

# *Timeless* Classic

*The update of this 100-year-old waterfront cottage mixes old and new to create a place full of life and history.*

BY AUTUMN KRAUSE | PHOTOGRAPHY BY WERNER STRAUBE

**SOMETIMES IMPERFECTIONS CREATE BEAUTY,** and that beauty can be given a new life through careful design that honors the past.

This was the approach taken by Tom Stringer, founder and president of Tom Stringer Design Partners, when he oversaw the overhaul of a 100-year-old cottage perched right on the shores of Lake Michigan. “This home had seen many changes from different owners throughout the years, so it was a haphazard mix,” he says. “Instead of completely renovating again and losing the quiriness, we kept all renovations very minor. The creaky floors, the exposed beams and the architecture and moldings . . . that was the charm.” He stayed true to the cottage’s classic American spirit by keeping an eye toward the future while highlighting the home’s aesthetic history. “The priority was to design a home that would be light and cozy and perfect for entertaining multiple generations of the family,” he says.



**This area,** which is just off the living room next to a fireplace, is a delightful spot where the homeowners can enjoy a cup of coffee or tea. Since wicker is a staple of cottage dwelling, two Mainly Baskets wicker chairs were selected for the seating, adding dimension to the mostly white space.





**The media room** is a cozy place where the homeowners can gather as a family and enjoy each other's company. Tom and his team designed both a sectional in Clarence House woven blue fabric and drapery panels, opting for a custom design inspired by a Ralph Lauren linen. As with the rest of the window treatments in the cottage, the curtains were light so they would not block the sunlight, while the bold print adds drama to the room.

## Blank Slate

The walls and ceilings in the living room were painted Benjamin Moore White Dove, a color that consistently appears throughout the cottage to give it a cohesive, airy feel and showcase the charming moldings, wall accents and ceiling treatments found within the residence. Tom and his team approached the room with an eye for proportion, playing artfully with symmetry and mixed textures. The coordinating bookshelves and accessories on either side of the three windows create a focal point for the room and emphasize the scenic view.

When it came to styling the space, "texture was absolutely key," Tom says. "We played a lot with the scale of fabrics, especially with the pillows. Large floral prints were juxtaposed against contemporary patterns and solids for interest." Two sofas were custom made in beautiful fabrics that beg to be touched and enjoyed. The pillows add pops of color and, set against an overall palette of blue and white, create the perfect cottage-on-the-water feel.

## Dining in Dove White

In order to give each room a distinct feel, Tom and his team introduced new accent shades of colors against the bright walls. "We wanted the home to flow throughout, but not repeat itself," he explains. The hues create a path of color that leads visitors from space to space.



**For the entryway,** Tom envisioned a welcoming place that would set the tone for the entire cottage yet also be functional. "It's a place to sit while you wait for the rest of the family and store necessities like keys and mail," he says. A Richard Mulligan chair, accented in a classic Americana Ralph Lauren stripe, sits next to an antique chest and gives the feeling that the home has been lived in and curated for the past 100 years.

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When it came to the living room, Tom suggested a color scheme of white and blue. “When you think of a classic cottage on the water, blue and white just seem appropriate,” he says. “The last project I had done with this client featured a much more subdued palette, so we knew this time around we wanted to add a bit more punch with bolder hues.”

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When it came to the breakfast recess, “we wanted to create a cozy nook where you could gather and eat breakfast, or just curl up in the afternoon with a good book and enjoy the calm, serene view from the bay window,” Tom says. In keeping with the cottage’s mix of antiques and new pieces, Tom selected an antique, walnut, spindle-leg table circa the 19th century. The chairs by Artistic Frame were custom painted and antiqued in Benjamin Moore Buckland Blue to give them a similar sensibility.

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Antique steel French beds are the crown gem of this guestroom, and their austere beauty inspires the rest of the design. “We wanted it to feel as if this room were in the French Victorian era,” Tom says.

Since the cottage has multiple guestrooms, the homeowners were able to express different styles in each one. For this room, Tom went for a nautical feel with an updated twist. Navy and white created a preppy feel while the graphic element of the striped pillows and patterned comforter adds a modern look to the room.



A built-in china cabinet adds depth to the dining room. The top portion is used for visual display while the bottom area provides storage for additional serving ware. China plates of varying sizes, shapes and colors create interest and allow the eyes to move across the space. In keeping with the rest of the cottage, Benjamin Moore White Dove paint emphasized the timeless moldings and details.







**In order to create** a dramatic focal point, a black antique mirror hovers right over the bed. Its round shape contrasts with the shiplap accent on the master bedroom's walls and softens the area.

When it came to the dining room, Tom found the perfect place to use a darker blue—the homeowners' existing set of Richard Mulligan Library chairs. “We painted the chairs in a two-part custom finish with Benjamin Moore Super White and Gentle Cream to give [them] an antique appearance,” he says. The chairs were also reupholstered, using a small print on the seats and then an unexpected lighter-blue stripe pattern on the back of the chairs. “I love the contrast stripe,” Tom says. “You can see it from any angle in the room.”

## Sleep Retreat

The cottage boasts a shiplap wall accent and exposed beams in the master bedroom, a hint at its rich, turn-of-the-century history. The priorities for the bedroom, according to Tom, were “relaxation and retreat,” so neutrals were used to create a soothingly comfy space, accented with moss green and antiqued black accessories. A Geoffrey Hirst “Tibet” broadloom carpet sets the tone for a stay-for-hours escape and bamboo detailing on the bed evokes thoughts of calm and paradise.

With the unifying theme of white and respect for the cottage's existing quirks and details, Tom brought out the beauty of the space, giving it timeless style that can be enjoyed for many generations to come. “My goal is always to create a home,” Tom says. “This cottage had 100 years of amazing history—and we were able to preserve and enhance that.”

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**Custom-made duvets** reflect “classic cottage inspiration.” With a color scheme of soft yellow and green against the white walls, the room is perfectly timeless and charmingly romantic, the embodiment of cottage style.

**The window seat** is located in an enclosed porch with a waterfront view. The colorful art by local Michigan artist Kelli Snively gives the space a sweet feel and pairs perfectly with the antique pink table and lime Anthropologie rug. It's the perfect place for daydreaming.



**Moss green and black** are used sparingly throughout the bedroom. The two hues contrast with the white walls and linens and provide the room with personality and style. Having plenty of space around each item results in a clean, cottagey feel.







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Even though it feels homey and intimate, the cottage boasts an impressive total of nine bedrooms. “There are frequently guests and family visiting,” Tom says. “We really designed the space for them.”



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One of the attention grabbers in the dining room is the 19th-century Paul Ferrante antique chandelier, featuring white and blue opaline glass. With thin, elegant lines that pop against the clean, white walls, the fixture creates an exquisite focal point in the spacious room.