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# A BEACH RETREAT

*Peace And Solitude On The Outer Banks*

INTERIOR DESIGN Barbara Hawthorn  
Barbara Hawthorn Interiors, Vienna, VA

TEXT Barbara Karth, Chevy Chase, MD

PHOTOGRAPHY Geoffrey Hodgdon, Washington, DC



ABOVE: This terrace is the perfect place to sip coffee while watching the sun rise. Sea oats, planted by homeowner Teel Oliver with plugs from the rear of her beach house, sway with the ocean breezes.

The beach house was so dark and gloomy the kids grabbed a can of white paint and took matters into their own hands. Their grandfather was appalled that anyone would want to paint the wood-paneled walls. That was before interior designer Barbara Hawthorn worked with Teel Oliver to remodel and decorate her Outer Banks, North Carolina, get-away.

Ms. Oliver's father built this four-bedroom, four-bath house in the late '60s, a retirement home far from the Washington scene. Although sited on a large lot high on the dunes, with a view of the ocean and sunrises in the



east and the barrier island vegetation and sunset in the west, the house is nestled into the landscape. Respectful of its environment, it is almost invisible from the beach—and protected from the frequent, infamous nor'easters and less frequent hurricanes.

Today the beach house belongs to Ms. Oliver. It is where she and her grown children and grandchildren come to relax together as they have through the years. "It's the family retreat, with one big space where everyone gathers," Ms. Oliver says. Plus, it becomes a much-desired rental when the family returns to the real world.

Ms. Hawthorn set out to lighten and brighten the



ABOVE: Interior designer Barbara Hawthorn simplified the fireplace for a clean, contemporary look in the living area of this North Carolina beach house. Ms. Hawthorn selected a black and white photo of a flower by Geoffrey Hodgdon rather than the requisite ship or sailfish. The striking image defies the expected.

LEFT: This living room was once dark and dreary before it was lightened and brightened. Square columns were left uncamouflaged for architectural definition to the space. A large sofa covered in a blue washed-cotton duck is imperious to wear, tear and spills. It's a room for comfortable, casual living.

space, open it to the sunrises and sunsets, and create an easy-to-care-for vacation home, one that could be readily personalized when the family was in residence.

The old dining room adjacent to the kitchen became a seating area in the living room, and a tiled floor porch also became part of this large living space. It's an ideal location for a dining table, easy to clean after a dinner of lobster or crabs. And the kids enter from the beach for lunch without tracking through the house. "We accentuated the good parts with wonderful supporting columns, so it has a marvelous sense of repetition and openness. We kept the columns

squared and very simple," Ms. Hawthorn explains.

All the furnishings are new, with the exception of the dining table, "dad's table." The commodious L-shaped sofa is covered in a washed cotton duck. "It can get wet and not have mildew, and can take a lot of abuse," Ms. Hawthorn notes. She chose a large, sturdy coffee table, with generous space for books and beverage glasses, plus room for people to put their feet up.

Ms. Hawthorn simplified the fireplace and painted it white. "We made it almost contemporary; we cleaned it up so it didn't fight with the interesting architecture of the room." She hung a black and white



photograph over it—a striking oversized image of a flower. “We didn’t want to do the typical sailfish,” or ships or dunes with fences.

“We took a minimalist approach. The more edited it looked, the more it didn’t detract from the main feature, which is, of course, the beautiful ocean,” says Ms. Hawthorn.

The designer also maintained the light, airy feel with wicker, creating a separate seating area behind the sofa. Tables and such often came from flea markets and were given a coat of paint to conceal slight imperfections. This home is about relaxation.

Accessories were chosen that would “make statements—important things, not a lot of little knickknacks. We went with large-scale pieces, so the rooms didn’t look empty.” For instance a large tobacco basket and a painted printers’ tray become focal points on the wall when renters are there. Framed posters also make great, colorful statements. When the family comes, art photographs and original paintings take their place, and oriental rugs are rolled

out and placed to define groupings. Thus this beach house becomes personalized.

Sixties avocado green had enveloped the kitchen and there was no eating area, just a contrasting red countertop. A new, softer palette with less saturated hues brings light and air to this space. An island was built that makes a great workspace for food preparation or a breakfast bar for cereal, coffee and the morning paper. It’s also a gathering place to chat with the day’s designated cook.

This beach house is a contrast to Ms. Oliver’s elegant Georgetown home, which Ms. Hawthorn also helped her decorate. This is a place where the “livin’ is easy,” for waking up with the sun rising over the ocean, for coffee on the terrace overlooking the beach, for body surfing in the waves after lunch and for watching the sun set on the screened porch as the children play games. A late dinner of oysters and lobster followed by a mystery or other novel ends the day. Ms. Oliver sums it up: “It has a sense of peace, a removal from the world.”



**FACING:** A screened porch was added to the rear of the house so the family can enjoy the beautiful sunsets. French doors open from the living area as the two spaces mesh together. Ms. Hawthorn chose wicker furniture for its light and airy look.

**ABOVE:** This tiled eating area was once a porch. Now it is incorporated into the living space. The table originally belonged to Ms. Oliver's father who built the beach house as a retirement home. A painting by Alla Rogers evokes the ocean view.

**RIGHT:** It's hard to believe, but this was once a sixties kitchen in then-popular avocado with red countertops. An island was added for additional counter space or for keeping company with the cook.





## SOURCES

### LIVING ROOM

Sectional: *Crate and Barrel, Washington, DC*  
 Sofa Fabric: *Pindler & Pindler, Washington, DC*  
 Wicker Rockers: *Crate & Barrel, Washington, DC*  
 Wicker Furniture: *Lloyd Flanders, Various Local Retail Outlets*  
 Selected Wicker Furniture Fabric: *Robert Allen, Washington, DC*  
 Upholstery: *Mrs. Elizabeth Hooper, Southern Shores, NC*  
 Posters: *Merck-sponsored NIH Concert Series; Matisse, National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC*  
 Black and White Photography: *Geoffrey Hodgdon, Alla Rogers Gallery, Washington, DC*  
 Still Life in Wet Bar: *Dolya Dogal, Alla Rogers Gallery, Washington, DC*

### DINING AREA

Table: *Owner's Collection*  
 Painting: *Alla Rogers Gallery, Washington, DC*  
 Tablecloth: *Open Market, Provence, France*  
 Ceramics: *Iznik through Barbara Hawthorn Interiors, McLean, VA*

### KITCHEN

Kitchen Cabinetry: *Island Wood Crafts, Kitty Hawk, NC*

### BEDROOM

Abstract over bed: *Elizabeth Byrd, Barbara Hawthorn Interiors, McLean, VA*

ABOVE: Guests delight in waking up to the views. Interior designer Barbara Hawthorn uses the same colors throughout, yet each room is different in texture, pattern and mood. The blue tones in this bedroom echo the hues of the water and sky.

FACING ABOVE: This four-bedroom, four-bath beach house has two master suites with views of the ocean. Ms. Hawthorn focused on simplicity and comfort in this light and airy master bedroom, where homeowner Teel Oliver enjoys waking up to the sunrise.

FACING BELOW: Almost indiscernible from the beach, this house is sensitively and respectfully nestled into the dunes, yet Ms. Oliver, her family and guests have a marvelous view of the beach and ocean.

