



White on white interiors welcome the warm coastal light into the home. Bright pops of blue and yellow lend a happy feel to each of the spaces.

Cottage Redux

An all-star designer fills a Lake Michigan homestead with enough laidback coastal cool to last a lifetime.

By Georgina Crespo | Photography by Werner Straube

When the time came to reimagine a cozy turn-of-the-century cottage in Harbor Springs on the shores of Lake Michigan, designer Tom Stringer knew exactly what he had to do: as little as possible. Though the house required some serious TLC, Tom approached the renovation with kid gloves. "Our job, as we saw it, was to preserve the 'cottage' of the place," he says. "Of course, we would have to fix a few things, rewire a few things and paint everything, but we wanted to resist the urge to completely remodel and thus wreck it. The eccentricities of a longtime summer cottage were the turn-on here."

With the structural integrity of the place preserved, Tom moved on to the exciting job of filling the home's all-white shell with bright colors befitting a fun-time retreat. Bold pops of blue, green and yellow look striking against the white beadboard backdrop of the cottage's interiors and the natural, neutral rugs that preside under foot. "We used really simple off-white wool needlepoint and sisal flat-weave carpets throughout the house," he says. "We wanted the floor plane to bounce light rather than absorb it."

Exposed beams and shiplap on the walls bring architectural interest to the master bedroom. All of the added texture makes the all-white space sing.



A mix of patterns, like navy stripes and modern paisley, in the guest room gives a fresh take on nautical style.



As a result, the home feels like a breath of fresh air and reflects the easy disposition of its retreat destination. "Setting and context are everything," the designer says. "Harbor Springs is a classic American summer resort town. You see geraniums in the window boxes and wicker on every porch. Our point wasn't to reimagine cottage living but rather to reinterpret it in a crisp way that didn't feel tired or dated." And by choosing furniture with clean, sleek silhouettes and a timeless aesthetic, Tom was able to do just that.

The house is ageless. It looks as if it has sat on its lot on the water forever and as if it always will. In the end, the home ended up being exactly what Tom hoped to accomplish for the owners: "It's a slightly muscular, turn-of-the-century cottage that's not at all fussy," he says. "It's full of light and really easy to live in."

A built-in bench in the breakfast nook ensures there's plenty of space come mealtime. It's also the ideal spot for an early morning session with the weekend newspaper or the perfect cup of coffee.



TOM STRINGER'S TIPS FOR A COASTAL COTTAGE WITH CHARACTER

1. Embrace imperfections.

"Having grown up summering nearby in a cottage built by my great-grandfather, I think I get the 'summer cottage thing.' Easy, breezy style with things slightly askew is a good description of cottage living."

2. Add architectural interest.

"The features and eccentricities of the architecture are essential to the design and provide an underlying interest to the interiors. Without those elements, the decorating might not hold up on its own."

3. Go bright and bold.

"My last project for this client involved very soft, heathery hues, so we decided to punch this one up with more primary colors. Plus, blue and white is just so classic and feels great in a house on the water."

