interior designer Robyn Stevens turns her Saddle River home into a work of art.
Photo by SGM Photography.

NJ Home

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“For fast-acting relief, try slowing down.”
—Lily Tomlin



california down the shore

A designer builds her dream beach house, bringing a West Coast boutique feel to Long Beach Island.

Text by **Leslie Garisto Pfaff** Design by **Karen B. Wolf** Photography by **Raquel Langworthy**

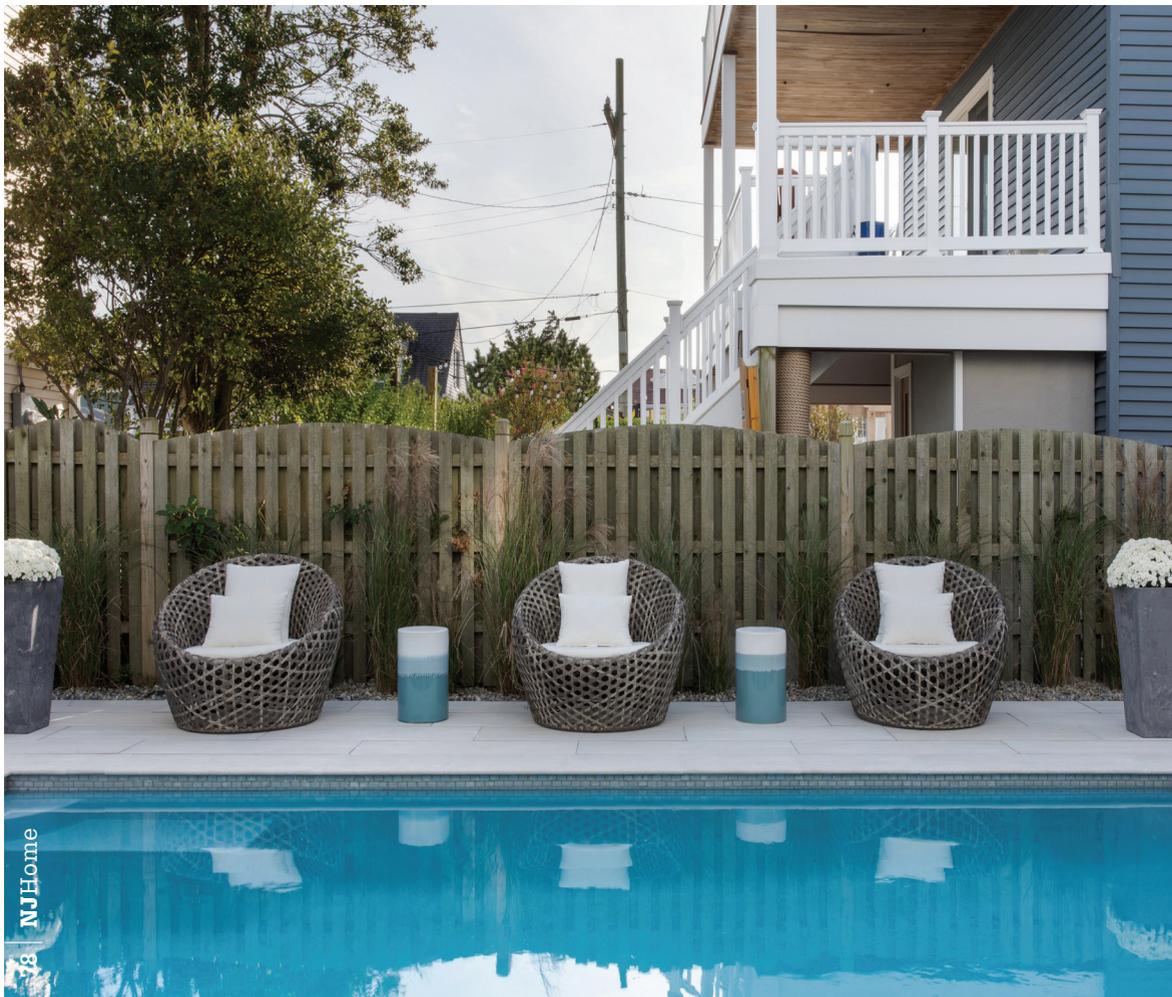


The lanai on the first floor of this Long Beach Island house connects with the pool area via an up-sliding garage door. In front of the wet bar, a custom driftwood-topped table and mesh chairs from Essentials for Living offer ample space for snacking and dining. They reflect the house's palette of sand, white and blue, the latter evident here in a trio of bar stools and the floor's ceramic tiles from Garden State Tile. The flooring was a practical choice, to stand up to sandy feet and potential flooding.



Growing up, designer Karen Wolf had spent many happy summers on the broad beaches of Long Beach Island, so when she decided to build a beach house for herself and her family, location was never a question. “I love the fact that when you drive over the bridge to LBI, you feel like you’ve really gotten away,” she says. The house she built—and designed herself, from top to bottom—was created to embody that getaway feeling: part California cottage, part boutique beach resort.

