



Surrounded by shutters, the Hoods' front porch serves as an outdoor living room.

Coastal architecture is defined by simple details and low-pitched roofs.



Timeless Coastal Charm

Do you long to be on the beach, but water's nowhere in sight? Instead of waiting, take some tips from these South Carolina homeowners to turn your own home into a seaside retreat. **BY ROBERT MARTIN**

Picture rolling sand dunes, glistening seashells washing ashore, and motionless seagulls hanging effortlessly in azure blue skies above.

Peaceful and relaxing, isn't it? But even if you don't live anywhere near the coast and an upcoming trip to one may seem unlikely, you can still set the scene by turning your own home into a breezy, beach-inspired getaway.

Homeowners Sheila and Dennis

Hood did just that in their lovely cottage in Palmetto Bluff near Bluffton, South Carolina. While this community is set within the fertile and historic marshlands of South Carolina's Lowcountry, the sand and surf of the Atlantic are still a little distance away. Undaunted by their distance from the sea, the Hoods established their own isle of tranquility through thoughtful coastal-styled architecture, well-chosen materials, soothing colors, and sea-inspired accessories.

Style that Captures the Coast

The Hoods' home resembles a quaint beachcomber's cottage. Similar sturdy and modest structures have epitomized the South's coastal communities for over a century. In keeping with this aesthetic and in response to the local climate, Jim Strickland and his team at Historical Concepts in Peachtree City, Georgia, called for wide roof overhangs, simple details, and comfortable porches to catch refreshing breezes. Sheila,

Dennis, and dog Annie know this well because they spend so much time enjoying these sheltered spaces.

If the homeowners need more seclusion or shade, all they have to do is close a bank of shutters. These handy panels combined with decorative solid walls below and fixed louvered shutters above further transform both ends of the porch into cozy outdoor rooms. Operable shutters also flank the French doors inside the porch. “I love using shutters with adjustable slats because even when closed, the slats can be positioned to let air circulate,” says Jim. “Plus, being on this porch when it’s raining, with all the shutters pulled shut, is such a treat.”

Materials Convey a Simpler Time

The casual, take-it-easy essence of the Hoods’ bungalow is evident in its corrugated-metal roof, simple wood box columns, and tabby-formed chimney and foundation piers. “These are all materials that the locals used in the past to construct their homes,” explains Jim. “They built with whatever was readily available around them, which often resulted in straightforward structures that were passed down through the generations.”

Inside, walls covered with horizontal reclaimed cypress boards lend a subtle texture and aroma that gypsum drywall just can’t provide. “We make every attempt to build a house with sustainable materials,” states Bill Mischler with Genesis Construction in Bluffton, “and the Hoods’ home is no exception.” Beaded-board ceilings, both on the front porch and indoors, further capture a nostalgic, long-standing quality.

Sea-Inspired Inside and Out

At first glance, the gray-blue surrounding shutters and shake siding establish a soothing color palette that continues throughout the house. Even the mix-and-match pillows on the porch reflect various shades of water and sky.

Assisted by interior designer Ruth Edwards of nearby Hilton Head Island, Sheila didn’t want to overlay the blue



While not a Southern invention, shutters are a part of Deep South design.



To help the modest-size home live large, the front room is one big open area.



The table behind the sofa helps divide the room.

tones inside, so she used them sparingly in the living area. Where the walls are neutral, eye-catching cushions, throws, and painted furniture keep things upbeat. The slate surround of the fireplace, along with the landscape painting above the mantel, reinforce Ruth and Sheila's color scheme.

The kitchen shares this same interplay of color, with the cabinetry, marble countertops, and backsplash, creating an off-white backdrop for bowls, trays, and dishware. "Again, we didn't want our use of blue to be too heavy-handed or expected," says Sheila. Nautical-style lighting above the island helps carry the coastal look into this space.

Accessories Bring in the Beach

The Hoods have made their front porch one of the most congenial outdoor spots in Palmetto Bluff because their house doesn't have a conventional foyer—pairs of French doors open right into the main living room. This in-between space is where they greet guests and neighbors, so it is here that their coastal touches begin.

The Hoods decorated their front porch with lamps that look like sea-weathered wood, sisal rugs, and throw pillows with wavy and coral-like



Sand-colored cabinets and nautical-style lighting anchor the kitchen.

Home

patterns inspired by the Atlantic Ocean just a short drive away. The back porch is outfitted with coral-patterned pillows and a swinging daybed. Instead of shutters, the couple relies on durable draperies made from waterproof sailcloth for shade and privacy. Potted ferns add the lushness of nearby marshlands.

Tortoise shells and conch shells accessorize the living area, while starfish adorn the mantel. Books on South Carolina's coastal area lie stacked on the coffee table and topped with shells. Vases of palm fronds simply picked up from outside complete the tropical ambience. "Besides being pleased with the architectural outcome, I must give Sheila and Dennis special credit for their added touches," says Jim. "They took the bones of a fun, comfortable house and gave it a refreshing, resort-like sophistication." *



The Hoods rely on the front porch as an extension of the interior.



The daybed-like swing turns the back porch into a comfy retreat.

Features of the Lowcountry Style

Defined as South Carolina's and upper Georgia's outer Coastal Plain, the Lowcountry was occupied by a host of European settlers. These inhabitants, along with the local Gullah and Geechee people, have stamped their own character on the architecture. The area's steamy climate also demands certain design decisions to make homes more comfortable. Here are some key features of Lowcountry architecture.

- **Protection from the elements.** Broad roof overhangs with unique rafter tails help shade interiors. Metal

roofs add to the aesthetic. Shutters that can close for protection during storms complete the look.

- **Durable materials.** Stucco on brick and tabby is a common choice. Tabby is the material used on this house. This mixture of crushed oyster shells that dries like concrete was often used by early settlers because its ingredients were readily found along the coast.

- **Emphasis on natural ventilation.** Porches and structures raised up on piers encourage good airflow. Inside, windows and doors are often aligned to allow for interior cross breezes.



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