





A wooden pier, just a few steps from the back doors of Cee Brown and John Bjørnen's Sag Harbor, New York, cottage, leads straight to Morris Cove.

The French doors in John and Cee's office, part of the two-story addition that houses the master bedroom, open onto the pier.

“It's vacation living year-round”

Filled with distinctive finds from their travels, John Bjørnen and Cee Brown's classic Sag Harbor cottage is a **fresh take on Bohemian style**



Splattered with 50 years' worth of paint,

John Bjørnen and Cee Brown's clapboard cottage looked more like a Jackson Pollock original than anyone's dream house when Cee first came upon it 14 years ago.

"The previous owners were artists, and what is now our dining room was packed with file cabinets filled with prints and rug samples. There were paint drips all over the floor," says Cee. "It was funky, but it had the spirit I was seeking in a house. It just needed a lot of editing and cleaning and thought," he says. "The only view was the water—no neighboring houses. It was lust at first sight."

A few years later, at a mutual friend's cocktail party, Cee met John, an interior designer. Both had a passion for old houses and the water—not

a bad combination for renovating a Sag Harbor, New York, cottage already ripe with charm. "I thought the location was splendid, perched up on a cove," John says. "I lived in Norway as a kid, and we were always fishing or having something to do with the water. It's always been really important to me."

The cottage's history, which resonated through the interior, also appealed to John. "I love the vestiges of the past—wood walls with so many coats of paint and heaps of character," he says. So when Cee and John decided to add on a two-story addition with an office, master bedroom, and bath, John applied many of his signature design techniques. "In my work, I consider decorating 'aesthetic therapy,'" he explains.

In the living room is a pair of red lamps Cee and John made from lacquerware they found traveling in Burma. Their miniature Pinschers, Walker and Willa, "take naps on the sofa all the time," says Cee.

Once a screened-in front porch, the dining room shows off the original rafters and tongue-and-groove cedar walls. Sliding wood windows capture views of the water.

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In the master bedroom addition, a vaulted ceiling visually enlarges the space. John and Cee clad the walls and ceiling in tongue-and-groove cedar to match the rest of the cottage.





“Our bedroom feels like a tree house with magnificent views”

“In other words, I ask my clients a million questions. Then I create an environment that is pleasing and balanced based on what’s important in their lives.”

One glance into Cee and John’s cottage reveals what matters to them—their home embraces the sea air and summer breezes that waft through open windows in every room. “Even on the most blustery, rainy mornings, I can look out my bedroom window and be reminded of what a gift our environment is,” John says.

When building their bedroom addition, they were sure to include big windows that would capture those peaceful views of the cove. “We felt strongly about keeping the addition true to the rest of the cottage,” says John, “so we used the same molding and siding on the exterior and roofing materials.”

On the interior, they special-ordered 8-inch cedar clapboard to match the original wood and spaced it similarly. “Our guests who’ve seen other homes in the area are often surprised by how small ours is, and they often remark on the

intimacy and charm of the scale of the rooms,” says John. “Our bedroom is only 12 by 12 feet, and the ceiling is 12 feet tall. We find there’s a lot of warmth in that symmetry.”

Although they’ve long since covered the splatters, Cee and John have punctuated the cottage with colorful collections that highlight their passion for travel. “Every year, Cee and I spend a couple of weeks in Bali,” John says. “When you’re there, it’s just a hop, skip, and a jump to other fun excursions.”

Their trips have also garnered a lot of requests from friends who’ve seen their findings. “People started asking us to buy them a teak Buddha for their garden, or a piece of Burmese lacquerware. We buy what we react to,” John says. For a couple with such a sharp eye for design, their collections tend to add up. “We come back with a lot. If friends or clients want to buy the things, they can; otherwise, we are perfectly happy living with them!”

The couple’s basement is filled with pinch hitters. “It’s fun having a mini gallery down there.

An apron-front farmhouse sink (above left) makes a clever appearance in the master bath. “John and I wanted a simple look, but we each wanted to have our own sink. This style looks clean and uncluttered,” says Cee.

Two metal dressers with a faux bois (wood grain look) finish serve as side tables in the guest bedroom. John found their steel pulls in an antiques store.



The backyard *Bale*

(pronounced “bal-AY”) at left, an open-air coconut pavilion made in Bali, is Cee’s favorite spot for entertaining. “Stereo speakers, lighting, and a comfortable Balinese daybed make it great for hanging with friends by the pool,” he says.

A hidden seating area with hand-carved benches (at right) is nestled under a grove of bamboo trees, creating a living fence around the outdoor room.

Take it from John and Cee:

The sky’s the limit in creating the ultimate outdoor room

■ **Start with a natural element you love.** John and Cee took advantage of a lush bamboo grove to surround and shade their seating nook and create a natural wall. “The specimen bamboo here are about 5 inches in diameter,” John says.

■ **Take advantage of the new crop of outdoor furnishings.** “There are all kinds of beautiful, textural outdoor fabrics,” John says. “Now there’s even upholstered furniture that can sit outside. Since you have freedom with furniture and fabric, you can make the space just as cozy as an interior room.”

■ **Accessorize with something personal.** “You don’t want the room to look like it’s straight out of a catalog,” John says. “Even if it’s a side table you picked up at a flea market—those are the best pieces.”

We can rearrange art pieces or furniture and it’s like we have brand new rooms,” John says.

In their decorating, John and Cee try to create a sense of surprise with architectural elements. “It’s fun to let your guests discover something new, whether it’s by hanging Japanese fabric panels that they have to pull back to walk through a doorway, or by constructing a maze through a grove of bamboo that leads to an outdoor room,” says John. “You have to take a risk and sometimes make a mistake, but many times it’s the mistakes that lead to the greatest successes, so it’s always a worthwhile adventure.”

In their own backyard, a thatched-roof *Bale* tucked amid a privet hedge, a bamboo fence, autumn olives, and an apple tree is ideal for summer soirees. “Year-round, we keep the pool heated to a spa temperature, so we use it from mid-April through mid-December,” Cee says. “John and I can take a glass of wine out there and catch up on the day’s events or just commune with nature.” ■



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discover a tucked-away
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