It also had to accommodate three generations. Her parents occupy the top floor of the three-story house; Wolf and her college-age twins call the second floor home, and the ground floor is taken up by the lanai, an indoor-outdoor space that opens onto the backyard via an up-sliding garage door. The lanai, which features a wet bar, a dining table and a comfortable living area, sets the tone for the entire house, with what Wolf describes as “a cheerful, bright, sun-drenched happy feel.” It’s casual and inviting but very grown-up, eschewing coastal kitsch (there’s nary a beach sign or a decorative lifesaver to be found). The floor is covered in hexagonal ceramic tiles in white and pale blue, and all of the furniture in the lanai, including a faux wicker sectional sofa with snowy white cushions and a found-driftwood-topped table, is indoor-outdoor—a hedge against



This page, top: In the lanai’s living area, a sectional faux-wicker sofa from Southern Home offers comfort and practicality: all the furniture in the lanai is indoor-outdoor, weatherproof and water-resistant. Bottom: Flanking the pool, the cocoon chairs offer a place to lounge in a narrow space that doesn’t accommodate traditional chaises. Opposite page: The exterior is designed to bring to mind a clean-lined California beach cottage. Reflecting the interior palette, the board-and-batten siding was painted in Sherwin Williams’ Blissful Blue. The custom terrace railings pick up the X pattern in the garage doors.





potential flooding, not unknown along the Jersey Shore.

The blue, white and sand palette that prevails in the lanai—Wolf describes it as “beachy chic”—is repeated throughout the house, with the blue morphing from turquoise on the ground floor to mostly navy on the second to periwinkle on the top. Wolf also used it on the home’s exterior, with board-and-batten siding painted a soft sky blue, accented by white trim and a white metal roof. The railings on all three terraces (off the second and third floors and adjacent to the pitched roof) are also white, with an X pattern echoing the design of the house’s two garage doors (one leading to the lanai and the other to an actual garage). The exterior colors are pure Cali cottage, as is the essential simplicity of its design, in contrast to some of the more ornate houses on the island.

The home’s overall palette, combined with tall, pitched ceilings, gives the top floor an ethereal feeling. The pale hardwood flooring, installed throughout the second and third stories, is echoed in the exposed beams that delineate the ceiling, but Wolf deliberately stained the beams slightly darker so that they’d contrast more dramatically with the white walls and ceiling. In fact, Wolf begins virtually all her designs with the flooring, whose tones she then strategically echoes throughout the space. In this case, she actually edged the white range hood with the flooring itself.

While blue is an essential element of the home’s palette, she’s applied it lightly, with a deft



The home's palette was based on the color of the hand-scraped, wide-plank white oak flooring, picked up here, in the third-floor kitchen area, in the wood-look porcelain on the perimeter of the cabinetry and in the range hood's rim, created from the flooring itself. The custom island—also porcelain, for extra durability—contains the kitchen sink. Coastal blues feature in Sherwin Williams' Windy Blue on the front of the island and in the tiled Maritime Blue backsplash from Glazio. Opposite: The third-floor ceiling is covered in shiplap for a coastal feel; the beams are a slightly darker take on the color of the flooring.





hand, so that it doesn't overwhelm. In the second-floor living area, for instance, Wolf used it in the kitchen backsplash, on the front of the kitchen island, in a console table backing the white sofa and, most notably, in a pair of swivel chairs upholstered in a striking blue-and-white ombre pattern.

The sun-washed third-floor bedroom derives visual interest less from color than from texture, from a three-dimensional wheat-sheaf rim on a hanging mirror to a variety of highly textural pillows on the four-poster bed to the beaded chandelier above it. "I really wanted to provide a feeling of warmth and comfort in the bedroom with layering of texture, but to keep it bright and airy," she says.

Light and air were important overall in creating the sense of beach chic that Wolf desired, but they were also essential to opening up a space that might otherwise have felt confined. The lot, like many on LBI, is long and narrow, presenting Wolf with her major design challenge. "From the beginning," she says, "my goal in the space was to make it feel wider." One way she accomplished this was by differentiating specific areas in an open-concept space to draw the eye from left to right. On the third floor, she raised the ceilings, eliminated hallways and tucked the

This page: The designer's subtle use of texture—in a nubby rug and a Curry & Company console table that evokes the look of raw wood—enlivens the living area. Opposite page: The third-floor living area was designed for year-round living. The designer eschewed marble on the fireplace surround for tile in a subtle Moroccan pattern (Emma Gray) from Riad, which infuses it with warmth but doesn't overpower the rest of the space. Custom swivel chairs were upholstered in an eye-catching blue ombre pattern. The blue in the Shop Society Social console table matches the front of the kitchen island.





master bedroom area behind the kitchen.

The narrow lot posed a particular challenge in the backyard, where a rectangular pool takes up most of the available space. To accommodate the pool, Wolf had to accept a narrower-than-ideal perimeter. Because there was no room for traditional chaise longues, for instance, she used dramatic cocoon chairs. The chairs, and the grasses behind them, were placed symmetrically to help draw the eye outward from the lanai.

Though summer is clearly the house's flagship season, it was designed to be used and enjoyed throughout the year—as evidenced, for example, by the third-floor fireplace and the enveloping upholstered pieces that surround it. The lanai, too, says Wolf, “has an all-year-round-feel, so while you can use it for the pool, you can also sit down in the middle of winter and enjoy the space in warmth and comfort.” That’s exactly what Wolf and her family have done, multiple times, over the past winter, as they waited, expectantly, to greet summer in their own private beach resort.



This page, right: Texture also has its say in the third-floor master bathroom, in the veneered floating vanity and the glass blend tile from Artistic. Opposite page: In the accompanying master bedroom, colors are deliberately toned down to give the space a relaxing, airy feel. Instead of intense hues, the designer draws visual interest from texture—in the mirror from Ballard, the wallpaper from Mark Alexander and the bedding and pillows.

