

# HERMOSA BEACH CHIC

A southern California coastal house is toughened to withstand the elements and given a sleekly efficient, stylishly contemporary interior



Writer: JoBeth McDaniel Photographer: Jonn Coolidge Producer: Char Hatch Langos



Pete and Linda Biché's nephew Connor tries out the white leather Barcelona lounge chair and ottoman, from Design Within Reach. Abaca area rug by S&J Biren. Opposite: Ocean tones abound, with a sand-colored mohair sectional sofa from CBD behind a two-tiered coffee table from City Studio.





FOR TWO DECADES, Pete Biché watched the intense sun and salt air take its toll on neighboring homes in Hermosa Beach, along a stretch of southern California sand. So when the longtime bachelor married, he and new wife, Linda, decided to replace his small bachelor pad with an ocean-worthy beach house that would stand up to the elements in style.

Forget wrought iron, or any metal that rusts in the moist air. Wood? Only dense, tough types hold up here, with protective marine coating. For Biché, a retired engineer, function was key: he wanted everything to work smoothly, from the motorized window treatments to the computerized scene lighting, which varies in intensity for entertaining, reading, or television viewing.

No need for air conditioning: the Pacific Ocean blows cool breezes every day of the year. Instead, Biché knew that their barefoot beach lifestyle demanded radiant heat, rising up from floors throughout the house, to cut the foggy morning chill.

The Bichés hired architects Michael Eserts and Grant Kirkpatrick, from the KAA Design Group of Los Angeles, to create an expansive, modern space with few interior walls. Eserts notes that the pair are fans of early California modern architects, such as Richard Neutra and R. M. Schindler, who blurred the lines between indoors and out. "They wanted everything open to capture the views," says Eserts.

Each of the house's three floors spills out onto a sun deck or patio facing the ocean. On the lower level, a broad terrace faces the Strand, a lengthy seaside path populated by a busy parade of cyclists, walkers, and beachgoers.

Biché points out the beach volleyball court where he often plays with friends, just steps across the sand. Afterward, the players retreat to his lower level "Beach Room," a casual space where they can drink beer and play poker around the heavy walnut table. Outdoor and indoor showers wash the sand away, and a full kitchen keeps the party humming.

On the second level, the living room, dining room, and kitchen flow through open space, all with sweeping ocean vistas. The kitchen is sleek and efficient: the pantry is a ver-



tical pull-out, tucked inside a wall, and the downdraft vent fits down into a cubby behind the stove. "We didn't want a big vent hood getting in the way of the view," says Biché.

Since space is at a premium on the narrow lots of Hermosa Beach, every wall was designed

for maximum privacy. The stairwell is bathed in soft light from a side wall of translucent laminated glass, double-paned to keep outside noise to a minimum.

At the top, the master bedroom and bath perch high enough to enjoy both the seascape and privacy. The window seat is a favored spot for reading, and the sundeck, with chaises for two, has a panoramic view of spectacular sunsets.

Even the master bath is designed for the Pacific view, with a shoji screen that slides closed if so desired. Biché helped design and build the Japanese soaking tub with tiled sides and recirculating heater, in which two people can bathe comfortably in water up to their necks.

Early on in the project, KAA introduced the Bichés to designer Chris Barrett, who helped select the natural textures and soft tones that would complement the house's contemporary aesthetic: Linda Biché's first purchase was a pair of white leather Barcelona chairs, which set the tone for the rest of the design.

Barrett also brought in art consultant Joanna Burke, who selected artwork for each room. Biché's favorite is the master bedroom's iridescent green sculpture, made by local artist Eric Johnson. It resembles an aircraft wing—an homage to Biché's years in the aerospace industry.

As he walks through the house, Biché points out the many projects he personally designed or finished. "I built that wall," he says, touching the grey Trendstone blocks in the lower level. He turns and smiles. "Actually, I built all the walls on this level." (Designer Barrett says he is the most hands-on client she has ever had.)

The personal attention resulted in a home that perfectly suits the Bichés' lifestyle. "This house fits them like a glove," says Eserts. "It is tuned like an engineer would tune a machine."

And that, Pete Biché might say, is the highest praise of all.





Clockwise from top: Cool colors and textural contrasts set the interior's modern tone. A mica chandelier from Thomas Lavin casts a shimmering light on a custom dining table and chairs from Mulholland Furniture. Pete and Linda Biché relax barefoot on a terrace, which is paved with cool Arizona flagstone. Vintage pebble-topped coffee table by Monteverdi-Young from Emerson Troop. Opposite: The gentle glow of a Capiz Shell Globe, from Twentieth, lights the stairs.



Visiting nephews romp in the kitchen atop Blanc Mouchette marble countertops and wood and leather barstools from Thomas Lavín. Heavy glass hanging pendant fixture by Alison Berger from Holly Hunt. On the back wall, a stack of three GE Advantium ovens. Opposite page, clockwise from top left: Ocean-view window seat in the master bedroom, built by Design Solutions of Torrance, with cushion fabric by Donghia. A custom soaking tub clad in Seagrass limestone and lined with Fusion quartz tile (both from Walker Zanger) is flanked by a sliding shoji rice paper screen. A serene master bedroom has a bed from Therlen and bedside lamp from J.F. Chen. Wall sculpture by San Pedro artist Eric Johnson.







**OCEAN LINES** For the master suite, designer Chris Barrett took a cue from the blue waters beyond. "We didn't want to fight with the ocean," she says. "We didn't want the materials to call attention to themselves, except to complement the architecture." Clean, modern lines keep the neutral palette from being boring, as do the window seat pillows and the turquoise silk throw, which add a punch of brightness and texture. Unusual shapes, such as the green wall sculpture and ebonized wood piece below it, stand out even more against the streamlined space.

