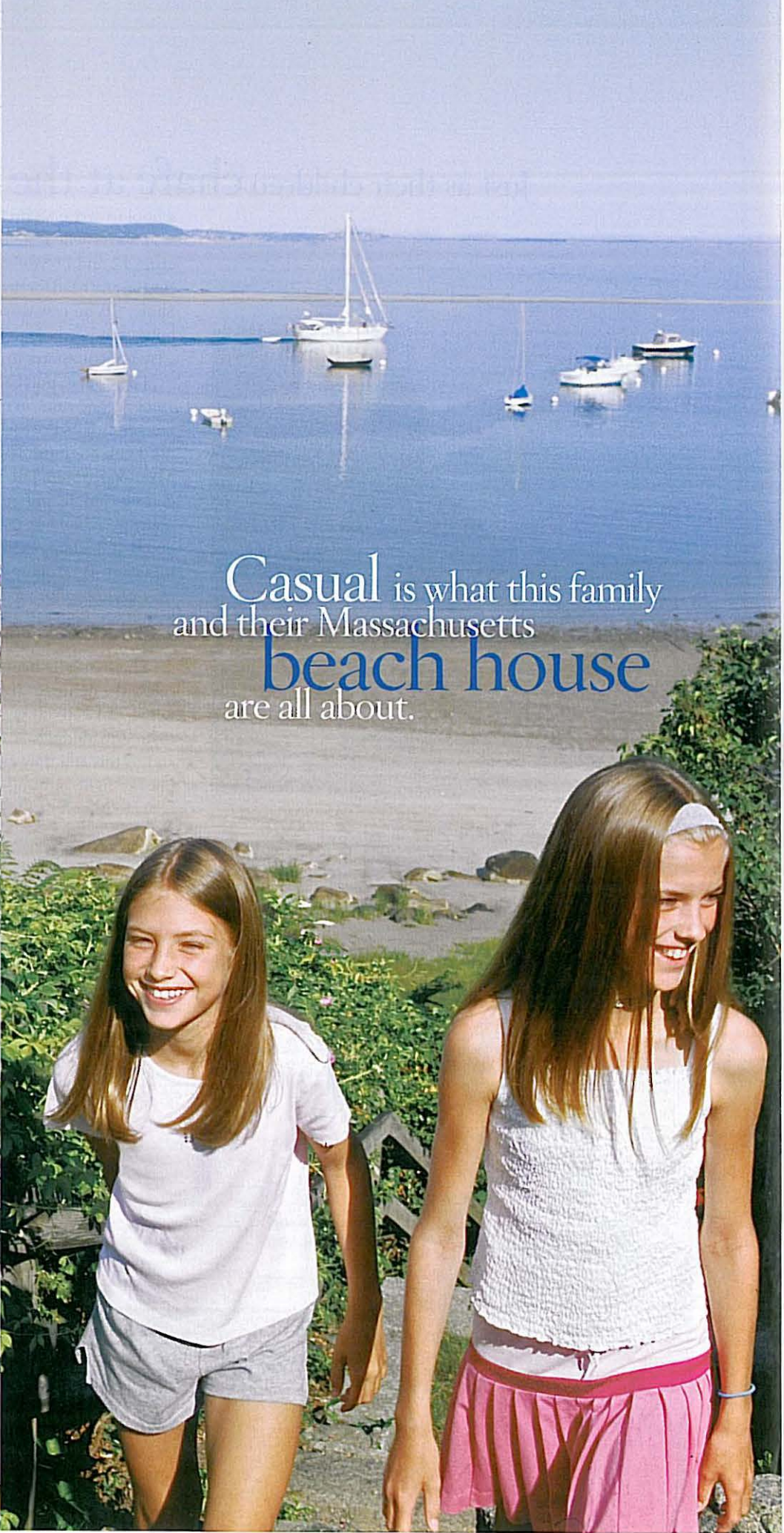


easy BREEZY

BY PAMELA J. WILSON PHOTOGRAPHY BY TRIA GIOVAN PRODUCED BY HILLARY MAHARAM



A graceful arch frames the view of the sitting room as seen from the entry. A pair of new, extra-comfy lounge chairs focus on the fireplace studded with shore stones. *Right:* Location, location location. Victoria, *left*, and Katherine Johnston make the most of their stay at the family's beach house on the Massachusetts North Shore.



Casual is what this family
and their Massachusetts
beach house
are all about.

Just as their children chafe at the bit for the last day of

school to arrive, so do Leslie Sennott and her husband, Bill Johnston. That's when the entire family—including Tucker, 15, Katherine, 12, and 11-year-old Victoria—bid adieu to their home near Boston and head for their beach house on the Massachusetts North Shore. "It's an easy drive [less than an hour] from our year-round house, but psychologically, it's far, far away," says Leslie. In fact, Bill, a lawyer, commutes to Boston during the summer season.

