

HOUSE & HOME
OF THE MONTH

Pacific IDYLL

BEACH HOUSE COMFORT
MARRIES CONTEMPORARY
SOPHISTICATION IN A B.C.
HOME AT THE WATER'S EDGE

Text by Laura Muir Photography by Janis Nicola





“I call it my big TV,”

says homeowner Derek Riley of the ever-changing vista from the West Coast house he shares with his wife Karen. “Logs rolling on the beach, migrating ducks, boats going by... There’s always something going on.”

Located on Vancouver Island just north of Nanaimo, this open-concept, 2,800-square-foot abode sits so close to the water’s edge that during high tide, with windows taking in the seaside views from every angle, it feels like being on a ship. A place with such idyllic surroundings and composed cottage charm could quite easily be mistaken for a luxurious getaway, only to be enjoyed on weekends or summer vacation. But it’s in

OPPOSITE, TOP: Two outdoor areas, defined by paving stones and beach rocks and surrounded by nautical-look steel-table fencing, allow homeowners Derek and Karen Riley (above) space to lounge or entertain. The upper deck, off the living room, overlooks both the Georgia Strait and the two-acre property. A courtyard off the lower level is a more sheltered outdoor perch.

OPPOSITE, BOTTOM: The living room’s basalt stone fireplace, with a sleek wood mantel, is a strong focal point. The soaring

ceiling’s exposed rafters and panelling contribute a beachy feel. A country-style hutch and plush sectional enhance the coziness. Sofa, chairs, Carmel Furniture Design; sideboard design, Juli Hodgson; wall colour, Classic Gray (OC-23), ceiling colour, Decorators White (CC-20), Benjamin Moore; blue pillows, Danica; artwork by Zoe Hodgson.

RIGHT: The wood and travertine coffee table was designed by the project’s designer Juli Hodgson. Table construction, Island Architectural Millwork.

