



Life at Mermaid Manor

A once-dilapidated Tybee Island cottage has a new life — and so does its owner. **Allison Hersh** steps inside a quaint coastal haven. » Photography by **Richard Leo Johnson**

After 9/11, Diane Kaufman knew she needed to make some changes in her life. At the time, this ambitious Marriott exec lived in Atlanta and worked as a sales and marketing expert, traveling around the world to conduct training sessions on destination marketing. Recently divorced, Diane decided to pack up and move to Tybee Island, one of her all-time favorite vacation spots, to start a new life.

“Tybee is so real,” she enthused. “I love the quirkiness and the fact that it’s real houses and real people. I wanted to be somewhere that felt authentic. I made a conscious decision to leave the trappings of suburbia to be by the sea, smell the ocean and know my neighbors. Tybee truly allows you to have a different quality of life.”

A House In Need of a Home

Diane restored several Tybee Island residences with the help of Jane Coslick, the island’s leading restoration expert. She began renting these cottages out to vacationers — eventually leaving her job with Marriott to launch Mermaid Cottages and serve as a full-time ambassador for the Tybee way of life. Along the way, she fell in love with a run-down cottage overlooking the Back River and decided to make it her own.

“That house really needed a home,” Jane recalled. “There’s some really great energy in that house. I knew it had great potential.”

The 1920s cottage, which Diane dubbed Mermaid Manor, was located on prime waterfront property that a couple wanted to build a new home on, so they

The Kaufman Stats »

Owner: Diane Willard Kaufman
Location: Tybee Island
Year built: Late 1920s
Year purchased: 2006
Square footage: 1,100
Number of bedrooms and bathrooms: 3 bedrooms/2 baths
Time to complete: 1 year



Savannah Home

Home Tour



moved the three-bedroom structure across the street to an empty lot Diane purchased.

"I told Jane I wanted to have a 'big girl' house that feels really comfortable," she said. "And that's exactly what I got."

Under Jane's direction, the dilapidated 1,200-square-foot structure was raised one level and completely renovated. Diane then masterminded the rebirth of this vintage beach cottage, finishing the attic and creating an atmosphere defined by breezy coastal chic.

Nature Meets Nurture

Working within the home's existing footprint, Jane created a warm, inviting sanctuary that is truly embraced by nature. Sheltered by live oak trees and graced with spectacular river views, this Tybee haven boasts original hardwood floors — along with plenty of contemporary accents.

"We tried to incorporate the old and the new," said Jane. "The house has nice high ceilings and lots of wonderful old wood. It's a great little cottage."

Painted pale green with bright white trim, Mermaid Manor welcomes visitors with its symmetrical architecture, flowering window boxes and classic white picket fence. Two low-key Labrador retrievers, Danny and Sophie, enjoy the run of the cottage, snuggling up on sofas or stretching out on the hardwood floors throughout the day.

The enclosed front porch doubles as Diane's office, outfitted with a desk, a laptop computer and yard sale finds covered with decorative slipcovers.

"I can sit here and look at the water while I work," she raved. "I had green herons nesting here last summer. I don't even feel like I'm working because this space is so light." Diane especially loves the cottage's shabby chic aesthetic, and she's enhanced it by picking up furniture



Savannah Home

Home Tour



Diane Kaufman's Referrals »

Planner/interior designer: Jane Coslick, Jane Coslick Designs and Restorations

Draftsman: John Dugger, Vernacular Cottage Design

Builder: Anthony Sapone, Catskill Builders

Paint/wallpaper: Benjamin Moore "Moonlight White"

Landscape design: Lisa Watson, Plan It Green Design

Electrician: Johnny Russell, Russell Electric

Plumber: Tybee Island Plumbing and Quality Control Plumbing

HVAC: Southern Comfort

Furniture and accessories: Vintage and junk stores, yard sales, Seaside Sisters on Tybee Island

Art: Various local artists including Bellamy Murphy and Catherine Lovett

House mover: Hugh Braswell, Braswell Brothers

and several stunning crystal chandeliers. With bright lime green and neon pink accents playing off of white walls and ceilings, the attic throbs with color. Diane also decided to add a luxurious white-on-white bath in the attic, complete with a refinished antique cast iron tub, antique mirrors and a vintage glass cabinet.

As part of her commitment to environmental sustainability, Diane incorporated recycled denim insulation, low-VOC paint and renewable bamboo flooring in the attic. She also refuses to use any pesticides or chemicals in her yard, which overflows with jasmine, hydrangeas and crepe myrtles. This dedicated environmentalist explains that such toxins simply run off into local waterways, polluting the island she treasures.

Flip-flop Chic

Diane drew from a beach-inspired palette for the main floor's interior colors, incorporating pale peach, sand and pink hues. From bedding to accent pillows, the décor exudes a spirit of casual coastal elegance. The result is a living space that radiates calm, peace and tranquility in every room.

"I've had a lot of houses in my life," she explained. "This is like being in a nest. It's very calming and very relaxing. It's not pretentious in any way."

at yard sales and thrift shops, re-painting the pieces or topping them with coastal-inspired slipcovers.

"There's nothing here that's expensive," she said. "This is something anyone can do for very little cost."

In the loft-style attic, whitewashed exposed beams and a cathedral-style ceiling lend a sense of coastal grandeur to the space, which features two beds, one window seat

This quaint cottage was featured on the Tybee Island Tour of Homes in 2008 and showcases Diane's impressive collection of vintage quilts and antique bird prints. Diane's favorite room is the master bedroom, which features a vibrant still life of an oyster shell by Bellamy Murphy at the head of the bed and a gold gilt-accented painting of the Tybee Island Lighthouse by Catherine Lovett at the foot of the bed. Most of the bedroom furniture — from the armoire to the side tables — has been painted white in a nod to French country styling.

This Tybee transplant feels most comfortable on the water and admits to being an island girl at heart.

"I really wanted to live in a small town," she said. "The cottages on Tybee are how life used to be. You ride your bike and wear flip-flops everywhere."

And that's just the way she likes it. Rejecting the impulse to create a museum-like designer environment, this island entrepreneur embraces a decidedly casual coastal style. Diane created a haven where she can work while surrounded by nature or kick off her flip-flops and put her feet up.

"No matter where I go, I always love to come home," she said with a smile as wide as the Back River. "There's nowhere else I'd rather be." ■



Pool featured on latest Deen brothers' cookbook, "Ya'll Come Eat" by Jamie and Bobby Deen and Melissa Clark

Architectural
Pools & Spas, Inc.
FIBERGLASS & CONCRETE POOLS

Largest Pool Builder
in the Coastal Empire

Over 450 Pools Installed. Over 450 References.



Voted Best Pool
Company
by the readers of
Savannah Magazine

Visit our showroom at
1370 E. Highway 80 in Pooler
Phone: 912.965.0560
www.architecturalpool.com