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With expertise in designing and building homes in Bethany Beach, Delaware, a designer creates a custom, coastal-inspired home that's perfect for generational living.

# It's About Time

BY AUTUMN KRAUSE  
PHOTOGRAPHY BY DANA HOFF











**|ABOVE| SPACE FOR FAMILY.** The main family room is located to the immediate left of the entry and is geared for hosting. “We wanted to keep this space open so you can easily entertain in one big area from kitchen to living room,” Marnie says.

**|LEFT| MADE FOR MUD (OR SAND).** A mudroom is an ideal place for the owners to keep all their beach accessories like flip-flops, towels, hats, etc. It sits off the kitchen with a washer and dryer nearby. The homeowners also wanted a place to keep chips and cereal off the counter and tucked away, so the tall cabinets on the right are a pantry for extra food storage.



*Bethany Beach, Delaware,* is a beautiful coastal town that offers pristine expanses of sand and beaches lined with boardwalks. It's the sort of place that encourages connection with nature and each other. However, those seeking their own little corner of this coastal retreat must contend with Bethany Beach's building restrictions. Enter Marnie Oursler, President of Marnie Custom Homes. Marnie's company specializes in designing and building homes in Bethany Beach. “Each home presents a new challenge,” she says. “Each homeowner has different needs, and I have to fit their wish list into a constricted space that's based on the city's lot and height regulations.” She's been the saving grace for many—including a couple who sought a second home in Bethany Beach.



**CURB APPEAL.** Marnie and her team designed and built the entire home. “This is one exterior I get asked about over and over again because of its many architectural details, which include an arched porch entry, tapered porch columns, oversized glass front door, and cedar shingles with sweeps that add an architectural flair,” Marnie says. A pop of color is provided by Benjamin Moore Antique Glass paint. When the home is lit up at night, you can see the gorgeous chandelier from the two-story sitting room.







## THE PERFECT PLACE

The couple found just the right lot for their getaway home. Its proximity to the beach and the downtown area means they can park their car upon arrival and never drive again during their visits, since everything is within walking distance. The property is narrow, as is characteristic for lots in Bethany Beach—only 40 feet wide and 113 feet deep—but they embrace the fact that the smaller lot means minimal landscaping and upkeep, a key feature for a second home. However, when they bought it, it contained an unfortunate 1960s duplex that didn't suit their needs at all. So they turned to Marnie to create their dream home from scratch.

"The homeowners loved the property," Marnie says. "But they wanted a home that had enough space for their teenage daughter to bring her friends to visit, as well as having room for extended family during their annual beach week." With these needs in mind, Marnie and her team designed a residence meant for the lively bustle of family and friends. The results are a masterpiece of a home that's built for generations to enjoy. It sleeps 16 with 5 bedrooms, a loft and 5.5 bathrooms. Visitors are met by a unique exterior design accentuated by cedar siding, which gives the classic beach house feel. A front porch and a custom, extra-wide blue front door, which is a signature of Marnie Custom Homes, give a cheery welcome and immediately make everyone feel at home.

## COASTAL CONTEMPORARY ELEGANCE

The home's style starts with its exterior and continues on in. The aesthetic is coastal contemporary elegance, and every room teems with inviting classiness that puts guests in the vacation mindset. "The homeowners envisioned a look that's sophisticated yet comfortable," Marnie says.

White was chosen as the home's color scheme because it establishes a feeling of peace and tranquility. The calm, neutral palette is reminiscent of salt air that drifts in off the ocean. But in order to keep the home from looking sterile, Marnie used a variety of shades of white as well as textures to enliven the rooms and add dimension. "We incorporated natural textures, such as driftwood, wicker, jute and rope, inspired by the coastal surroundings, throughout the home," Marnie says.

Design elements like custom built-ins, molding, reclaimed wood accents, hanging beds, exposed beams and French doors leading to a private balcony give a thrilling experience every time the homeowners arrive. Another aspect of the home is also centered around connection and family: first-floor living. Marnie says, "The couple envisioned an open inviting space where everyone would hang out together, and they didn't want to walk downstairs to open the front door."





**|RIGHT| MEET AT THE BAR.** A bar area sits right off the kitchen. Marnie likes having a separate bar area because it's a natural way to shift everyone away from the kitchen island and space out the flow of entertaining. The backsplash, cabinets and hardware are all the same as the kitchen, which ties everything together. Here, though, a glass cabinet with a nautical X to showcase glassware and nicer kitchenware, becomes a visual treat.

**|OPPOSITE| LOVELY LINES.** The kitchen design is a study in the use of lines to elongate. Marnie extended the upper cabinets to the ceiling to make the space feel taller. In addition, she continued the backsplash to the ceiling, which lengthened the area while also giving a high-end look.

