house & garden

THE CHARLESTON HOME

Relaxed Refinement

With help from Caribbean-influenced designer Allison Elebash, Kirk and Tara King turned an 1890s Sullivan's Island abode into the casually elegant beach house of their dreams

—written by BRIDGET VENATTA /// *photographs by* JULIA LYNN

Like many Charleston natives, Tara King grew up spending lots of time on Sullivan's Island. After hitting the beach and grabbing a bite to eat, she'd drive around admiring the homes, always making a point to visit one property in particular: an 1890s side-gabled beachfront house positioned near the convergence of Charleston Harbor and the Atlantic Ocean. "The house looks straight at Fort Sumter," she says. Even from her curbside vantage point,

LOVE AT FIRST SIGHT: Charleston native Tara King first fell for this Sullivan's Island house in her teens. After admiring it from afar for some 25 years, she and her husband, Kirk (left), purchased the more-than-a-century-old home in 2011. In the process of making it their own, they added a new back porch with French doors to maximize oceanfront views.

Tara knew that inside, the coastal views would be amazing.

Some 25 years later, when she caught wind that her house crush of yore would soon be for sale, Tara looped in her husband, Kirk, and the two immediately made arrangements for a tour. The timing was tricky, as the couple had just finished designing and building a new 7,000-square-foot creek-front home on Daniel Island. But with their two oldest children—Chelsea, now 29, and Brock, 22—out of the home, and their youngest, Alyssa, attending Ashley Hall, the soon-to-be empty-nesters were beginning to re-evaluate their needs. "Our home was beautiful, but it was too big and too formal," Tara says. "We realized we wanted a more casual, laid-back feel; a place where people would come in, kick

COASTAL CHARM: (Counterclockwise from above) The Kings asked designer Allison Elebash to infuse the home with a laid-back island vibe. For the living room, she chose a color palette inspired by coastal landscapes—the walls, for example, are Benjamin Moore's "Beautiful in My Eyes," a rosy hue inspired by the pink sand beaches of the Caribbean. French doors frequently draw the family out onto the patio for a dip in the pool or a round of table tennis. Framed works by Danish painter Louise Fenne (above mantel), German modernist Otto Naumann, and area artist Sally King Benedict add texture and personality.

NATURAL ACCENTS: The use of natural materials, such as sisal area rugs and the cherrywood of the circa-1825 Biedermeier chest, underscore the home's connection with nature.

off their shoes, and relax."

With its open layout, the 4,500-square-foot Sullivan's Island abode was the perfect scale to accommodate the couple, their kids, and family Shih Tzus Lilly and Sulli, as well as Brock's Husky, Nala, a frequent overnight guest. A single second-floor bedroom and detached guest house provided extra sleeping quarters without taking away from the coziness and convenience of one-story living. And though the residence was more than a century old, it was well cared for, with only three previous owners. "The homes down here are often generational; they get passed down, so they don't go up for sale very often," Kirk notes.

On their first visit, the duo stepped through the front doors into the living room, where a wall of windows provided a vista as breathtaking as Tara had imagined. "The property faces south, and the waters are very calm; all the shrimp boats, yachts, and ships go right by the house," she says. For Kirk, a Greenville native who is CEO of CSS International, the proximity of those waters meant ample opportunity for fishing and boating, two favorite hobbies. The view cemented the Kings' decision to sell their new-build and

"Everything was dark wood and pine and the paint colors were dark, but I wanted coastal, light, airy, and relaxed."—Tara King, homeowner

GOLDEN TOUCH: In the kitchen, simple roman shades in an abstract Kelly Wearstler fabric and clean-lined open shelving are offset by dramatic hammered-gold sconces. Instead of an island, the room is anchored by a custom dining table and comfy slip-covered chairs.

AN ELEGANT WELCOME: In the foyer, a vintage Biedermeier chair covered in Forsyth hide and an acacia wood console exude warmth, while a work by Otto Neumann in a gilt frame adds sophistication.

buy Tara's dream home.

With the keys in hand, Tara and Kirk set about making the place their own. "Everything was dark wood and pine and the paint colors were dark, but I wanted coastal, light, airy, and relaxed," Tara says. At the same time, she and Kirk wished to honor the structure's inherent character. "We still wanted it to feel like a historic home," she adds. "Our goal was to modernize while preserving details like the antique heart-pine floors and interior trim."

