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Waterside Cottages

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# Waterside Cottages

Barbara Jacksier

Photography by Dan Mayers

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## Waterside Cottages

Barbara Jacksier  
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*Waterside Cottages* defines the attributes of successful coastal decorating, so that anyone, anywhere, can create a casual waterfront atmosphere, even when the nearest body of water is a thousand miles away.

Waterside property holds an undeniable appeal, as do the cozy, casual dwellings that exist there. But waterside style need not—and often is not—confined to residences within walking distance of an ocean or lake. The details are what truly give cottages that elusive quality known as coziness. Cottages near the water tend to be snug and modest, with exteriors painted in sun-reflecting whites, nautical blues, or playful colors. The interiors of these houses likewise avoid formality in favor of a casual approach. For many cottage owners, the goal is to create the illusion that their décor is somehow “thrown together,” albeit very tastefully.

From tidy New England beach cottages to bright tropical bungalows to a boathouse on the steep, pine-studded banks of the Kalamazoo River, *Waterside Cottages* showcases thirteen romantic havens, giving you inspiration for creating your own cozy waterside home.





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*For fresh and spontaneous rooms,*

Tybee, a barrier island, is dotted with historic cottages and colorful bungalows, many handed down from generation to generation. Some of the older homes, like the one Marcia and Ronnie Thompson own, were originally located elsewhere on the island and moved when hurricanes destroyed the shoreline.

“Our cottage was moved across from Tybee’s ocean coastline to its present site on the Back River in the 1930s,” recalls Marcia. “It had been abandoned for nearly twenty years when a real estate agent showed it to us in 1992. The house was a total wreck, with mold-stained walls and floors and roosting families of pigeons everywhere.”

The Thompsons bought the place, intending to tear it down and build fresh. However, while interviewing builders, the couple had several chance encounters with longtime island residents. Each had an interesting story to tell about the place.

“It never occurred to me that it could be made livable,” says Marcia. “But after learning about the home’s rich history, I decided the cottage should be saved if it was at all possible.”

Built in the nineteenth century, shortly after the railroad linked Tybee Island to the Georgia mainland, the cottage had once been the summer residence of a prominent Savannah family. Its wide front and back porches and central hallway are typical of low-country architecture in the coastal areas of the Carolinas and Georgia.

“It would have been less expensive to build a new home, but Marcia was determined to restore the place,” notes Ronnie. “She did an amazing job.”

Marcia’s goal was to retain or restore the home’s best features and to improve on those needing to be modernized. With the approval of architect Daniel E. Snyder, who has won numerous awards for his firm’s historic preservation work on other Tybee Island cottages, two

*display nature’s beauty in all its forms.*

interior walls were removed. The resulting great room includes a kitchen, an eating area, and a living room with French doors opening onto the screened-in verandah.

Now, just as it was more than a century ago, the home’s main thoroughfare is a wood-paneled hallway. Doors at opposite ends channel welcoming breezes. The rear door opens onto a back porch with a view of a private dock and gazebo.

“When our children were younger, the gazebo was their favorite spot to picnic with their friends after a day of fishing from the dock,” says Marcia. The home’s many outdoor living spaces were one of the things that attracted Marcia to the cottage.

“One of the reasons I wanted a second home was to have a casual place for our children, my parents, and my grandmother to get together and enjoy each other’s company,” she continues. Her grandmother Sema Wilkes, who passed away in 2002, was known to generations of

Savannah residents as the proprietor of one of the city’s most beloved restaurants. The restaurant, called simply “Mrs. Wilkes’ Dining Room,” is still family-run and offers guests the finest in old-time Southern dining.

Through the years, Mrs. Wilkes gave Marcia and Ronnie many of her handcrafted chests, tables, and hutches. “My grandmother originally bought them to furnish a Savannah boardinghouse she ran before she opened her restaurant,” Marcia notes.

These beautiful antiques are a sentimental reminder of her family’s history and the era when the cottage was originally built. They demonstrate anew that the bare-foot denizens of Tybee Island and the well-shod residents of Savannah have more in common than casual observers might imagine—a love of beauty, of preserving the past, and of the kind of careful craftsmanship found in many city homes, and in the Thompsons’ Tybee Island sanctuary as well.



**Roberta's favorite beach gems**, *above*, are displayed in a worthy shadowbox. When Roberta found it at a flea market, the frame was gold and the interior dark wood. What a difference a little paint can make! **Ocean blue bottles**, *right*, shells, sea glass, and strands of pearls are arranged to form a thrift shop mermaid's bounty.

