

Heritage House

A cottage's décor has its roots in New England and Sweden.

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ANN MILLÄNG DIDN'T NEED TO VENTURE FAR AND WIDE TO FIND inspiration for decorating her cottage; she simply looked within. The owner/founder of St. Barth's Home, an online boutique that specializes in Swedish Gustavian and Northern European furnishings, apparel and linens, drew upon her family memories, her husband's heritage and her signature style to make her design choices.

"My dad was raised on the beaches of Cape Cod, Massachusetts, so that was the driving factor in our design style and feel," Ann says. "We also wanted to have the feel of a Swedish beach house, as my husband is Swedish and we have lived in Sweden for many years, with my company focusing on Swedish design."

Ann inherited the cottage in South Laguna, California, from her parents. It had been in her family while she was in college and through adulthood. "My parents lived in Dana Point while looking [for a home] in the 1980s, and this one came on the market. My mother loved its potential," she says.

The seaside cottage, built around 1954, figured prominently in her parents' lives and is a source of nostalgia for Ann. "Both my parents had a great love for the unique landscape here in Laguna, and I remember they spent much of their time at the beach—swimming, surfing, walking and watching the tides," she recalls. "They loved the proximity to the beach and being able to take an evening walk after work and see the dolphins hopping up on the waves. When my brother, John, and I inherited the house, rather than sell it we decided to keep it as a family retreat."



The living room features Ralph Lauren chairs in Oyster White fabric. The West End coffee table, available at St. Barth's Home, has a Belgian bluestone top and can be separated into two smaller pieces.

After her father passed away, the family rented the cottage for a time but then decided to take it back and renovate it. "The neighborhood is 1950s ranch style but everyone has made improvements and most [neighbors] have lived there for a long time," Ann says. "We lived in the rubble for a good part of the renovation and then moved across the street for the worst of it."

The first item on their list of renovations was adding a second story to the house. It was not only a practical consideration but an emotional one, as Ann's parents had planned to have it done as well. "Sadly, they did not live long enough to do the second story they dreamed of, but we did it. And that is why it has even more meaning to us," Ann says. Luckily, they had the full support of their neighbors to proceed with the expansion. "The neighbors were very happy with our plan to build the second story, as it fit so nicely into the trees and was not obtrusive," she says. "They even came to council meetings to speak on our behalf."


Ann couldn't be happier with the way the second floor turned out. "We would go on the roof of the original structure and look at the ocean and think about how nice it would be to live up there. Our dream came true," she says. "A family member was the architect, and even though he lives in Sweden he was able to help do the design from photos I had and sketches we made of the original house. He really captured the way the light would flow through the home during different times of the day. The end of the day on the balcony is a favorite time."

(Top) Patterned pillows on a Ralph Lauren sofa.

(Right) A coffee-table vignette includes a shell collection and French design magazines.

(Opposite) The Drottingholm sofa converts to an extra-long twin bed and makes a comfortable sitting area for the family's King Charles spaniel, Sammy.




A photograph of a brown and white dog sitting on a light-colored sofa with blue and white striped cushions. The dog is looking towards the left. The sofa has several decorative pillows, including one with a floral pattern and two with circular geometric designs. The background is a plain wall with a piece of artwork or a tapestry in the upper left corner.

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Simply designed European flatware is poised for entertaining on a Swedish table runner. A Volle teapot stands nearby.

(Opposite) The dining room's Edmund table, available at St. Barth's Home, has a mahogany top and a white base and legs. The Castilly chairs are upholstered in white linen fabric.



Pottery from English stoneware company Burslem is among the pieces showcased in a Clichy cupboard from St. Barth's Home.

(Opposite) Hanging above the dining-room fireplace is a painting of a cow near the Milling horse from the 1930s.

Other renovations were born out of necessity. "This was major: We tore down the walls full of termites first and then found more termites and pulled down some more walls," Ann recalls. "The first-story footprint is fairly similar but stretched out a bit on the back. The original Mexican tile floors are still there, as my parents put those in and we wanted to save what we could of their contributions. We tried to save the

downstairs fireplace but it was not up to code so we had to rebuild that."

When the renovations were completed it was time to move on to the painting phase. For the exterior, Ann decided on a seaside cottage look. "The house is painted in a sort of Nantucket sea gray that I mixed myself, and the top story is shingled with natural wood that is going to get more gray with time," she explains. "The shingles connect to the

California vernacular and become weathered by the sea air, so they already look like they have been there a long time."

The interior is similarly painted in the tranquil colors of the home's setting. "The two downstairs bedrooms are decorated as the rest of the house, in colors that are the tones of the beach: sand, coastal fog and Nantucket gray walls," Ann says.

Finally the decorating process could begin. Ann culled her design inspirations from people and places close to her heart, making her personal touch even more personal.

