

JANUARY 2009

# House Beautiful

## A CLEAN SLATE

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A CLEAN SLATE

THE POWER OF  
**SERENITY**

A HOUSE AS SOOTHING  
AS A SEA BREEZE



The front door of this oceanfront Los Angeles house opens to a surprising open-air courtyard. Designer Chris Barrett clustered plants in antique pots on a concrete table from Inner Gardens. Metal garden chairs are from Hollyhock. OPPOSITE: A detail of one of the living room's suzani pillows from Brenda Antin.





LISA CREGAN:

Does it get dreamier than this? A peaceful cottage with a full view of the Pacific...

CHRIS BARRETT

Romantic, isn't it, and so desperately beautiful—small but such a jewel. The way it sits perched on a lush green hill above the ocean, it feels like the Amalfi Coast, like Positano. Everyone who sees it wants to live here. I know I do. The idea was to design an intimate retreat for two, as well as a gathering place for family—for children and grandchildren. I wanted it to be open, clean and serene. It's a refuge for the soul—not to get too artsy and California on you. But it really is... >>

The living room's infinite ocean view inspired a light, fresh palette, with hints of blue in the integral plaster walls. A silk and wool teal rug from Mansour Modern grounds all the soft colors. To keep the mood serene, Barrett covered the sofa and chairs in the same fabric, Lambeth Linen in Oyster from Travers. She designed the double cane-back sofa in a style that's part Biedermeier, part Caribbean. The marble-topped side table is from Brenda Antin, the metal-topped coffee table is from Amy Perlin, and the tree stump table is from Inner Gardens.

**A refuge for the soul... is that why you went with such a quiet, soothing palette?**

Well, it's really more about the ocean. The moment you enter the living room, all you see is ocean through that enormous wall of glass. It's like some giant piece of art. And there are views from the dining room, the master bedroom and bath, the terrace... it's ever present. The texture of the teal rug in the living room even has a movement like the sea.

**There's also a sea of pillows in the house!**

You're right. But if you took them away, the house wouldn't be nearly as interesting or inviting. They're an important element and not just because pillows are cozy. They all have a hint of orange—the orange of red seaweed. Orange gave the rooms that extra punch of warmth. It's one of those colors that really brings rooms to life.

**Except for the suzani pillows, most of them have a lovely faded look, as if they were sun-bleached.**

I use pillows like that a lot. The guy I get them from, Chuck Geller, actually fades the prints to give them a presence that you don't get from a crisp new fabric. We brought in 50 at the very end of the project and narrowed them down to the ones that felt best.

**Do you always wait until the end to choose accessories?**

The real personality happens right at the end. That's when this natural, easy-living, undecorated look happened here. I do floor plans and mock-ups and 3-D drawings like every interior designer, but until a house comes together physically, there's no way to know what to add or subtract. Interior design is about creating an experience, an atmosphere, and you can't do that on paper or a computer! Drawing in every little vase or pillow makes for a static, boring space. The sophistication in this house had to be layered in—it was like creating an art installation.

**An art installation?**

I'll give you an example. The living room was really a blank canvas—we'd chosen the sofa, chairs, and coffee table, which are very neutral. Let's say I had added blue and white

Fortuny pillows—it would have made the room much more formal. See that round marble table next to the sofa? It's not something you'd have chosen if you were using photos and planning the room to a tee, but once I got it in there, I knew it was right. It's a quirky piece—it throws off all the rectangles in the room and makes the space feel more relaxed. But who knew?

**Not me. And I'd never have guessed this light wood furniture would have so much presence against pale walls and floors, either.**



I didn't think dark furniture was right for the beach, even though it might have looked more dramatic against the whitewashed wood floors. I wanted the furniture to relate more to driftwood than to a redwood tree, more ocean than inland. The living room sofa and the dining room chairs have caning, which, to me, says breezy and beachy, like the openness of the dining table base. I wanted the large furniture to be very see-through. Then there's this little tree stump table in the

living room, like someone found a piece of wood on the beach, polished it up, and used it as a table. I realize that's a totally romantic notion, but it's still the way I see it.

**You keep using the word romantic—what's the most romantic thing about this place?**

Oh gosh, I don't know. Maybe the courtyard garden? The courtyard is the first room you enter, a sort of vestibule—it just happens to be outside. It's a sheltered haven with clusters of antique pots and lush plants and flowers, and it feels so good, so calm and nurturing. It was the first space I really tackled, kind of a springboard for serenity.

**And what was going through your mind when you placed those crusty pots and rusty chairs in your perfect little courtyard?**

No, not perfect! Nothing's more boring than making everything perfect. A little imperfection makes a perfect thing prettier. The white metal chairs give that concrete table such a lift. Clearly no one sits there, but they add character. It gives the table purpose, even if it's only a pretend purpose! I love the plaster walls that run throughout the interiors here for the same reason—there's beauty in their imperfection. I did them with a slight blue tinge mixed in—they make the whole house feel so cool, so peaceful.

**You seem to have used pretty old-fashioned techniques to create such an up-to-date lifestyle.**

I do think historical reference is so important. I love these bedside lamps in the master. They're Lucite with a sort of baroque gold-leafed wood base, the epitome of old meets

new. Without them, the bedroom isn't nearly as good. Same in the kitchen. The antique light fixture adds a bit of history, so does the table I designed—the reference was an old wine-tasting table. The romantic little curve in its legs is subtle, but that's what makes it so special.

**Everything about this house is special. No big statement here—it's just home, isn't it?**

Yes, it's a little slice of heaven.

STYLIST SEAN MCGOWAN

ABOVE: In the living room, a leather-armed Ralph Lauren Home chair and a Dessin Fournir lounge chair flank the fireplace, which is directly below a hidden TV. The ivory and teak box on the coffee table is from Hollyhock. The glass floor lamp is from Bourgeois Bohème. OPPOSITE: Barrett designed the 1950s-style dining room table and chairs; she caned the chairs and made a see-through table base to give the furniture a "beachy" feel. Chair fabric is Classic Cloth's Gladestone.





PELLI  
VINO





1. Oak cabinets and a vanity are built into a niche off the master bedroom. 2. A Moroccan box striped with ivory and teak inlays sits on the metal-topped coffee table in the living room. 3. A Holly Hunt chair and ottoman are an inviting place to read in the sitting area between the kitchen and living room. 4. The master bath is open to the master bedroom, so the owners can see the ocean from the tub. 5. Dark furniture—Janus et Cie's Veneto—grounds the expansive oceanside terrace. 6. A detail of the living room's damask footstool. 7. An aqua glass makes the perfect powder room vase. 8. Kitchen floors are whitewashed oak. The range is Wolf. OPPOSITE: Barrett created a banquette "to add a comfort zone to the kitchen." She upholstered it in Rogers & Goffigon's Pandora in Gregglo. Print pillows are from C Geller Pillows. The antique pendant light is from Rewire.





Barrett designed the master bedroom headboard "higher than the norm to lift your eye up to that pretty Paul Ferrante chandelier." Beechwood tables from City Studio. Lamps are 1940s Lucite and carved wood. The rug is AM Enterprise's Repp Block. OPPOSITE: Sheer curtains add "a little romance" to the master bath. Light fixtures above the mirror are from Urban Archaeology. The huge sculptural white coral is from Inner Gardens. FOR MORE DETAILS, SEE RESOURCES.