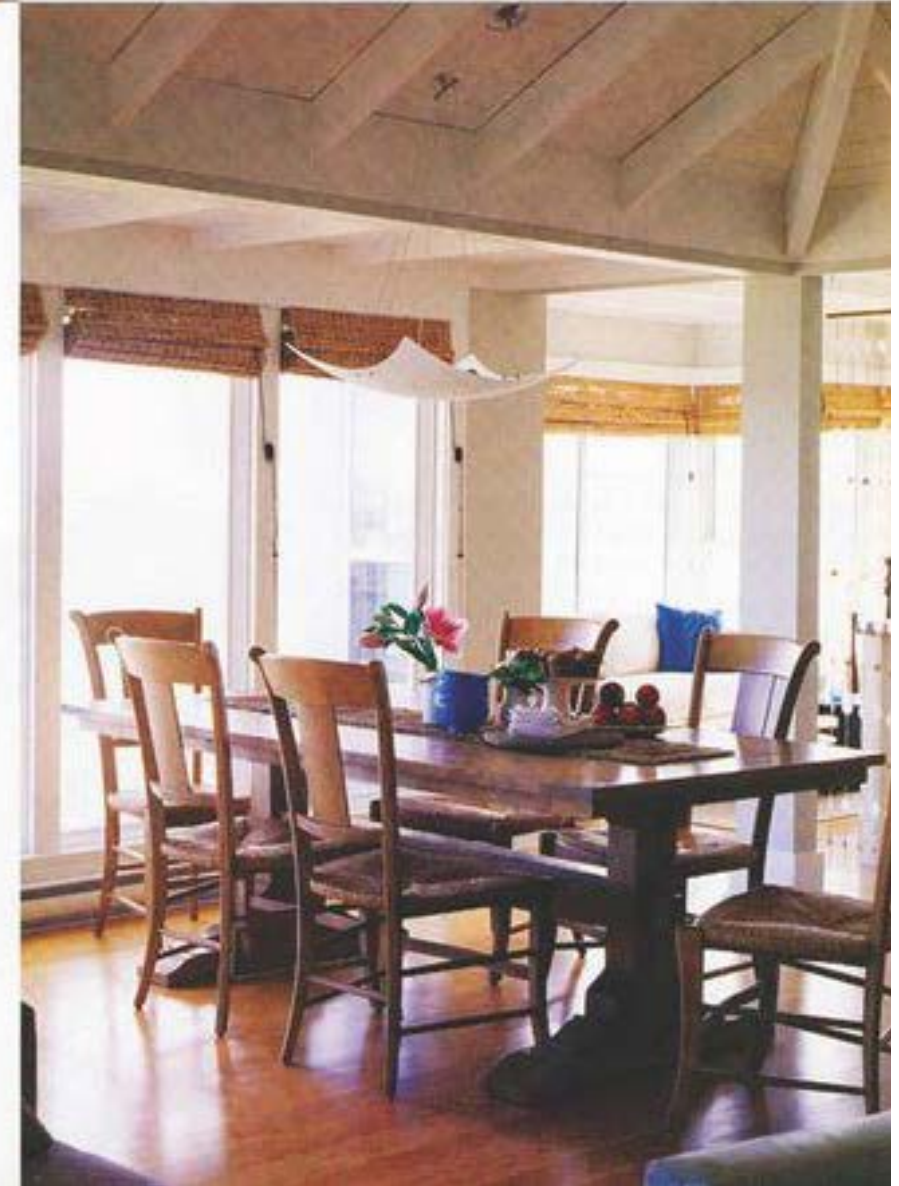


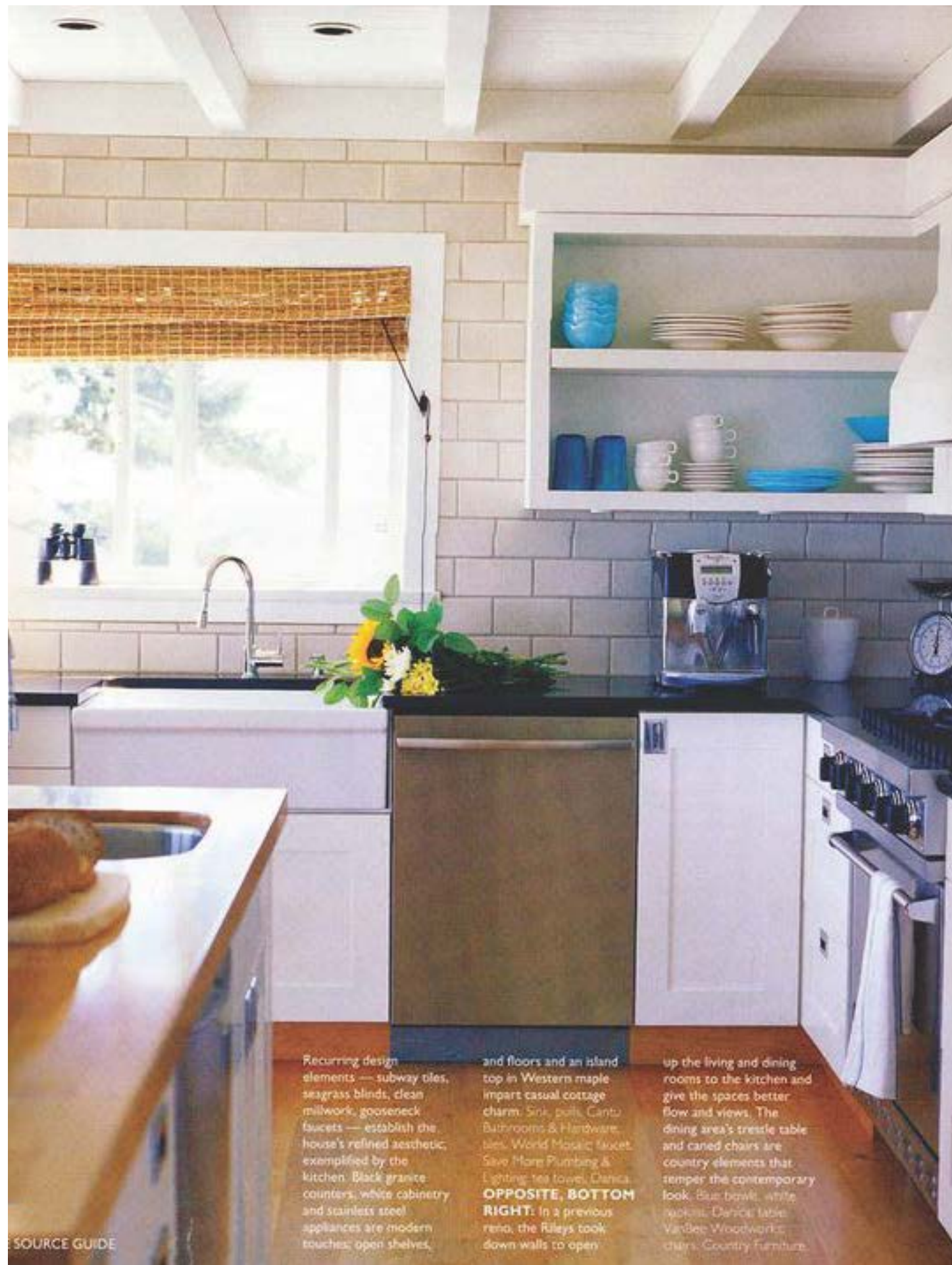
this natural, calming setting, on two acres of land, that Derek and Karen have lived for 17 years. While raising their two now-grown daughters, they’ve gradually renovated and reworked the house into the inviting, light-filled dwelling it is today.

