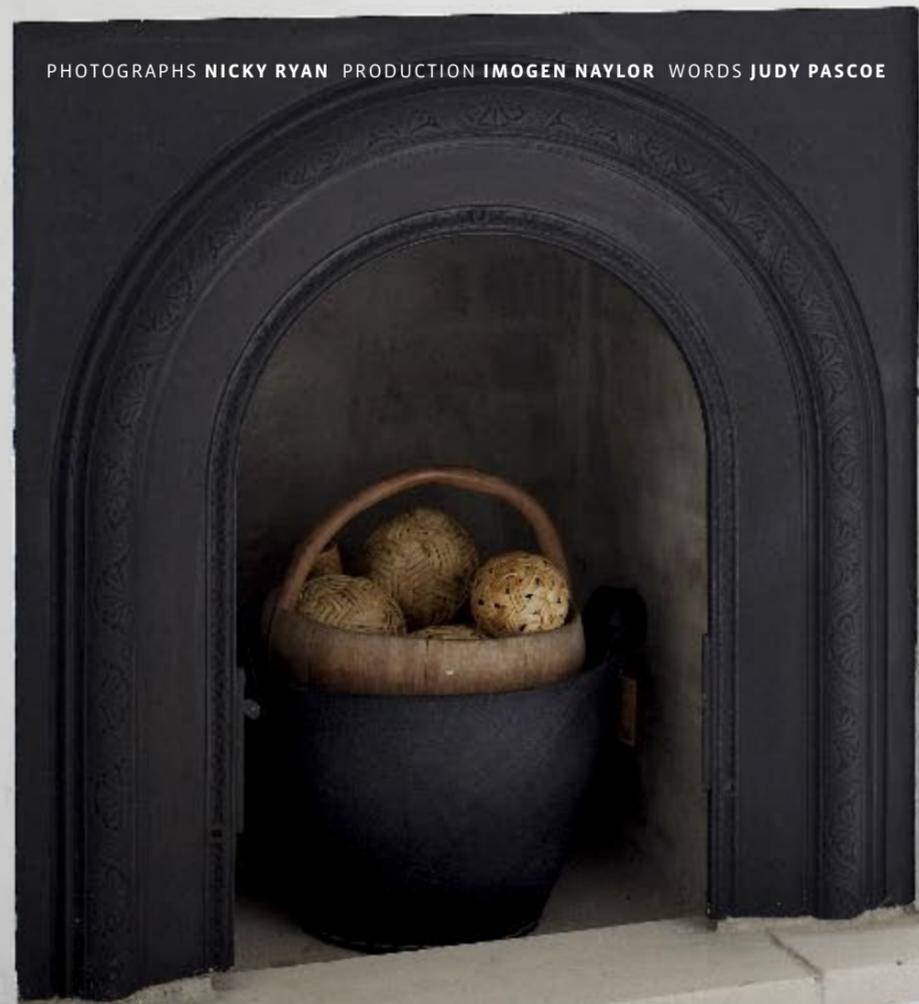


THIS PAGE Sofa from Jordan, piled with cushions from Coco Republic and Ondene, is a gathering spot for the family. Coffee table from Coco Republic on rug from Robyn Cosgrove. Ceramic stool from Ondene with bowl from Pond. Floor lamp from Rust. Missoni throw from Orson & Blake. Bowls from Pond and Les Interieurs. OPPOSITE PAGE Old fireplace in the kitchen was painted black and the mantelpiece is perfect for displaying artwork and decorative objects. Painting by Jen Frost. Keys and pot from Les Interieurs.

SMARTCASUAL

Despite its laid-back seaside ambience, this weatherboard house on Sydney's northern beaches exudes a refined aura.

PHOTOGRAPHS NICKY RYAN PRODUCTION IMOGEN NAYLOR WORDS JUDY PASCOE



THIS PAGE Justine retained the carcasses of the kitchen cupboards, freshening the look with white paint and adding stainless steel benchtops and appliances. Tolix stools from Thonet. OPPOSITE PAGE, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT A timber-framed mirror bought in England reflects the view; chairs from The Country Trader, and stool from Cotton Love. Books and decorative pieces add charm. Chair from Howell & Howell Antiques; torso from Coco Republic; bike from Chuck & Bob.



An outdoor shower in a stone alcove near the front door sets the tone for this relaxed beach house at Palm Beach in New South Wales. It is the perfect spot for washing off the sand before entering the cool white confines of the two-level weatherboard home overlooking Pittwater.

Owner, English-born interior designer Justine Hugh-Jones has given the house a complete makeover since buying it a year ago. "We weren't even really looking for a beach house," she says. "But I have a soft spot for weatherboard houses and I fell in love with this one." Being just a 40-minute drive from her family home in Mosman also means that the property is eminently usable. "We come here for weekends, for holidays, even just for the day," says Justine, whose husband and two sons are keen surfers.