With this vision in mind, the couple turned to a team of local pros. Longtime friend and area contractor Chuck Allen built practical upgrades, such as en-suite baths for each of the five bedrooms. Design expert Regina Garcia helped with spatial planning in the baths, dressing room, and the kitchen. Allison Elebash, a Mount Pleasant–based designer with projects throughout the Lowcountry and the Caribbean, set to work conjuring interiors that captured the laid-back, island-chic aesthetic the Kings craved.

Elebash guided them toward a serene palette and natural materials that reflect the ease of coastal living. The pale pink living room walls are a tip of the hat to the rosy

BLUE ZONE: In the den, the Kings opted for grass-cloth wallpaper by Phillip Jeffries in a navy in keeping with the coastal color palette. "It reminds me of the Mediterranean," says Tara. Here, Elebash maximized space, transforming one underutilized corner into a work and study zone (below left). "The Lucite chair is functional without taking up too much visual space," she notes.

Similarly, a Lucite console disappears into a small nook under the stairs (above center), allowing cherished pieces, such as the Anne Darby Parker painting, to shine. (Above right) Elebash dressed up the powder room with geometric wallpaper from Romo and a beaded sconce from Circa Lighting.

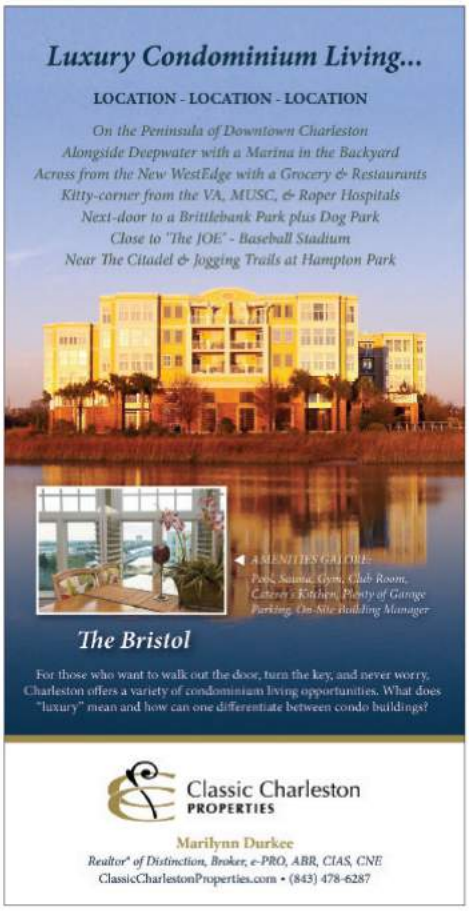
ARMCHAIR TOURISM: Strategically positioned near French doors that lead to the patio, this Eames lounge chair and ottoman provide a sleek yet comfy perch for taking in views of the pool and the Atlantic.

sands of Harbour Island, Bahamas, where the couple often vacations; throughout the rest of the space, shots of soft pink, as well as shades of blue, green, and tan pay further tribute to the beauty of the coastal landscape. Similarly, many of the textiles, such as grass-cloth wallpaper in the den and guest bedroom and sisal rugs throughout, were chosen for their warm, organic feel.

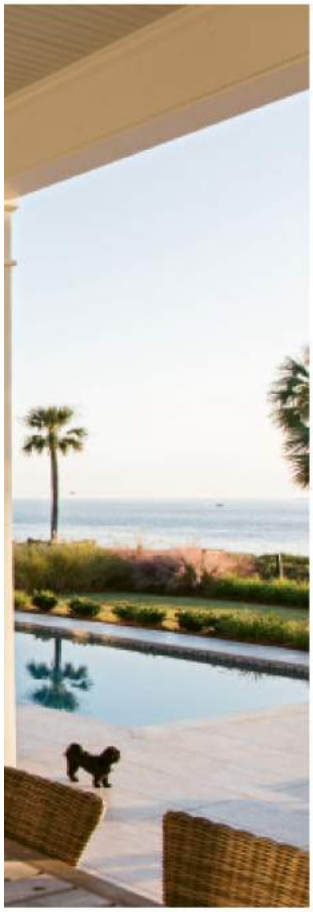
In terms of furnishings, many of the Kings' existing pieces were too formal for the island vibe they hoped to capture. "Allison was brave enough to say, 'You've got to get rid of most of your things,'" Kirk recalls. To achieve a feeling of bohemian elegance, Elebash sourced a mix of well-worn and modern pieces: in the living room, for example, a circa-1825 Biedermeier chest scored at Fritz Porter keeps company with a Lucite-based custom Kravet stool.

