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Deborah Lloyd:

Explore her serene lakeside retreat

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Island Retreat

Designer **Bunny Williams** gave a Sea Island condo just what it needed: a relaxed, comfortable atmosphere perfect for its beach backdrop

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With five miles of private beach running along the Atlantic Coast, Sea Island, Georgia, is an escape to the quietude and casual atmosphere of long summer weekends and languid afternoons by the water. When designer Bunny Williams learned she'd be creating the decor of her client's island condo, she knew exactly where to look for inspiration: outside. "The sun, the ocean, the sand—it all played a part," says Williams of decorating the 4,000-square-foot seaside getaway. "I wanted a place you could walk in with a wet bathing suit, sit on a chair, and it would be OK."

Leave it to Williams, an influential name in the world of decor since the '60s, to pull off a beach house that is every bit as elegant in its precision as it is relaxed in its execution. Mirroring her classic traditionalism that never impedes on comfort, the condo moves

The condo came ready-made with marvelous hand-textured walls, which Williams left completely natural. "The entire condo appears bigger since the living room and hall are all one color," she says. Blue cotton slipcovers accentuated by bright orange cushions anchor the room, although they don't appear overly saturated because of the surrounding neutrality and the varying textures: a woven rug, printed fabrics, and the Anglo-Indian coffee table from Williams's furniture line, BeeLine Home.

like a boardwalk on Saturday night: relaxed and airy, casual and friendly, and engagingly excitable in only the right places. "It's a comfortable space that feels like a destination; it's restful while being lively at the same time," explains designer Elizabeth Swartz, who helped Williams tackle the condo in the tight three-month time frame.

Designing the space to be a retreat home for a family of five, Williams wanted to create a noticeably contrasting environment with the family's New York City and Connecticut homes, both of which Williams also



According to Williams, color starts with where you are; in this case, the beach. "You can do so much more with color in spaces where the sun is strong," she says, explaining that it will absorb the intensity and not overpower a room. When designing in Manhattan, Williams often utilizes deeper, muted shades like gray because sunlight is often lost in tight apartments. "Use a hot pink in New York and it can be jarring," she says. "There simply isn't enough strong light."



designed. By utilizing slipcovers and sisal carpeting, and warm summer colors balanced by consistent neutrality, Williams derived a space freshly separate from the formal, sophisticated air of the family's Manhattan home and the antiques-heavy, modern grace of their new Georgian home in Westport, Connecticut. It's a place where the kids can kick back on the sofa, the family can gather around the dining table for a card game, and the chaos of everyday life washes away with the tide. "I love that the colors and decor blend with what's outside," says Swartz. "When the doors and windows are open, you can feel the breeze and hear the waves crashing on the beach, and it all feels seamless."

The home is filled with Williams's signature touches: comfort, unique combinations, a sense of playfulness, and an expert eye for scale, functionality, and consideration of space. Yet Williams isn't out to be identifiable; her work is about capturing the individual lifestyle of the client, not laying claim to her talent. Humble in her magnitude, she strives to create beautifully outfitted homes that, at the end of the day, her clients can live their best lives in. "Every space should have its own personality, different from the next," she says. "It's simply about creating a perfect fit for the people who live in it." ✨





Practice Restraint

Stop decorating well before it hits the limit. "Never overdecorate; you don't want a room where you move one thing and everything falls apart," says Williams. The key is to create spaces that feel evolved, never formulaic, by mixing materials, textures, and appropriate colors so it's easy to alter a number of elements in the room. "You should be able to change a piece of art or add new cushions over time," she says. Williams's layout in the living area allows for flexible movement of the chairs so the family can be engaged wherever the activity may be.

A clever sisal upgrade: add artistic detail. Painted by Artgroove, the design is a 1940s altered pattern and the stars are a tribute to Williams's former employer, Albert Hadley. Take heed: only a very flat-weave sisal carpet will allow for paint.