Originally a humble 1950s bungalow-style structure with a chopped-up layout and dated decor that included green shag carpeting, mauve bathrooms and mirrored wall tiles, it nonetheless clearly had potential when the Rileys purchased it in 1990. Since then, they have embarked on three renovations, the last two with the help of Vancouver designer Juli Hodgson. “Juli summed it up best,” says Derek, a developer. “She said there are so many houses on the coast of B.C. that started out as small cabins and ended up as

TOP LEFT: Blue glass pendant lights and chins are bits of bold colour in the neutral kitchen. Cabinetry, Island Architectural Millwork; cabinet colour, Decorators White (CC-20); Benjamin Moore.

BOTTOM LEFT: Set in a nook jutting out toward the water, the sitting area off the kitchen offers the best views in the house. “When guests come for coffee, that’s where we perch,” says Karen. Round elements, like the twig chair and coffee tables, allow for better flow in the small space. Blue pillow, throw, Danica.





Recurring design elements — subway tiles, seagrass blinds, clean millwork, gooseneck faucets — establish the house's refined aesthetic, exemplified by the kitchen. Black granite counters, white cabinetry and stainless steel appliances are modern touches; open shelves,

and floors and an island top in Western maple impart casual cottage charm. Sink, pots, Cartu Bathrooms & Hardware; tiles, World Mosaic; faucet, Save More Plumbing & Lighting; tea towel, Bianca Carrara marble deck and a tall gooseneck faucet, is set right by the window for the ultimate in calming soaks; Para faucet, Save More Plumbing & Lighting artwork by Zee Hodgson towel, Divco.

OPPOSITE, BOTTOM RIGHT: In a previous reno, the Rileys took down walls to open up the living and dining rooms to the kitchen and give the spaces better flow and views. The dining area's trestle table and cased chairs are country elements that temper the contemporary look. Blue bowl, white napkins, Divco; table, VanBee Woodworks; chairs, Country Furniture.



OPPOSITE, BOTTOM LEFT: The ensuite bathroom's tub, with Bianca Carrara marble deck and a tall gooseneck faucet, is set right by the window for the ultimate in calming soaks; Para faucet, Save More Plumbing & Lighting artwork by Zee Hodgson towel, Divco.

Clean-lined millwork and a watery blue and white palette create a simple, beachy look in the ensuite bathroom. An abundance of Bianca Carrara marble — in the hexagonal floor tiles, the subway wall tiles and the vanity counter — adds luxurious, timeless appeal. The substantial framed mirror is actually a built-in medicine cabinet. Vanity, large mirror, Island Architectural Millwork; CBH pulls, Cartu Bathrooms & Hardware; floor tiles, wall tiles, World Mosaic; sconces, LightForm; Para faucet, Save More Plumbing & Lighting.

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opened right into the kitchen," Karen explains. To resolve this, the couple split the bathroom into a smaller powder room and the hall, and the principal bedroom was treated to a new ensuite. "And none of them lead into the kitchen!" she says.

Even with enough nooks and crannies to bestow the house with official quirky-West-Coast status, its well-considered mix of elements ensures a simple, refined style. The most recent reno, a three-month facelift done two years ago, entailed incorporating materials and furnishings that created a cosy, contemporary look. "They wanted a beachy aesthetic but with a level of sophistication," says Hodgson. Black granite counters and a backsplash of green-grey subway tiles that reaches to the ceiling modernize the kitchen, while open shelving, a farmhouse sink and a Western maple butcher block-topped island establish a casual tone. "We used marble tile in the ensuite and limestone in the guest bath to 'bump them up' a bit — 20 years down the road, we'll still appreciate the finish," says Derek.

