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WHIPPED CREAM

A DELICIOUSLY SMART NEW BEACH COTTAGE IN CARDIFF

BY CARL H. LARSEN | PHOTOGRAPHY BY JOHN DURANT



Nevada interior designer Kelley Cozzolino and Encinitas architect Samuel Chereskin teamed to create a Cardiff confection: a repurposed beach cottage tailor-made for a senior couple to remember grand times on the East Coast.

*I*t's cute as a button and, oh, so soothing. That was the plan all along in rejuvenating an aging Cardiff bungalow for long-married husband and wife clients who wanted a retreat from the brutal summers straining their primary residence in Las Vegas.

Pale yellows, accented with a light blue, and soothing sea breezes working up a rise from the ocean a few blocks away make the high-powered glitz of The Strip and its nonstop action seem like another world.

The story of how this 2,100-square-foot, two-story abode came to be is one of finding the right people to carry out a dream. And it's a story of a unique personal relationship between designer and client and a newly forged partnership between designer and architect.

The focus would not be on the latest high-tech equipment, but on memories of how a simply



designed seaside cottage can be a restorative place of relaxation and contemplation.

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A few steps from the kitchen, which has its own breakfast counter, is a formal dining area, brightened by the fireplace and sconces. The island at left houses a custom venting system and below-countertop microwave. The countertops are made of recycled glass embedded in epoxy. A beam overhead recalls important way stations in the owners' lives while a new stairway at left leads to a downstairs bedroom, garage and laundry.

Interior designer Kelley Cozzolino of Henderson, Nevada, had worked earlier with the retired couple and now she was tasked to help them find a North Coast residence that would meet their goal of being a place to age gracefully. The focus would not be on the latest high-tech equipment, but on memories of how a simply designed seaside cottage can be a restorative place of relaxation and contemplation. The home also could serve as a new primary residence for the couple, who wanted a residence close to their physicians.

“The owners are very hands off, so I approached this project as if it were my own personal home,” Cozzolino says. “I represented them with the architect, contractors and the city of Encinitas.”

To find the right home on the coastal strip from La Jolla to Encinitas, Cozzolino worked with real estate agent Ria Scoma.

“We narrowed down the selection to about eight houses ranging in price from \$1 million to \$2.6 million,” Cozzolino recalls. “On the last day of my trip (from Nevada), Ria called and asked me to look at ‘just one more.’ She felt that it was ‘the one.’ And it was.”

What they found was a 1,385-square-foot bungalow in a densely built section of Cardiff that had been constructed in the 1950s. With a converted garage and an odd floor plan that seemed to ignore the view to the ocean, the house needed a major awakening. Cozzolino saw the potential, but realized that it would take a lot of work, and could benefit from a well-planned expansion on the tight site.

“My clients and I met Ria at the house and they fell in love with it immediately. The wife said that the house gave her ‘a hug.’ She loved the lemon tree in the front yard and the cottage charm.”

Cozzolino gave her clients this assessment of the property, posing three options:

“We can paint and decorate. We can renovate the bathrooms and some other areas.”

Or, she told them, “We can go for it.”

The answer was Number Three, opening nearly a two-year process of getting permits from the city of Encinitas, gutting the home, and finally creating the turnkey cottage her clients desired and remembered from their early years on the East Coast. “Their only request was that we keep the charm of the original house, and to try to create a ‘Hamptons or Cape Cod feel,’” Cozzolino says.

Before you turn up your nose and ask: “What does East Coast sea-front living have to do with Southern California?” you need to know that virtually all the major design and decorator pieces, such as hard goods from San Diego Hardware and decor items from the Birdcage in the nearby Cedros Design District, were locally sourced by Cozzolino. She also included paintings from local artists. Though this was her first San Diego-area project, her feel for the vernacular of the area proved to be spot-on.

But Cozzolino needed a partner, someone who could share her vision of an expanded home and deliver a plan that would work for her clients.

The surprise inside is the open-air design in what first appears to be a small cottage. Here, the view on the main level is from the living room, past the double-opening fireplace, through the dining area and the kitchen with its pass-through windows looking out on a rear deck and the ocean.







As luck would have it, she found Encinitas architect Samuel Chereskin through contacts from Scoma.

Chereskin has a strong background in custom-home design as well as extensive remodels. Helping the process was Chereskin's work on projects within the health-care industry. This was important, because as the clients moved further into their senior years, they were concerned that their beach cottage take into account issues of accessibility and sustainability as a longtime residence.

"This was designed as an aging-in-place and special needs home," says Cozzolino. And, while you don't really notice it, the house is outfitted with strategic grab bars and with an easy-access shower off the master bedroom. Doors and halls throughout can accommodate people challenged by mobility issues. There's an interesting benefit for the resident dog. A Solo pet door, activated by a device on the pet's collar, allows the animal to go outdoors to a side-yard dog run without an assist from a human. "It's like having my own automatic garage door opener," boasts the company's advertising canine.

The home is entered from its eastern exposure, through a Dutch door, and from the outside easily deceives visitors. It appears to be a small, crowded house,

Above: A focal point in the cozy living room is a custom-designed Robert Allen corner couch, just beyond the Dutch-door side entrance. The floors are oak.

