



# Beachcomber Revival

A family getaway near Virginia Beach is rebuilt to capture an oceanfront panorama

*By Michael Tardif*

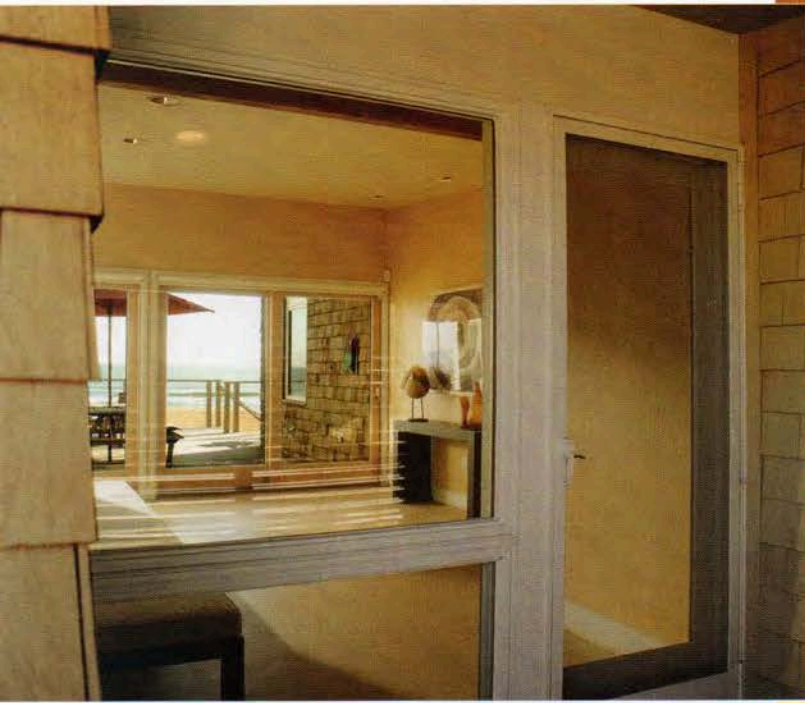
*Photography by Mark Atkinson*

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*Architecture: Larysa Kurylas, The Kurylas Studio, Washington, DC*

*Interior Design: Vicki Morgan, Sandbridge, Virginia*





**T**he demolition of small summer cottages and their replacement with much larger homes is a familiar sight in many beach communities. So when Vicki and Peter Morgan decided to rebuild the oceanfront house in Sandbridge, Virginia, that Vicki's parents, Sally and Ted Turner, had built in 1961, the neighbors took appreciative notice. "Someone must have really liked that house to tear it down and build it again," noted one long-time resident of the similarity between the old and new homes.

In the 1960s, Sandbridge was the place to escape the summer crowds of nearby Virginia Beach. The Turners built a beachfront home that provided the bare necessities for summer shelter: a simple box on wood piles beneath a roof that sloped just enough to shed water. But the modest structure, which Sally Turner designed herself, had a couple of ingenious design features that set it apart. The bedrooms and living spaces were organized around an ocean-facing courtyard deck, an intimate space sheltered from both the warm, prevailing westerly winds and cold winds occasionally blowing down the East Coast. The deep overhang of the roof shaded windows from summer sun and protected them from the rain so that they could be left open in all but the most severe summer rainstorms. The gentle, upward slope of the roof toward the water allowed for tall windows that provided a panoramic view of the beach.

The house was one of the few in Sandbridge to survive a severe storm in 1963, after which all new houses were required to be built on piles. The Turners, both of whom

were artists, spent every summer of their married lives at the house, painting while their three daughters enjoyed carefree beach days. However, by the time Vicki Morgan inherited the house in 2002, time and weather had taken their toll and restoring or even repairing the wood-frame structure was not viable. So in building anew, the Morgans decided to preserve the spirit and character of the original house by retaining the best features of Sally Turner's original design: the simple shape, the courtyard deck, the ocean views.

"Anyone who builds a large house close to the ocean—two or three stories—has to rent it in order to recover their investment," Morgan notes. "We thought we would do something more humble that family and friends



could enjoy.” An interior designer, Morgan turned to Larysa Kurylas, an architect in Washington, DC, with whom she had collaborated on a number of residential design projects.

Kurylas stayed in the house for several days and was confident that a new house could be designed in keeping with the old. During her brief stay, she recognized another quality, what she calls the “one-sidedness” of the house. “When you’re in the house, the ocean is completely dominant,” she says. “It’s unusual for a house to be completely focused in one direction. It was a great thing to exploit.”



The new home pays homage to the family’s original beach house with a courtyard deck (previous spread). Architect Larysa Kurylas exploited ocean views throughout. The front door (opposite left) opens onto a foyer lined with glass on the ocean side, overlooking the deck and the sea beyond. On the left side of the deck (inset above), the master bedroom enjoys waterfront views; the opposite side houses the living room (top), dining room and kitchen.



She was eager to enhance the “portal-like” experience of entering the house, which separates the busy street side from the relaxing beach side. “I wanted to emphasize the contrast, to heighten the element of surprise.”