The designer gravitated toward pieces with a sense of fun, opting for a hanging swing rather than a bench for extra seating in Alyssa's bedroom and a funky abstract Kelly Wearstler fabric for window treatments in the kitchen. A few holdovers from the couple's former residence were given new life. Elebash re-covered a set of four armchairs in another Wearstler fabric and plucked serving pieces from the family silver collection to be displayed throughout the home.

Paintings by artists near and far add a



JUMP IN: "We all pretty much live on the back porch," says Tara. Palmetto trees and the harbor provide a scenic backdrop for regular swims and backyard parties, especially the family's annual Fourth of July shindig.



"The property faces south, and the waters are very calm; all the shrimp boats, yachts, and ships go right by the house."—Tara King

SWEET DREAMS: (Above) The serene color palette of the master bedroom and adjoining sitting room allows the ocean view to take center stage. (Below) The custom settee in this guest room features a twin mattress covered in indoor/outdoor fabric, so it can pinch-hit as an additional guest bed.

DRESSED FOR SUCCESS: In the dressing room, an Oly light fixture and tufted blue ottoman set an elegant tone.

sense of sophistication without stuffiness. Perhaps the couple's favorite acquisition is the piece presiding over the living room fireplace: sourced from Ann Long Fine Art, the oil painting by Danish impressionist Louise Fenne depicts a woman by the sea with a bird perched on her head. It's elegant, but the subject matter feels friendly and fun—just like the abode itself. In the bedrooms, works by Sally King Benedict, Anne Darby Parker, and other local artists help to lighten the mood, while in the den, a wall of black-and-white family photos—curated and framed with help from area framing gallery Artizom—strikes a personal note.

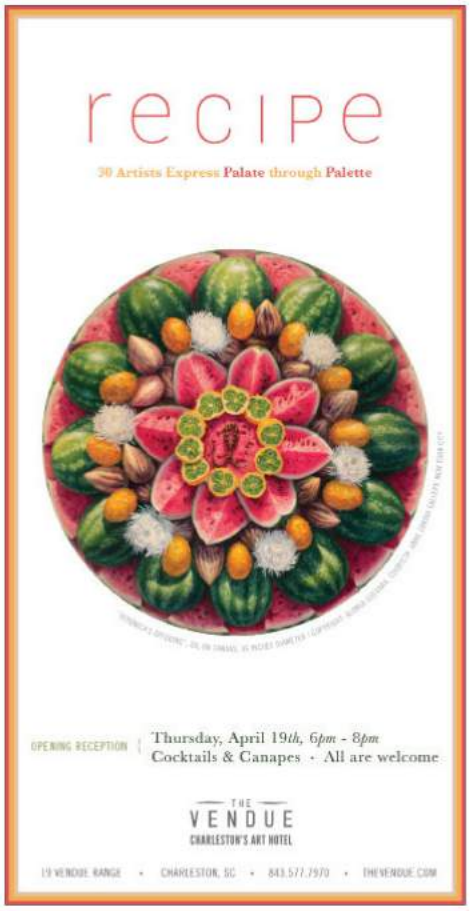
Before Elebash entered the scene, the den was an underutilized parlor, but it's now a family hub. The couple and their kids spend much of their downtime here, curling up to watch a movie or taking in the view of the pool and beyond that, the ocean. On nice

IN THE SWING: Alyssa's room features a favorite spot for lounging or doing homework. (Left) Beach time with the whole family: Brock, Alyssa, Tara, Kirk, and Chelsea with husband Brad Milford, plus pups Nala, Lilly, and Sulli

BRIGHT SPOTS: (Top) In the guest room, accents of cerulean blue pop against a Bermuda hemp wall covering. (Above) In the master bedroom, a hand-carved credenza by Kelly Wearstler is flanked with locally commissioned abstract paintings by Emily Brown.

days, the French doors are open, and family life flows outside onto the deck and into the pool. "We all pretty much live on the back porch," Tara says. "On special occasions like the Fourth of July, we have friends over for swimming and grilling."

With the project completed, Elebash reflects: "I think we succeeded in striking a balance between traditional elegance and the ease of coastal living," adding, "it's very livable on a daily basis, but also great for hosting parties with the doors open and the breeze blowing through." ©



ALLISON ELEBASH INTERIOR DESIGN

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