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SUMMER

15 AMAZING
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SPACES

Porches, Patios, & Sunrooms

Coastal Style of Maine

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WALCOTT ADAMS VERNEUILLE ARCHITECTS

• One South School Street • Fairhope, Alabama •



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Photography by Helen Norman
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Utopia BY THE BAY

Who would have guessed that a local Christmas parade would lead directly to a dream home in a charmed city by the Bay?



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The genteel house sits peacefully in the shade of a grand oak tree, just as it's done for the last century. The calming breezes drifting across Alabama's Mobile Bay still ruffle the leaves and bring welcome respite from summer's heat to one of the most splendid locations on the Eastern Shore.

The city of Fairhope was founded in 1894 as a utopian single-tax colony. The town became a fashionable winter destination for artists and intellectuals, among them writers such as Upton Sinclair and Sherwood Anderson. In more recent times, the location attracted another prominent artist known simply as Nall, who purchased a residence on the Bay.

Enter Marilyn and Paul Ellis. While enjoying a local Christmas parade in Fairhope with a longtime friend, the couple shared their interest in acquiring a home in the town. With children and grandchildren nearby, it seemed an ideal spot. As the fates would have it, the friend just so happened to know a local realtor who also was a friend of Nall.

The realtor placed a call to Nall—who was spending most of his time in France—and the rest, as they say, is history. Within three months of that propitious Christmas parade meeting, the house became the treasured property of the Ellis family.



As Seen In
cottage
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(Opposite) To enhance the breezy, open feel of the kitchen, the stained wood ceiling—which is original to the house—was painted white. Wood light fixtures bring to mind the driftwood that often graces Mobile Bay's shoreline. (Below) A local cabinetmaker built the cypress cabinet that sits alongside the fireplace and houses pieces from Marilyn's pottery collection. The cabinet's white doors, also original to the house, were recycled from built-ins in one of the bedrooms.



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To suit the house to entertaining family and friends, as well as making it a comfortable place to host church and community functions, Marilyn and Paul worked with talented architect, Lea Verneuille, to customize the house before moving in. “Lea is a genius,” Marilyn makes clear. Some of the changes the team made to the existing structure included increasing the size of the living and dining rooms, adding a wing to the left side of the house, and expanding to the right with a master bedroom suite.

“I love mixing old with new,” Marilyn says. And that meant keeping as much of the original house as they could. All of the floors are original, with oak upstairs and 2¾-inch pine floors downstairs. A brick wall behind the original fireplace was revealed when plaster was removed during the renovation. That brick now is an intriguing feature in the home’s new iteration. Barn doors—also original to the house—provide privacy for the couple’s visiting grandchildren.

New front porches were added—a must-have for a home with such an enviable view of Mobile Bay. The dining room, situated at the front of the house, showcases the calming vista, which encourages guests to linger at the distinctive zinc table that was the inspiration for the redesigned dining room.



(Top) Marilyn found this pair of elegantly rustic shutters at an antiques store in Memphis. The shutters perfectly frame the view of the majestic oak that stands sentinel just outside. (Left) The brick wall that was revealed during the renovation hints at the home’s century-old history.



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For years, Marilyn collected pictures and tear sheets from magazines of rooms she admired. She worked with decorator Elisabeth Hays at Lulu & Me to get just the right ambience for her bayside home. “We wanted each room to be warm and comfortable with something of unique interest,” Elisabeth

says. Key to that look is the showcasing of Marilyn’s collections of pottery and art from local Gulf Coast artists—right down to the Nall painting that hangs above the bed in the master bedroom. Perhaps further proof of the sweet serendipities of life. □

TEXT BY REBECCA BRENNAN PHOTOGRAPHY BY MAC JAMIESON



White accents pop against bold blue and white wallpaper in the master bath, making it, according to Marilyn, "My favorite room in the house." In a guest bedroom, neutral walls and furnishings offer a peaceful setting for relaxing and enjoying the soothing surroundings, as does the stylishly appointed second-story porch—one of two that the Ellises added to the home. The distinctive spiral staircase at the front of the house gives an easy entrance to the captivating porch.