Although old, the house had good bones and Justine saw that it could be easily refreshed. The previous owners had decorated in a heavy country style, adding stained glass windows and dark timber. "What I wanted was a sense of calm when we opened the door," says Justine, "it's a place where we come to relax."

In five months of renovation she breathed new life into the property. "I didn't want a clichéd beach house," says Justine. But as the property is also rented out it needed to be able to withstand the rough and tumble of casual tenants. "It is also our home and I wanted to furnish it with quality pieces that were durable."

To unify the spaces, mismatched floorboards were coated in Resene Aquapoxy in Sea Fog and all the walls painted in Dulux Vivid White, providing a blank canvas for a more contemporary sophisticated look. Downstairs, Dulux Grey Pebble has been introduced to give a Scandinavian feel to the boys' bunkroom and television area.

While no structural work was done, doors were removed to promote an open flow from the kitchen through to the living and dining area, and similarly from the main bedroom through to a sunroom.

A neutral palette of white, grey, black and taupe provided the calm aura Justine was seeking. Anchoring the living area is a floor-to-ceiling bookcase which occupies one wall. Made to measure by

Manning & Manning, it gives the space scale and impact, and houses the plasma television, books, and Justine's one concession to the beach-house look – two large glass bowls filled with shells. The natural linen sofa from Jardan is piled with cushions and is the perfect spot for the family to gather and relax.

A self-confessed "texture queen", Justine kept the random timber panelling in the house and also some of the picture rails – "great for displaying artwork that can be easily changed". The uneven brick staircase linking the two levels, now painted white and covered with a sisal runner, provided more texture and "makes me feel as if I'm in Greece", says Justine.



THIS PAGE Ideal for drinks at sundown, the newly constructed deck has a Dedon outdoor setting from Eco Concepts. Hurricane lanterns from Les Interieurs. OPPOSITE PAGE Dining setting takes in the view. Table from Coco Republic. East Hampton chairs from Rust. Candlesticks from Cotton Love. Platter from Orson & Blake.

The dining area, with its long table, occupies a prime position overlooking tall trees and sparkling Pittwater beyond. Justine replaced the coloured glass in the windows and they slide back to open the space up to the sea breezes. "I love all the vegetation here, the well-established trees, the frangipani and the magnolia that come into flower – it adds depth and interest to the view."

A keen cook, Justine wanted the kitchen to be low maintenance. She worked with the existing cupboard carcasses, painting them white and adding new nickel-plated handles, stainless steel benchtops and appliances. Reluctantly, she dispensed with the existing Kookaburra stove – "it was charming but just not practical". The fireplace was retained, painted black and the mantelpiece now serves as a place to display artwork and treasured pieces.

Opening out from the kitchen is the new deck, where the family virtually lives in summer. Furnished with black outdoor couches and a teak and stainless steel table surrounded by Philippe Starck chairs, it is "where we all gather at the end of the day. It is the ideal spot to have drinks and to watch the sun go down," says Justine.

As an interior designer Justine always likes to inject some humour or a quirky decorative item into her work and her own home is no exception. In the boys' area downstairs is a colourful artwork, which doubles as a clothing hanger, by South African designer Heath Nash, proclaiming "it's beautiful here". No argument with that. ■

For more of Justine Hugh-Jones's style see Bathroom Bliss, page 229.



THIS PAGE Luxury is not abandoned, even at the beach. Bed and chair from Manning & Manning. Society bed linen from Ondene. Wallpaper is Mimosa from Cole & Son. OPPOSITE PAGE, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP Sunroom off the main bedroom offers relaxation with a view; chest from Monsoon Trading. The bathroom is simple and sophisticated with grey limestone floor tiles from Academy Tiles, white 'brick' tiles from Tilecraft and a claw-foot bath. The boys' bunkroom is painted in Dulux Grey Pebble. Linen from Moss River.

"WHAT I WANTED WAS A SENSE OF CALM WHEN WE OPENED THE DOOR. IT'S WHERE WE COME TO RELAX."

SPEED READ Interior designer Justine Hugh-Jones eschewed the traditional beach-house vibe for this weatherboard home on Sydney's northern beaches, creating instead a sophisticated yet laid-back retreat. • Painting the walls in Dulux Vivid White has introduced a freshness, while a neutral palette of white, grey, black and taupe keeps the mood serene. • Quality furniture and artwork provide punch.

STYLING ASSISTANCE BY STEVE CORDOY. FLOWERS THROUGHOUT FROM GRANDIFLORA