"I'd much rather have someone *walk into a space and feel comfortable* than walk in and think, "Wow, *this design is drop-dead gorgeous*—but it doesn't function."

When Williams spotted these oversize standing storks, she knew they had to be incorporated into the dining room. "I wanted bigger, bolder objects; fewer things on a grander scale is much stronger," she says. Plus, fewer objects mean less clutter, so the space is automatically more maintenance-free.



The master bedroom's color scheme of beiges and melons creates a calming atmosphere conducive to the room's view of the beach. "We wanted the master bedroom to be a room to get away in, not just to sleep," says Williams.

"From the *blue slipcovered* furniture in the living room to the *natural tones* in the master bedroom, the feel continues to blend with the surroundings of *Sea Island*,"

says Swartz.



Cost-Efficient

High-quality rugs, like these from ABC Carpet & Home, are beautiful options to anchor a room, although they can be a bit pricey. To balance the cost elsewhere, Williams cleverly sewed two inexpensive cotton rugs together to create one larger rug for the daughter's bedroom, and utilized sisal carpeting in the living area. She also kept cash flow low by poring over catalogs to find affordable pieces. Nevertheless, don't get too chain-store happy. "Make sure to add one older piece with genuine character so the entire space doesn't feel like the catalog," advises Williams.





Williams sought a bed with both height and an upholstered headboard, and she found the perfect fit in this piece from Mrs. Howard. Since it's not a typical four-poster bed, it still gives that dimension of height without feeling too heavy in the space.



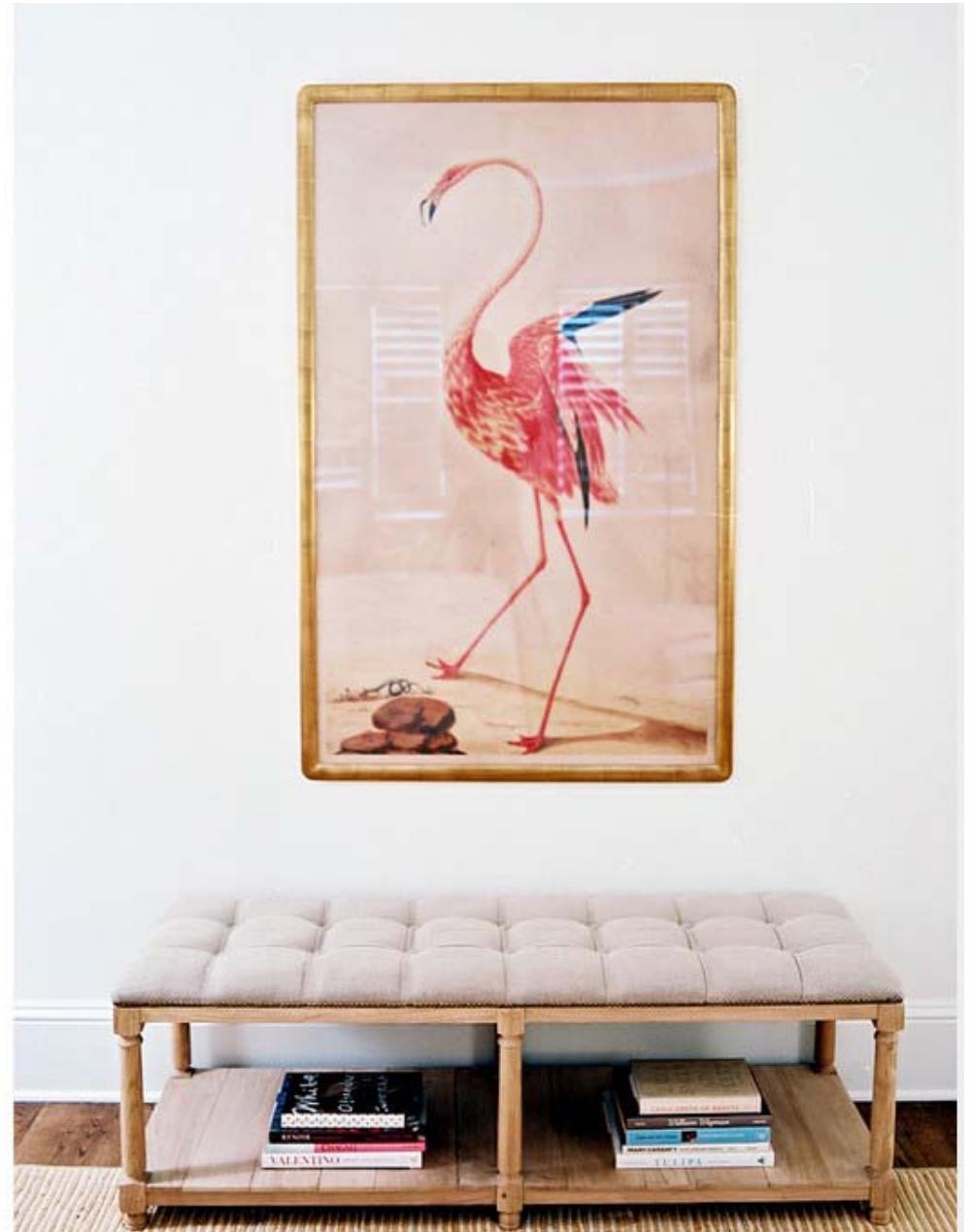
Williams often looks to her furniture line, BeeLine Home, for great pieces to outfit a space, like this desk and the chicken feather lamps on the bedside tables.

