

COASTAL LIVING

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By Logan Ward

Retro Active

Two Atlanta friends channel the past on Georgia's St. Simons Island.

Glenn Murer says he's seen too many beach houses that look like they were decorated from a wicker-and-pastel-blue mold. So while building his own seaside home, this Atlanta business owner was determined to make it daring, fun, and—in a unique, personal way—beachy. "I wanted the house to uplift the mood," Glenn says of his house in the Coast Cottages community on Georgia's St. Simons Island. "I wanted it to speak to people, to say, 'Relax, you're at the beach.'"

With the help of friend and Atlanta designer Amy Dantré Wikman, Glenn got his wish in Emil Cottage—which has a touch of the unexpected in every light fixture, countertop, and wall hanging. Actually, the surprises start before you even enter the shingle-clad, three-story home. The door, a gorgeous paneled slab of oiled teak, is a false-front entry opening to a side-facing porch and access to the real front door—a setup that echoes Charleston's "single house" vernacular.

Amy and Glenn, it turns out, both have a thing for old houses. With Glenn's input, Amy designed this home's layout and interior spaces, devising clever ways to give the new house old-home character. Instead of 2- by 4-inch lumber, for instance, they framed the walls with 2 by 6s, which deepened doorjambs and windowsills. For floors, they installed nail hole-riddled heart-pine planks, salvaged from an 1835 plantation house. And in a move that drove the carpenters nuts, Amy reversed the cypress boards lining the interior walls, burying the finished face and letting the rough sides show so that the boards have a hand-hewn look. "People actually think we moved an old house here," she says.

Yet if the architecture is meant to look old, many of the design elements—even ones that *are* old—are fresh and funky. "Traditional with a twist," Amy calls them. At the bottom of the stairs, mounted to mimic a newel post, rises a kitschy lighthouse, complete with a tiny revolving beacon. Ship models with peeling paint sail in cubbies and on shelves. A neon lobster sign bathes the dining area wall in an orange glow. Above the kitchen counter hang light fixtures artfully crafted to resemble milk bottles.

"I love the 1950s idea of piling into the station wagon and heading off on a vacation," Glenn says, which helps explain the eclectic decor. He

and Amy scoured flea markets and antiques stores from Lexington, North Carolina, to Atlanta for finds that include the Gulf oil sign hanging in the dining area and the old-fashioned telephones scattered about the house.

The home's vivid, playful colors also hark back to the '50s. The risers and banisters on three flights of stairs are painted red, forming a bold backbone that climbs from the bottom of the house (with its guest bedrooms and baths) to the middle floor (living/kitchen/dining rooms) to the top (master suite, with sitting area and bar). And red accents pop up throughout—in the upholstery, on a wooden bench, on the kitchen island, even on the doorknobs. The kitchen and master bath countertops are a Seattle artist's take on terrazzo: concrete speckled with bits of colored glass and glass marbles. The master bath's shower tiles form a brilliant checkerboard of primary hues.

"I'm not afraid of color," Amy admits. Yet her approach here was to use a softer background palette, with walls painted white, sky blue, or lime green, and punch up the rooms with darker moldings, folk art, and furniture. The resulting look is neither too rich nor washed-out, a space that welcomes the coastal sun without fear of fading.

The home's fun factor runs high, in direct proportion to the pair's hard work during construction. Amy still groans about having to cull bad boards from a contractor's pile by flashlight in the middle of the night and hand-positioning each knobbed whelk (the Georgia state shell) in the tabby fireplace surround. But unlike the impersonal beach homes that leave Glenn uninspired, Emil Cottage overflows with attitude.