Opposite top and bottom: The master bedroom suite is decorated with Robert Allen draperies and a painting of Marilyn Monroe by local artist Amalia Di Luccia. The bathroom features an eco-friendly Toto toilet and an easy-access Italian marble shower. Architect Chereskin and designer Cozzolino filled the home with aging-in-place features.



the kind where two people in a room would be uncomfortable. Surprise. Just inside, a cozy living room greets guests and is brightened by a solar light tunnel, which in the world of green architecture wields the awkward generic name of tubular daylight device.

The focal point of the room is a two-sided gas fireplace and a custom L-shaped sectional couch. Flooring throughout the first floor is an easy-to-maintain oiled Siberian oak.

With dry wall underneath, the white judges paneling gives way to a bead board in a contrasting pale yellow. Overhead, a lightly stained white plank ceiling contrasts with the bright white and pale yellows of the walls.

“We took everything back to the studs,” says Chereskin. To win the permits he needed from Encinitas, Chereskin had to assure officials that the house would be habitable while construction took place, so his plans called for movable eating, sleeping and bathroom facilities while work progressed. But that’s only half the story.

The architect added 775 square feet to the home to accomplish the need for more space, including a new bedroom. As part of the full-scale remodel, he had to undertake a large regrading project that left the cottage supported by shoring



while yards of earth were being moved. “It was a big dig,” says Chereskin. But by working on the bottom side of the house, instead of going up, he won smiles from neighbors who may have feared the remodel would block their ocean views.

One of the biggest design changes was pivoting the garage entrance from a busy street to a rear alley, and then adding new structural support to the garage. Today, cars pull in over a driveway framed in runoff-limiting permeable grass, one of many green features Chereskin incorporated into the design.

Moving to the left of the fireplace, past a Dutch-door side entrance, is a small dining area with a round table for four that faces the other side of the fireplace, a space highlighted by two sconces above the mantel. On a wall is a small computer workspace. An ample-sized kitchen is next with the range and microwave worked into an oversize island with a breakfast nook for three on the other side. Countertops of Vetrazzo recycled glass set in an epoxy add an artistic and sustainable flourish. Cabinetry is white-finished alder wood with maple dovetail drawers.

Framed by windows, the sunny kitchen looks toward the ocean, an improvement on the original design. Outside, above the garage, is a deck. A handy pass-through window puts hors d'oeuvres or cocktails within an arm's reach of sun worshipers.





Opposite top and bottom: The new downstairs guest bedroom has its own bathroom. Behind the draperies, the French door opens to a lower-level patio. An artist's detail on the wall above the headboard plays on the fabric's floral theme.

Above: Chereskin teases visitors to the Cardiff cottage with a glimpse of the ocean view as they descend the stairs from the street. By focusing much of the expansion work on the lower level of the lot, he enabled neighbors to keep their ocean-view sight lines.

Just off the kitchen is a new stairway, leading to the lower-level guest suite with bath and an adjacent oversize laundry room with painted mural. Hot water is provided by a tankless water heater. A second outside area, with fountain, is perfect for curling up with a book. Countertops in restrooms and the laundry are of Silestone.

Off the living room is a small office/guest room looking out on the front yard and its lemon tree, while the owner's bedroom has French doors leading to a porch overlooking the back.

Cozzolino gave up on one point. She has an aversion to fans, but in this house she has placed simple, unobtrusive white fans at strategic locations to capitalize on the coastal climate and to keep air moving to avoid coast-mildew issues.

While work was under way, Cozzolino set up shop in North County, moving into her own apartment. In off hours, she'd frequently drop by the family-run Trattoria Positano, a few blocks away. Here, she spied oil paintings created by one of the owners, Amalia Di Luccia. Those Italian meals led to the beach house being sprinkled with Amalia's artwork, bringing a vibrancy to the otherwise soft color palette inside with paintings of Marilyn Monroe and Italian beach scenes.

Looking at the joinery in the living room, Chereskin raves about the finishwork by general contractor and carpenter Richard Thaisz, also of Cardiff. "Every piece of wood was hand-cut," he says. "And you can't see many joints." In fact, many of the tradespeople came from nearby.

While Cozzolino and Chereskin proved that the house had good bones, the owners also wanted it to possess strong roots reflecting their life experiences. So

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Whipped Cream

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a beam in the kitchen is etched with the names of important way stations in their lives.

But the strongest tie to the past is a painting by local artist Edmond Piffard. Piffard used a photograph taken by Cozzolino from the Internet of St. Jerome's Church in the Bronx — the wife's former family church — to create a painting, setting the church amid a garden of roses. It's placed in a corridor, recessed within the wall around an arched woodwork frame.

Surveying their work recently, after the home was completed last May, Cozzolino and Chereskin said they believe they had delivered their dream home to the client couple.

Speaking of Cozzolino, Chereskin says, "Without her, it wouldn't have come off this way." He noted that Cozzolino lived and breathed the project, and functioned as sort of an on-site project manager, sometimes to the bemusement of tradespeople.

And Chereskin remarked the two grew to respect each other's ideas. "Outside is pretty much what I did," he said. "And inside is pretty much what she did."

"My goal," says Cozzolino, "was to not only meet my clients' request, but to create an atmosphere that was calming and happy at the same time, safe and convenient. I think the house feels like whipped cream. It's just kind of yummy. We worked very well as a team, from the architect to the landscapers."

"Nothing was too hard or couldn't be done, and it was never a problem to change direction, if I wanted to."

Today, after moving into the turnkey home, "the owners are very happy with the end result and wouldn't change a thing," she says. "What a great feeling to finish a project knowing that the owners love their home." ∞

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