Textural elements, in keeping with the beach house vibe, prevent the airy, open-plan space from looking too open or cold. The basalt stone fireplace is a commanding focal point in the living room, and shiplap panelling and exposed rafters create visual interest on the ceiling here. Seagrass blinds are a warm note throughout the house. A few country pieces, left over from the previous rustic-country decor, are juxtaposed with contemporary items to ensure a comfortable balance. White, brown and green-grey hues create a muted palette that enhances the West Coast feel without detracting from the vistas. "We have beautiful, sweeping views, and we didn't want to compete with what's outside," Karen says.

This deference to their environs is obviously behind many of their design choices, from taking down view-obstructing walls to adding windows. "In the principal bedroom, the bed used to back onto a high clerestory window,

We moved the bed and installed lower windows all the way across. Now they have a view to the ocean from bed," says Hodgson. Incorporating local materials was also a priority. Floors throughout are a locally milled Western maple. The fireplace's basalt stone is from Whistler. And even rock integrated into the outdoor spaces came from their beach.

With such consideration, it's no surprise the Rileys have yet, after 17 years, to lose appreciation for their way of life. When weather allows, the couple runs, bikes, takes walks and putters in their vegetable garden. "We're just a mile away from a mall and can jump on a plane and be in Vancouver in 20 minutes," says Karen, "but when we come back down the driveway, it feels like we're miles away. We get to come home to this beautiful private setting."

But as ideal as the setting may be, even the Rileys aren't immune to losing sleep. "From the house, we can hear the water, and every night we hear the waves," says Karen. "When it's stormy it often wakes us up." **H&M**

EAST MEETS WEST

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plantings transferred from their old West Side home, he initially left the balcony relatively stark. "We lived with it that way for a good year. There are three sets of french doors leading to the deck; we wanted to see where we found ourselves moving from inside to outside, and create something that was conducive to how we'd use the space," he says.

Eventually, with the addition of architectural features, furnishings and plants, the space was divided into several functional rooms: a dining area nestled into a pergola off the kitchen; an entertaining area, defined by an arbour in the middle of the deck entered from the living room; a reading area with an umbrella and Adirondack chair off one bedroom; and a pebbled Japanese garden installed around the corner that's visible from both bedrooms. "We discovered that we didn't access the deck through

the living room on a daily basis, so that space mainly serves as overflow for when we entertain," says Michael. "And with that magnolia tree, I feel like I'm in the middle of the country when I'm looking out the window."

In fact, the deck does provide some country-like side effects. The abundance of evergreen plants helps elevate oxygen levels, as well as buffering traffic noise and keeping dust levels lower. And several recycled elements — the tree-stump side table, metal planters made from a local hotel's tossed-away air ducts (they hold Japanese privets) and a reclaimed-elm coffee table — are a conscientious nod to the environment.

The deck's clean-lined look, punctuated with a square motif as well as vibrant hits of colour — mainly cheery red — is underscored with a highly personalized touch. "I like creating spaces that are comfortable, functional and reflect a bit of my history," says Michael. Items given as gifts, picked up on or inspired by travels or salvaged from old jobs make appearances throughout the space. Even many of the plants come with sentimental value and a story. There's a hosta dug from Michael's mom's garden in Victoria, a decades-old rhododendron rescued from a client when he worked in landscaping, and a maple tree and lava stones salvaged from the site of a demolished neighbourhood pub. The fig tree started out as one branch. "A friend literally snapped it off his tree and offered it to me when I told him my grandmother had had a large one in her garden," says Michael. The subtle aromas of privets in bloom reminds him of summertime visits to the Hamptons.

Nonetheless, to maintain functionality and flow, Michael keeps plants to a minimum and along the periphery. "I have to control myself," he laughs. "I love interest everywhere, but I don't want the whole deck filled up with plants." This is especially important when the couple entertains, which, come summer, is virtually every second night. "If it's not just casual hanging out there's a reason to celebrate." Possessing an outdoor space as appealing as this might just be reason enough. **H&M**