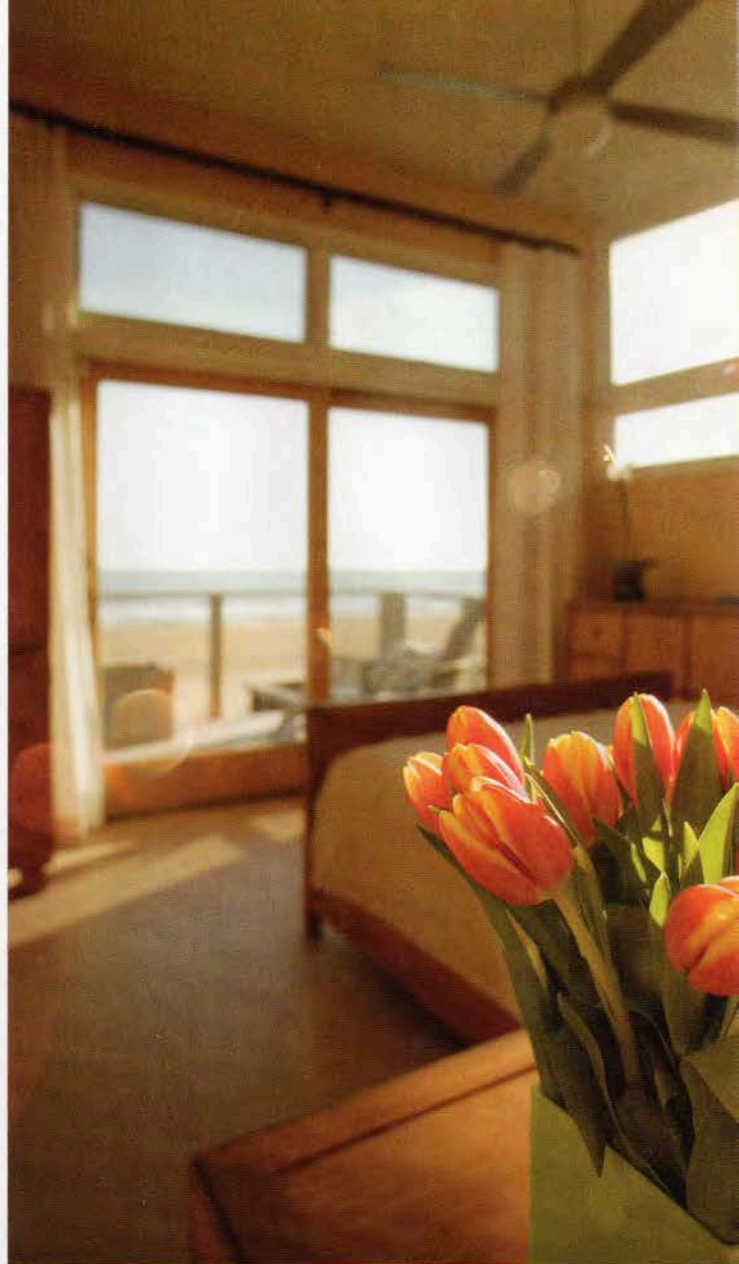
In the new house, Kurylas emphasized the transition by designing an understated entry, a simple stair placed along the rear wall of the house that leads to a small porch all but hidden from the driveway by a louvered screen. The front door, set into a glass wall, opens onto a foyer lined with glass on the ocean side, overlooking a new courtyard deck and the ocean beyond. The effect is subtle but powerful. “Everybody who walks into the house feels like they have entered ‘the zone,’” says Morgan. “It’s so relaxing, so much a part of the environment; all you focus on is sand and sea.”

To the right of the foyer and the courtyard deck is an ocean-facing master bedroom suite. Behind it, along the street side, is a laundry room and powder room, and an

outdoor shower and storage area. To the left, the foyer opens to an art gallery that separates the ocean-facing living areas—kitchen, dining and sitting room—from two street-side bedrooms and a large bathroom.

The bathroom and bedroom doors are set back from the art gallery by small foyers with skylights, and partitions are arranged so that there is no direct view from the living areas into these rooms and through them to the street side of the house. From the beach side of the house, one can only see the sand and water.

The Morgans insisted that each bedroom have an ocean view, a challenging requirement that Kurylas met by increasing the width of the new house to the maximum allowed by zoning. On one side, a bedroom juts out beyond the side wall of the living room to provide a beautifully composed ocean view. For the other bedroom—which was somewhat “landlocked” in the middle of the rear wall—Kurylas installed a floor-to-ceiling “bor-



rowed light” window that looks through the art gallery to the courtyard deck and out to the beach.

Though the new house, unlike the old, is equipped with central heating and cooling, the Morgans find it comfortable without air-conditioning on all but the hottest summer days. The white, thermoplastic membrane roof reflects heat instead of absorbing it, and when the high, ocean-facing windows are opened, windows and ceiling fans create enough of a breeze to keep the house cool.

The original house was as maintenance-free as a summer home could be, and Vicki Morgan was determined to adopt this aspect of her childhood beach home, too. The Morgans wanted to use the house as a weekend getaway, for themselves as well as for family and friends, without worrying about whether something got scratched or damaged. Instead of carpeting, ceramic tile, or wood, the floors are sand-colored linoleum tile. “We have three kids and a dog,” says Morgan. “They can make

Walls of windows bathe the kitchen and dining room (left) in natural light. The kitchen backsplash is fashioned from patterned “flax glass.” To ensure that every bedroom had an ocean view (above), Kurylas increased the width of the house to the maximum allowed by local zoning.

a mess, we can have parties; it’s a user-friendly house.”

Though the size, footprint and cedar-shingle siding are completely different from the original structure, the degree to which it appears to be a reconstruction of the 1961 house is uncanny, a testament to how faithfully Kurylas and the Morgans adhered to Sally Turner’s design concepts. “I didn’t feel hamstrung by Vicki’s sentimental attachment to her mother’s house, because it had charm,” says Kurylas. “I saw the challenge as taking a good thing and making it better.” ≡

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