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WISTERIA AND ROSES climb the facade of the 1920s-style beach cottage. Period detailing includes the roof overhang, shutters, and ceiling of the old-fashioned front porch. The floor is embedded with seashells. To create a path, concrete was salvaged from the old driveway.



casual

PHOTOGRAPHY BY MICHAEL WECHSLER | PRODUCED BY SUNDAY HENDRICKSON | WRITTEN BY ELIZABETH GAYNOR



“MOST PEOPLE ASSUME THAT THE HOUSE IS OLD AND ask when we remodeled it,” says architect Stephen Giannetti of the picturesque home he shares with his wife, Brooke, and their three children in Santa Monica, Calif. The white, vine-covered cottage, with its sheltering front porch, looks just like one of many built around 80 years ago on the modest 50-by-150-foot lots in this beachside community. The house is only three years old, but its shingle style and old-fashioned garden give it a vintage appearance. A beach cottage, just a bike ride away from the ocean, seemed ideal for an active young family.

“This house was all about the kids,” says Steve. Brooke, an interior designer whose practice complements her husband’s, concurs: “It was a reaction to our old place, a typical California-Spanish bungalow that was dark inside and getting too small as our kids [now 5, 9, and 12] began to grow.” Steve’s task was to engineer a vernacular beach cottage, adhering to proper proportions, while opening up the interior space for the flow of modern family life. He found he was able to use some stock fittings, like doors and porch posts, and adapted others to get a period look. Throughout, pine shelving-lumber was affixed with exposed nails for a rustic flooring effect, and a topping compound was applied over the drywall to give it the feel of plaster.

The couple relied on swap meets, flea markets, and online auctions for furnishings, fabrics, and some vintage detailing (such as the corner post for the stairs). Brooke made sure

THIS PAGE, TOP: Surrounded by greenery, Brooke and kids by the pool under a 19th-century-style umbrella. **RIGHT:** Enclosing the back porch created a light-filled sunroom where Boston ferns and foxglove thrive. Floral rug and fabrics give it a garden-room look. The shell mirror, by a local artist, is a flea market find. The family’s old breakfast table, with its legs sawed off, has morphed into a coffee table.

Enclosing a porch to create a sunroom was



a way to bring the outdoors in.



TOP ROW: 1. Leila and Nicholas Giannetti. 2. Sunporch with heated brick floor and unmatched furniture. 3. Garden roses and delphiniums. 4. The open kitchen's structural elements and painted-wood cabinets. 5. Living room mantel, embellished with catalog-lumber trim; pastel by Steve Giannetti. 6. The paneled master bedroom, in the treetops.

that all the surfaces and fabrics are family-friendly, too: "With kids, you have to ride them enough about rules and homework. I didn't want to be yelling at them about the house."

The Southwestern lifestyle lends itself to open doors, alfresco living areas, and generous windows to maximize the light. Steve specified windows that stand only 18 inches off the floor and, in the kitchen, brought them down to countertop level, doing away with a conventional splash. He installed banks of French doors at the front and rear to make an easy transition to the abundant greenery, which in this climate represents only a few years' growth. With local garden consultant Wendy Katz of Ruby Begonia, Brooke and Steve chose old-fashioned wisteria, roses, hydrangeas, and foxgloves to complement the cottage look. House colors are beach naturals: white and pale green—tones that run right through from the exterior cedar shake siding (heavier than wood shingles) and shutters, to the interior walls and paneling of the kitchen island—with accents in shell pink.

"It's so light and airy, I used florals, plants,



PULLING THE OUTDOORS IN

- Incorporate conventional outdoor materials, such as brick or slate, shingle or cedar shake siding, and tongue-and-groove paneling, as interior surfaces.
- Install French doors—substantially cheaper than windows—on outer walls, wherever practical, to bring in daylight and ease movement in and out.
- Use florals, botanical prints, awning stripes, and canvas as upholstery, cushions, bedcovers, and window treatments.
- Hang wall art, like landscapes, scenics, bird prints, and botanicals, or tactile pieces, such as architectural fragments, mosaics, and shell-encrusted work.

BOTTOM ROW: 7. Front hall wooden lockers for everyone in the family. 8. Dessert and Champagne served on the coffee table. 9. Unmatched furniture, with finishes left “as is,” in master bedroom. 10. A foxglove provides a burst of color. 11. A pet bunny, Potter, on the sun porch’s wall-to-wall banquette. 12. Stairwell antiques: Swedish clock; French bench, and town-clock face from Nancy, France.

and natural things almost unconsciously.”