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# Marnie's *Top Five Tips* for Incorporating Coastal Design into Any Home

Marnie Oursler, president of Marnie Custom Homes, and host of DIY Network's *Big Beach Builds* and HGTV's 2018 *Dream Home*, says that beach homes are appealing for their light, airy, casual and welcoming vibe, which is what attracted her to beach living in the first place. Not everyone lives near the shore, but that shouldn't stop you from getting that same beach feeling in your home. Marnie offers her top tips for incorporating a coastal style into any home.

- 1. START WITH A WHITE PALETTE:** White spaces elicit a sense of openness and casual design, so take a cue from the coast and begin with an all-white palette. Try different shades of white from room to room, and add texture to keep the spaces from feeling sterile. Creamy whites with yellow or red undertones, paired with brass and copper, create a warm feeling. For a cooler space, use whites with blue or purple undertones and accents of silver and chrome.
- 2. INCORPORATE NATURAL TEXTURES:** In the light palettes of the coast, texture takes on a more significant role. At the beach, driftwood, rope, sea-grass, linen and rattan are often used, so consider bringing in some of these elements along with weathered wood, jute and wicker to create a beachy vibe inside your home. Also look to your landscaping for inspiration!
- 3. ADD THE COLORS OF MOTHER NATURE:** The colors of the sea and sky are a great starting point for adding pops of blue and lighter tones into your home. Pastels, as often seen in an ocean sunrise, are also fitting for that coastal feel. Colorful accessories, such as pillows, throws, lamps, rugs, towels and kitchenware are easy ways to bring the beach home; they can be changed often, too, for a fresh look.
- 4. FURNISH WITH CASUAL YET TAILORED PIECES:** Life at the beach with its sand and water, as well as day-to-day life with a family and pets, requires low-maintenance furnishings. Try slipcovers in white or a light color that are easy to remove and launder. Slipcovers create a casual yet tailored look. If you want the same inviting feel without slipcovered furnishings, consider pieces with simple lines and durable fabrics.
- 5. BRING IN YOUR PERSONALITY:** Marnie's maternal grandfather, who was a master carpenter, is her inspiration for incorporating wall paneling and molding into every home she designs and builds. Go-to elements in beach homes are shiplap, beadboard and crown molding for their visual interest, texture and custom feel, but they work in any home anywhere. Even adding a simple chair rail to a powder room can have a major impact. Also think about adding maritime-inspired lighting, such as lanterns, or boat cleats as cabinet pulls, to create a coastal vibe in your current home.

**OPEN AREA.** The home has an open floor plan, but Marnie cleverly makes the different areas feel distinct. "With big open spaces, a good way to define each room is by creating different ceilings, which is what we did here," she says. "I also added a pony wall and pillars to help define the space and incorporated a reclaimed-wood design detail that adds texture."





**SITTING PRETTY.** A sitting area on the second floor is a great place to read a book or enjoy your coffee. The ceiling is the star of this area with the custom twig chandelier as a whimsical contrast to the exposed beams above. "To maximize the daylight, we added additional windows to bring in more natural light," Marnie says. "Coastal interiors are all about light, bright spaces and embracing natural light whenever possible. That's why I add windows, skylights and glass doors everywhere including hallways, stairwells (as shown here) and showers."





**|BELOW| LOFTY.** Guests sleep in luxury in a loft that contains custom-made trundle beds that sleep up to six. "The loft was designed as a hangout for the teenage daughter and her friends to have some fun and privacy. I created a custom accent wall using shiplap painted blue for a casual, fun design element," Marnie says.







**|ABOVE| CURATED FOR KIDS.** Beach houses in general are places where you can have more fun with design, and Marnie always tends to do that in the kids' rooms/bathrooms, like this one. "Here the twin beds 'hang' from the ceiling for a whimsical design detail," Marnie says. "The width of the room doesn't allow them to actually swing, so they are also tied to the ground."

**|LEFT| PRETTY POWDER ROOM.** The first-floor powder room is small, so Marnie added interest with decorative floor tiles.

**|OPPOSITE| WALLS OF WOOD.** Old barn wood sourced from a local mill creates a fascinating statement wall in the main bedroom. Marnie says, "We sanded it and used it as a way to bring the natural environment inside." This rustic look is offset by the mother-of-pearl chandelier and crisp white bedding. Marnie describes the room as coastal chic.



In the same vein, food and family are always intimately linked, so the kitchen is truly the heart of the home. It's custom designed and boasts white maple cabinetry, gorgeous white quartzite countertops and a touch of glam with a white pearl mosaic backsplash. All the features of the home combine to celebrate meaningful days spent with family and friends.

The homes are named in Bethany Beach, and this one was dubbed "It's About Time" by the homeowners. It has a double meaning for them. "It was 'about time' for them to finally buy a beach house since they've been talking about it forever," Marnie says. "And the other side of it is about spending time together at the beach with their loved ones." **CB**



