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DESIGNER LAURA COVINGTON TRANSFORMS A
RUNDOWN HOME ON FIGURE EIGHT ISLAND INTO
A DREAM RESIDENCE FOR ONE RALEIGH COUPLE.



TEXT BY BLAKE MILLER | PHOTOGRAPHY BY MICHAEL BLEVINS

The upstairs and downstairs living rooms mirror each other with sweeping sound and marsh views and gorgeous sunsets. To mimic the curvature of the windows with a nod to the playful function of the upstairs living room, Covington added a Lee Industries sectional with Crypton fabric and an indoor-outdoor rug to protect against salt and sand.





HEATHER AND JEFF NICHOLSON HAD BEEN LOOKING UP and down the North and South Carolina coast to find their perfect beach home. The couple, both of whom grew up in eastern North Carolina and met as college students at UNC Chapel Hill, even looked as far south as Florida but still came up short. Then one weekend their friends invited them to Figure Eight Island. “You can’t get on the island unless you know someone who lives there,” says Heather. “But once we were there we just knew that it was where we wanted to be.”

Homes on the exclusive island, however, are few and far between. There were just three on the market in early 2020, and it wasn’t until they toured the very last one that they finally had their

aha moment. “Our realtor actually recommended we shouldn’t even look at it,” says Jeff. The circa-1990s home was known on the island as the “terra-cotta roof house,” with a yellow stucco facade and Mediterranean-inspired architecture. Inside, dark, dated ornate finishes and architectural details, brass fixtures such as a gold swan faucet, and wallpaper everywhere made most potential buyers turn away. But the Nicholsons could see the potential.

While the home certainly stood out from the other traditional beach homes on the island, what it afforded the Nicholsons was the ideal setting they’d been looking for. Situated on the sound side of the island, the home is positioned in such a way that every room features a sunset and water view. Plus, with a dock and

In lieu of a formal dining room, Covington transformed the area at the top of the stairs into a makeshift dining hall. The large French oak round dining table with brass foot detail by RH expands to host larger dinner parties. **OPPOSITE:** Because the main floor living room boasts stunning sweeping views of the marsh and intracoastal waterway, maximizing the views was a priority. Covington created small seating areas to make the oversized room feel more intimate while also increasing the seating options. The Highland House sofas are swathed in a durable Crypton linen fabric.



Remodeled a year after move-in, the original Old-World style kitchen was made into a bright, beachy one, with high-gloss cabinets painted in Benjamin Moore White Dove and a fun blue-and-white patterned concrete tile backsplash. Oversized white plaster pendants are by Visual Comfort while the custom natural rattan breakfast stools upholstered in cream faux leather are by Tritter Feefer. **OPPOSITE:** To maximize seating in the breakfast area, Covington incorporated a trestle table by Tritter Feefer Home that accommodates eight guests. The wooden twig light fixture by Gabby creates a dramatic statement while complementing the rattan chairs by Arteriors.





water access for boating, the home—warts and all—was exactly what the couple wanted. “I asked Heather, ‘Can you see this working for us?’” says Jeff, “and she said, ‘Absolutely, we can make it work.’” Heather, who has a design degree, knew that with the right designer, the home could become the place of their dreams. “I think people underestimated what they could do with this home,” she says. “I think the home intimidated a lot of people because it was so different. But the bones were solid and those views were breathtaking.”

The couple, who are nearing retirement, dreamed of having a retreat for their grandchildren one day. “The hope is that as our two grown children eventually have families of their own, everyone will gather here together,” says Jeff. “We wanted and

needed this home to fit our large family comfortably so that hopefully this is a place our kids and grandkids want to keep coming to even after we’re gone.”

The couple enlisted the help of designer Laura Covington to bring their comfortable and cozy multigenerational beach home to fruition. “We felt immediately comfortable with Laura. I went to design school and had a vision for what I wanted,” explains Heather. “Laura’s aesthetic matched what we were looking for. We immediately hit it off and went to work right after closing.” With a goal of being in the home by summer 2020—only a few months after buying the home—Covington immediately gutted the interiors and removed the dark, dated finishes, replacing them with a softer color palette throughout.