Bunny's
Tried & True
 Treillage
 NYC
 Circa Interiors and Antiques
 Charlotte, NC
 Paysage
 Cleveland Heights, OH
 Mecox Gardens
 Multiple locations
 Hollyhock
 Los Angeles





Williams believes in the beauty of great architecture but cautions new homeowners not to jump the gun by immediately investing in elaborate home renovations. "If you're just starting in a house, it makes much more sense to put money into things that you'll have for a while and can take with you versus renovating the architecture, which you'll inevitably leave behind," she says. For example: invest in unique, interesting objects instead of expensive wall treatments.





With a headboard covered in raffia and a floral cotton quilt from John Robshaw, the bedroom designated for the client's daughter is feminine but not over the top. "Not going overly masculine or feminine in the bedrooms allows them to double as appropriate guest rooms," says Williams.



Bunny's
Timeless Inspirations
The Way We Live
 by Stafford Cliff
Vogue's Book of Houses, Gardens, People
 by Valentine Lawford, Diana Vreeland, and Horst (1968 edition)
**Albert Hadley: The Story of America's
 Preeminent Interior Designer**
 by Adam Lewis
Elle Decor
 by Francois Baudot and Jean Demachy
The Givenchy Style
 by Francoise Mohr

This screen had taken up shop in Williams's office stock, in limbo while waiting for the perfect home. When Williams saw this space, she knew she'd finally found it. "You get a lot of bang for your buck using this piece, so to say," says Swartz. "It's both a furniture piece and a work of art." The corner comes alive with the addition of the chaise from Wisteria.



Breaking It Down:

How Bunny Williams Brings the Beach Inside

1

Slipcover furniture in aqua-blue cotton.

2

Start an interesting shell collection and fill an antique cabinet.

3

Hang prints of fish or turtles in the powder room.

4

Mix decorative straw items with faded driftwood-colored furniture.

5

Use a lot of sisal carpets to represent the color of sand.



"It's so much more luxurious to have a double bed versus a twin," says Williams, who outfitted what is considered the boys' room with a pair of full beds. Bathed in blues, browns, and silvers, the John Robshaw geometric duvets on the beds complement the striped rug, which Williams picked up from Wisteria. Across the walls hang several fish paintings inspired by none other than the backyard sea.