The couple purchased their summer place in the autumn of 1998. At one time an inn with 12 bedrooms and only two baths, the century-old oceanside house boasted a perfect location but needed renovation. The Boston architectural firm of Charles R. Myer & Partners Ltd. was hired to do the job, which included gutting and reconfiguring all interior spaces, winterizing the structure, rebuilding the porch, replacing all windows and exterior doors, and adding architectural details consistent with the structure's age. By August 1999, the place was ready to welcome its new owners with an airy, open-plan layout, a new kitchen, five bathrooms, and six spacious bedrooms (instead of 12 smallish ones). Only the captivating seaside view remained unchanged.

There may be many reasons for owning a summer house, but surely the desire to "hang loose" is of major importance for most. Leslie and Bill's idea of relaxing means keeping their lives and their surroundings as easygoing and uncomplicated as possible, and to this end they enlisted Boston designer Christine Lane to put her light, nothing-fussy touch on the interiors.





At the far end of the living room, this atmospheric bay window is fitted with built-in seats and furnished with a table and chairs used primarily for game-playing. **Opposite, far left:** Blooms in the perennial garden peek through a white picket fence along the side and back of the 100-year-old shingled house. **Opposite bottom:** Casually dressed in wispy whites and seashore blues, the living room says "summer house" through and through.

Keep it simple,
keep it casual.

—DESIGNER CHRISTINE LANE

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Because it's fully open to the dining room, the kitchen looks and lives larger than it really is. More about simplicity than stop-in-your-tracks show, the room features plain cabinets and a peninsula used for both prep work and serving snacks. Top right: With its ocean views, the kitchen eating area provides the utmost in waterfront dining. An old ship lantern is now a chandelier.



"Keep it simple, keep it casual," were Lane's mantras in the process of choosing fabric, new furnishings, and a smattering of New England antiques for the house. A number of the furnishings, including the side tables and three lounge chairs in the living room, came with the house, and Lane incorporated these items by either painting them white or re-covering the upholstered pieces.

"Most of the artwork was done by local artists, and I purchased all of the antiques from dealers who live nearby," says Lane, who grew up in the Cape Ann area (where Leslie and Bill's house is located).

What looks like an antique farm table in the kitchen dining area is actually new but built out of old floorboards. The Essex, Massachusetts, craftsman who created the piece also made the coffee table and a round pedestal table in the living room. Designer Lane can take full credit for the eye-catching fireplace in the sitting room/library. At once a work of art and a labor of love for her clients, the fireplace is fronted with stones of various shapes, sizes, and colors—each one of which Lane plucked from beaches along the New England coast. She worked with a mason to put every stone in its proper place.

Because bare feet are more common than not at the beach, especially when children are present, the Sennott-Johnston family wanted floors and floor coverings that would resist harm from sand and other trackings. "All floors on the main level are

In the girls' bedroom, brilliant sunrises guarantee cheerful wake-up calls. Spindle beds were found at a flea market; all other furnishings came with the house. **Right, clockwise from top:** The girls' bathroom continues the yellow-and-white of the bedroom. Built-in ledges hold toiletries. ■ A charming armchair is covered in a summery stripe. ■ The water beckons.





fir, and upstairs they're pine," Lane explains. "Most rooms have neutral-colored sisal area rugs. We chose them because they're hard-wearing and also because they're simple and casual—in keeping with the mood of the house."

Leslie and Bill love the ambience that Lane and the architects created. "The house has such a wonderful, comfortable, summery feeling," says Leslie. "We wanted a place where we could wake up and know that we were at the beach without ever having to look outside."

Sure enough, the pleasant sensation of soft ocean breezes is duplicated inside through the use of frothy colors and lots of feathery shorebird white. Like the color of driftwood, the floors are components of the home's beach-like beauty, and the abundance of natural light is an extension of clear-as-a-bell summer skies. Even on cool, overcast days, the house radiates warmth and offers many options for pleasurable indoor pursuits—reading (shelves are stocked with good books), game-playing, and napping among them.

But whatever the weather, cooking is a popular pastime in the new kitchen, and mealtimes, like the house itself, are simple affairs. Lobster, clams, and all kinds of fish are local "staples" in plentiful supply, as are fresh vegetables and fruits purchased at farm stands.

When dining indoors, the family's favorite spot to gather is on the old Windsor chairs that surround the kitchen table. Here

they enjoy views of the water and, when the French doors are open, the salty breezes. Other dining venues include a delightful porch, a table situated in the living room's bay window, and, of course, picnics at the beach. Friends are often present at mealtimes and are always welcome.

Leslie and Bill are certain that this marvelous house will stay in their family for many years to come. Just as their children now walk to the yacht club every day to go sailing, swimming, or to play tennis, they envision their grandchildren doing the same someday. "This house brings us together now, and I'm sure it will continue to do so in the future," says Leslie.

The desire for ease and relaxation may be one of the major reason for owning a summer house, but the promise of experiencing togetherness with family and friends is no doubt the best reason of all. ■

Architects: Alice Dunn and Charles Myer **Interior designer:** Christine Lane
For more information, see sources on page 182.