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A rustic historic cottage with a serene view is reimagined to respect its roots and reflect its owners.

BY MERYL SCHOENBAUM | PHOTOGRAPHY BY BRET GUM | STYLING BY SHANNON GGEM AND JICKIE TORRES

History on the Water

SWING BED. Overnight guests have a fun treat in store when it's time to turn in. Designer Shannon Ggem had a swing bed hung with ropes installed in the guest bedroom to look like a sleeping porch. "The ropes give the room a nautical look, with a 180-degree view of nature, and guests can read in serenity," Shannon says. "We had to open up the ceiling to accept the weight of the bed, which opens to a full size to sleep two. The den looks like a little garden house, bringing the outdoors in."

SWIVEL SEATING. Whitney, host and owner of the nationally syndicated country music radio show *The Big Time with Whitney Allen*, enjoys entertaining, so Shannon placed teal leather swivel chairs in the living room so all guests can face the screen to watch movies together. On the windows, she went with closed- and open-weave fabrics for the draperies and a rod pocket instead of pleats for "maximum billowness" so the draperies would blow in the breeze.

DOOR IN THE FLOOR. The staircase in the downstairs den leads to a hydraulic trap door in the floor of the living room behind the sofa.

Shannon designed the hydraulic door for bringing laundry downstairs without having to go outside. "The den is all about texture," Shannon says. "The floor had to remain terra cotta because it is the solution to cleaning up flooding. I added a fun, decorative rug to warm up the space and double-wide chairs. I painted over the originally red-brick fireplace to make the room quiet." The painting above the mantel is by local artist Nan Kane. In one of her signature creative moves, Shannon turned the fabric on the chaise pillows inside out for a subtle look.



Some people dream of living in a sunny beach cottage, while others imagine life in a rustic mountain cabin.

But for the best of both worlds, it's hard to beat living lakeside in a rural cottage nestled in California's Santa Monica mountains. Whitney Allen and her husband, Gerrit, are longtime residents of this picturesque, dreamy enclave.

"We saw a few homes in the area and were driving to another," Whitney says. "When I saw this one, I pointed to its wood siding and green trim, and said, 'Why isn't a house like THAT for sale?' My realtor looked at her list and said, 'It is!'" And shortly thereafter, the couple

moved into the circa-1922 cottage with their three dogs and two cats.

But they soon realized there was another occupant living there that they hadn't bargained for. "We are pretty sure there was a ghost here when we bought it," Whitney says. "There were missing shoes and doors locked with an interior key, which I never used. There was the sound and smell of coffee being made in the kitchen. It wasn't scary, but crowded. I had a ghost whisperer come and talk him into moving on."

COTTAGE LIVING.

This view of the living room shows the home's original slate fireplace and millwork, with antique mirrors on the mantel. Pets are welcome here too, with a durable slipcover on the sofa so the dogs can enjoy relaxing there. Another pet-friendly feature is the flat-weave wool rug. "If you have animals, use wool fabrics because we know how to clean it," Shannon says. A blue vintage trunk as the coffee table gives the room an unexpected pop of bright color.





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BREAKFAST AT WHITNEY’S. The breakfast room has the old building details, such as combed plywood, topped with a whimsical chandelier. The views and subtle colors combine for a light, cheerful room in which to enjoy the first meal of the day.

The next call Whitney made was to interior designer Shannon Ggem, of Ggem Design Co., so she could redesign the rooms to the couple's tastes. Whitney knew Shannon was the right person for the job since she lived in the same community and understood the importance of keeping the authenticity and integrity of the old houses there. Shannon redesigned the five-bedroom/two-bath cottage's kitchen, breakfast nook, living room and downstairs den.

"Whitney wanted it to have light because it was dark, especially to add more light to the kitchen space," Shannon says. "It had to be pet-friendly because Whitney is a true animal lover. She wanted a turquoise feeling and requested a Haint Blue porch ceiling. In the South, that color is believed to keep evil spirits away—and besides that, she loved the look."

KITCHEN RECIPE

The kitchen space was originally a porch. These cottages didn't have kitchens when they were built because they were originally built as vacation homes, and there was an enormous

clubhouse with a chef in the recreational community, Shannon explains. "The clubhouse is still there, 96 years later, doing the same thing. This has stayed a quaint, Andy Griffith-style community—no movie theater, no restaurant, no school, no nail salon. Name a thing, and we don't have it," she says jokingly.

The kitchen required extensive remodeling to achieve the desired effect of creating a good flow into the rest of the house. "They love the way the galley kitchen operates because Gerrit likes to cook and everything is in arm's reach," Shannon says.

She took out the ceiling, exposed the roofline, added beams and beadboard, placed a transom window with black casing above the entry door and a window over the open shelves. "We were counterintuitive when it came to storage because we removed cabinets and replaced them with open shelves," Shannon says.

Whitney is delighted with the way the kitchen turned out. "Since the only entry is through the kitchen and it is impossible to move its location due to zoning [regulations], that room really needed to be welcoming—and it finally is," she says.

Whitney wanted a haint-blue porch ceiling. In the South, that color is believed to *keep evil spirits away*, and she loved the look.

KEYS TO THE KITCHEN. The kitchen ceiling's curved corner was addressed sailboat style, which was popular in the 1920s. Formerly a porch, the space was turned into a kitchen before Whitney moved in. When Shannon arrived, it had an asbestos drop ceiling and full cabinets. She added a window above the shelves for a light, open feel. "The oven was deeper than most, so we let it stand proud. The eye registers and appreciates the quaint little quirks that make it different," Shannon says. No color was added to the existing stripped-oak floor because it had a gorgeous patina, Shannon says. Maple butcher-block countertops complement the flooring.



MAKING A SPLASH. The bath, which was designed by a previous designer, reflects Whitney and her bubbly personality, Shannon says.

[OPPOSITE] GOING DUTCH. The charming Dutch door in the kitchen reminds Whitney of similar ones she has seen in Mexico. Shannon likes the contrast of the two colors. The framing allowed for a transom window above the door, in the space in-between the door and the ceiling.

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DYNAMIC TRANQUILITY

Shannon kept the concept of “dynamic tranquility” in mind as she worked through the rooms. “It’s a big, relaxed mix, with very intentional focal moments that allow the eye to be pulled to long views and the magnificent view of the lake and mountain,” she says. “Nothing is formal here; even precious inherited pieces are mixed seamlessly with fun and meaningful elements in the couple’s life’s collection.”

Shannon was “thrilled” with Whitney’s taste, which included soft colors and beautiful collections. “There was a lot to work with,” she says. The result was a collected-over-time look. Some of the designer’s favorite aspects of the project are the brass sconces in the living room (an unexpected avant-garde item) and two different turquoise colors in the kitchen.

Shannon displayed items that were special to Whitney: treasures from trips to Mexico, antique pickle jars, a vintage stove—even a plastic cow. And she made a point of filling the cottage with Whitney’s personality. “She’s gregarious, full of life and joyful, and the color tells that story,” Shannon says. “Her house is an expression of how bubbly and delightful she is.” A swing bed in one of the rooms reflects her lighthearted *joie de vivre*.

Whitney says her home is a dream come true. “It doesn’t matter if I have been gone half a day or a month, I am always thankful and thrilled to get back to my little dream cottage,” she says. When she thinks back to her first encounter with it, she feels serendipity was at work. “The house had been for sale and fell out of escrow more than once, and I was warned that it probably would never sell,” Whitney recalls. “But here we are, 22 years later. It was really meant to be.”

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