"[I was influenced] definitely by my family background in New England, even though I never lived there; my company specializing in Swedish Gustavian and classic Northern European style and the furniture we have designed; light, which I have learned to appreciate living in Sweden; my travels through Japan and Scandinavia; an appreciation for indoor/outdoor spaces and my love of California. It's a simple cottage style that suggests an easygoing lifestyle that is not complicated or difficult and the fact that you can live indoors and outdoors," Ann says. "Our house really does not jump out at you but rather sits nicely in the trees, like it has always been there quietly enjoying life."

A walk through the house illustrates the homeowner's aesthetic. The entryway is small but has a window with a view of the ocean, which you can see as you walk in. You enter the house in a combined dining area, stairwell and view to the den. There are doors that lead to two downstairs bedrooms, the first of which is furnished with a Navy desk, Wellington bureau and upholstered headboard, all in mahogany and sold at St. Barth's Home. The bathroom features a Dunbar vanity in dark gray with a marble top, white penny tiles on the floor, white subway tiles on the wall and a vintage bathtub. A Clichy cabinet





(Opposite) Ann helped design the kitchen with Swedish cabinetmaking company Kvånum. The hardware handles have leather for comfort and got a patina with age.

(Below) The Resoir buffet/side table is made of weathered oak and has iron drawer pulls. The framed photo is of Ann's grandparents at Cape Cod, Massachusetts, around the turn of the last century.



fits the gray and blue nautical theme and adds a stylish touch to the room.

Dark wood stairs with a contrasting white railing lead to the second story. You enter a room with high ceilings and lots of windows that bring in natural light. To the left of the stairwell is a relaxation area that affords the best views of the ocean and the options of going out on the deck or just opening the doors to bring the outside in. Against

the wall is the Balmoral weathered oak cabinet, which is a large bookcase based on a European antique. Ralph Lauren sofas in Oyster White are splashed with accent pillows from the Sweden-based Lexington Company. There is a console from St. Barth's Home in weathered oak that houses hurricane lamp and shell collections. The coffee tables are also weathered oak topped with Belgium blue stone. A sitting area to the right of the stairs features her shop's Drottningholm sofa and Julia writing desk, and a bench from the Civil War that belonged to Ann's grandparents.

The master bedroom includes two pieces from Ann's shop—the four-poster Harbor Island mahogany bed and the Fredrik bureau—as well as two pieces from her grandparents' home: a small inlaid table from the 1800s and a bureau, both from Cape Cod. The bathroom is done in Waterworks tiles with a Dunbar vanity in white with a white marble countertop. The tiles on the floor are oyster, and the wall tiles are bisque with a design of blue waves around the bathtub done with little mosaic tiles. All the bathroom fixtures are classic nickel.

"We did a little more mixing of styles with the Belgium pieces, our own heirlooms, mixing light and dark, and weathered oak. We did not stick to the Swedish style so much and brought in more influences," Ann explains.

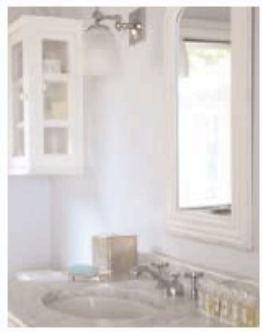
And even after the renovations, the heart of the home remains intact: its familial history. "Even when it was a little two-bedroom ranch house with pink tile in the bathroom it felt like a home because it had good energy and our parents' spirit there," Ann says. "But moving into the new renovation was quite a good feeling as it felt we had come full circle and finished a dream that my parents never could."

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INSIDER TRADING

Ann Milling offers tips on renovating your home efficiently and economically.

- The most important thing is to get at least three bids on the job. It is not important to take the lowest or the highest bid but rather to know exactly what you are getting for your investment. That often ends up somewhere in the middle, but make sure everything is itemized and it is very clear what the final product will be. Taking the lowest bid can often be a mistake as there will be hidden costs, and it is better to take a bit higher bid knowing everything you are paying for and what the builders will be delivering to you in exact, itemized terms.
- We looked for deals with tile, wood building materials, plumbing fixtures and flooring in areas selling wholesale. Every city has an area like this. I also went to wholesale nurseries for the planting materials.
- If possible, being your own contractor is advantageous as that gives you control over the process and budget.
- Always look for sales online and in newspapers as you can find just the right flooring or tile you need as well as bathroom fixtures that were overstock for another project.
- It's good to have a Microsoft Excel document to keep track of the budget, bids and final cost. This keeps things in control, as it is easy to let the excitement of completing the project overshadow your plan to keep within a certain cost.
- In the end, taking the time to find things at a discount by doing research is more satisfying than just going to a high-priced design studio. It's fun to determine your design style and keep a notebook with you of clippings from magazines and notes so that you can find the things you are need when you're in a building-supply center.



The four-poster Harbor Island bed, from St. Barth's Home, is made of mahogany. Ann's grandmother's sonny is to the left of the French door.