ABOVE: The original foyer was extremely dark with heavy tapestry and a wooden bench that greeted guests. Covington created a warm, layered entrance that sets the tone for the rest of the home, with a verdigris-colored faux leather console with brass accents by Mitchell Gold + Bob Williams, rattan chairs fabricated by Oomph, and rattan lamps by Arteriors. The mirror is by Carvers' Guild.

TOP RIGHT: The stone pedestal game table by Highland House is the perfect place to do a puzzle, have breakfast or cocktails, or play games. Custom upholstered white-oak chairs by Mr. Brown complete the room.

BOTTOM: The sitting area is a great place to unwind with a book or glass of wine. Covington outfitted the space with a pair of woven chairs by Palacek and side tables by Gabby. The floor lamps are by Visual Comfort.



LEFT: In the downstairs powder room, Covington added a custom vanity accented with Addison Weeks hardware and coupled it with a playful China Seas wallpaper. The chandelier, which she found at High Point Market, was originally a wall accessory. The rattan mirror is by Serena & Lily.

The kitchen was remodeled in 2021, a year after the couple moved into the home. “Originally, the kitchen had a very Old World feel to it,” says Covington. “So when we selected new finishes for the space, we decided to take an unexpected approach with high-gloss cabinetry in Benjamin Moore White Dove and a fun patterned blue-and-white concrete tile backsplash.”

Each of the bathrooms was completely gutted and replaced with a coastal-inspired aesthetic via wall-coverings, new light fixtures, gold hardware, and rattan and driftwood accents. “It’s a very unique situation because this home is not one of these cookie-cutter houses,” explains Covington. “It has so much personality, so we decided to embrace it and make it really feel like a resort and a retreat.”

The whole home is centered on its sweeping sound views and sunsets, which shed stunning natural light throughout every living space and led to a lighter, brighter color palette. Designed with two family rooms stacked on top of each other with large open windows that span the length, the living spaces are the ultimate gathering areas, so comfort and functionality was key. “The downstairs living room is such an amazing space,” says Covington. “The previous homeowners had one seating zone in that huge room and it felt so off in terms



To create a cozy cocoon in the owner's suite, Covington hung faux wood Nobilis wallpaper on the vaulted ceilings. The Oly canopy complements the ceiling, and, opposite, an extra-wide custom daybed by Lee Industries is swathed in Thibaut fabric, providing a perfect spot to rest, relax, and enjoy the view. The coverlet is by Legacy Linen. **OPPOSITE:** The homeowners love reading and napping on the daybed in the owner's suite, which is custom made from Lee Industries and covered in Thibaut fabric.



The Nicholsons did a significant landscape overhaul. They hired Tony Parker with Classic Landscapes in Wilmington to head up the landscaping redesign by removing ornate ironwork screens that blocked the sound and marsh views. Overgrown landscape was trimmed back to provide a better view of the sunset each evening, and the pool was remodeled so that it extended farther out. The teak and rope chairs by the pool are by Gloster. **OPPOSITE:** Covington transformed the dated game room into an entertaining hub by adding new custom built-in shelves lined with printed metallic grasscloth by Holland & Sherry. The chairs are by Palacek and the table is by Woodbridge.





of scale and usability. It felt too big, too empty, underused, and cavernous.” Covington redesigned the furniture layout so that the large space not only affords multiple seating arrangements that promote conversation and comfortable lounging, but also makes the room feel cozier. In the upstairs family room she took a similar but even more casual approach, since it would be used as the teen hangout where sandy and sunscreen-covered kids would lounge after a day on the beach.

The notion that nothing could be too precious and everything needed to be comfortable, casual, and withstand wear and tear from the beach was also applied to the game room,

owner’s suite, and guest rooms. Performance fabrics and durable materials like wicker and rattan were used throughout the home to withstand scratches and wet bathing suits.

In the end, the transformation from a dark, ornate home with traditional architectural details to an airy, open, relaxing beach retreat feels like a Tuscan farmhouse was turned into a private resort on the marsh and sound. Jeff acknowledges the grand renovation, saying, “Laura was able to take a structure that afforded this formal elegance and grandiose posture and turn it into this simple, comfortable, casual home where you really feel like once you’re there you can unwind, kick your shoes off, kick back, and relax.” ♦