



Homeowner Mary Kay Andrews updated a flea market hall tree with vibrant turquoise paint. Guests and family are encouraged to hang beach gear or grab anything they need on their way to the shore.

happy ending

Novelist Mary Kay Andrews realizes a long-held dream in renovating a throwback beach cottage on the Georgia coast.

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Several passages from

best-selling author Mary Kay Andrews' novel *The Fixer Upper* are inspired by her adventures finding and fixing up a family beach house on Tybee Island, Georgia. One line is notably pitch-perfect: "Sometimes when you need a change in your life, the tide just happens to pull you in the right direction."

Mary Kay and husband Tom had dreamed of owning a beach house for years. "Our vision was the pastel-color Florida beach cottages of the 1920s, '30s, and '40s," she says. But the dilapidated 1940s house they bought hardly matched that ideal. Everything needed replacing except original board-and-batten ceilings and concrete walls. Undaunted, Mary Kay called on her builder brother-in-law and rolled up her sleeves to tackle the decorating.

A self-described lifelong junker, Mary Kay scavenged thrift stores, flea markets, and junk piles throughout the Southeast for period-appropriate fixtures. Major scores included a claw-foot bathtub, a vintage cast-iron kitchen sink "big enough to hold a bushel of boiled blue crabs," and a hot-pink screen door with an aluminum heron silhouette, which she describes as "the perfect welcoming touch." She also dug into the basement of her Atlanta home, where she'd packed away treasures for years. A reexamination of her cache yielded vintage rattan, antique wicker, kitschy '50s lamps, bark-cloth drapes, and chenille bedspreads. The combination is eclectic and comfortable. "It's the barefoot life for us: worn wood floors, cotton rugs, white curtains. Nothing new or shiny will do at the beach," Mary Kay says.

To play up the mix of materials and styles, she chose paint in bright and breezy colors (the same fun hues that grace her book jackets). The exterior of the renovated house is mint green, which suits Tybee Island's "funky junky retro coast vibe." Inside, seaside shades of turquoise, blue, and green pop against fresh white walls and natural wood floors. "Everything about the cottage and the island is '50s throwback, a deliberately dowdy beach town of infinite charm," she says.

A four-hour drive from Atlanta, the beach house—affectionately called "The Breeze Inn"—has become many things to many people. It's the prime gathering spot for extended family and friends. It's where Tom sets out in his boat to fish the tidal creeks. And it's where Mary Kay often retreats to write her popular novels. "The sun and sea are grand," she says, "But it turns out that what Tom and I really craved was a time and a place to slow down and delight in the little things."

Mary Kay mixed vintage rattan and wicker furniture throughout the home, covering the seating in easy-care fabrics and adding colorful '50s accessories.





RIGHT: Paint that Mary Kay describes as “margarita green” and a wealth of striped pillows liven up an old glider on the home’s rear screen porch. Junk-shop art playfully decorates the walls. ABOVE: A white picket fence, seafoam exterior, and hot pink door wrap the renovated house in retro-coastal verve. BELOW: Compact yet efficient, the minty-fresh kitchen is a favorite spot for house chef Tom to prepare fresh seafood and other edibles for the grill that stands just a few steps beyond the adjacent screen porch.



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OPPOSITE: An old heart pine table and mismatched chairs comfortably seat a crowd on beach weekends. The cottage's original board-and-batten ceilings were painted a soft blue to mimic the coastal sky. TOP LEFT: Son Andy's bedroom sports a classic red, white, and blue color scheme and nautical accessories. TOP RIGHT: Book jackets hang on the wall while vintage accessories personalize the work space Mary Kay squeezed into a guest bedroom. ABOVE LEFT: Powder blue beaded-board walls set off the claw-foot tub and built-in display cubbies (formerly a window) in the bathroom. ABOVE RIGHT: Subtle beach motifs and pretty blue-and-white bedding create a restful retreat.