

Bring the beach back with you – creating cottage style in your home

(ARA) - Nothing's harder to face than packing up your belongings after a week at a cozy beach house and heading back home to the real world. Sure, it's hard to leave paradise behind, but who says you have to? Why not just transform your own living space to a beach-inspired haven that lets you get away from it all, even if you aren't on vacation? It's easy and inexpensive to do.

With some clever use of all those shells, beach glass and driftwood you've picked up during your travels, as well as scenic vacation photos and a little paint, you can transform your home into the ultimate beach cottage, creating an inviting, relaxing haven away from the real world outside your front door.

First, clear out the clutter. Cottage style is clean, bright and fuss-free because, if you think about it, beaches are simple, wide-open spaces – that's where cottage design gets its inspiration. The beach experience is stress free. Clutter equals stress, and you want to create an atmosphere that's serene and fresh. A massive purging of extraneous clutter will give you a blank palette on which you can apply the true essence of the seashore.

Paint is one of the easiest, most cost-effective ways to completely change the look of a living space, helping make your beach decor a reality. Just be sure you choose the right colors, so you can be happy with your revamped rooms for years to come.

“Cottage style is all about taking cues from nature, so think sand, clear skies, sea glass and sparkling water when selecting the ultimate beach-inspired palette,” suggests Mary Ward, Dutch Boy Paints' senior product manager. “To create a cottage-ready scheme use pale blues, aquamarines, periwinkles, sea-tinged greens, sandy tan, and bright whites reminiscent of ocean foam and fluffy, cottony clouds. All of these colors, in any combination, can work to create a picture of rest and relaxation that's reminiscent of a day at the beach.”

Serenity rules in walls painted in soft pastels or sandy neutrals with ultra-white trim. It's clean. It's clutter free. It's fresh and airy. It says beach house, even if you are miles away from the one of your dreams.

You also can easily add a bit of beach chic to your furniture, further creating a feel of a distant getaway. Slipcovers give any room that easy-living feel that is so important to cottage style. Cover upholstered pieces in slip-on, easy-to-wash covers made from light canvas, cotton duck or sailcloth. Paint dark furniture white to add a year-round summery glow to the space, or invest in a few inexpensive, fun wicker pieces to lighten up tired rooms.

Don't stop here. Keep digging for ideas and inspiration using the vast array of decorating books and websites. One new site, Dutch Boy's **Restore My Decor!** (<http://www.restoremydecor.com>) offers DIY tips and inspiration from professional designers, such as TV design personality **Danielle Hirsch** (<http://www.restoremydecor.com>), as well as homeowners, all of whom can help you find more ways to add cottage appeal to any **restored room** (<http://www.restoremydecor.com>) in your home.

For example, consider incorporating these other ideas for adding beach-worthy serenity to your living space:

- * Window treatments – Less is more. Think wooden blinds, plantation shutters or airy sheers.

- * Floor coverings - Natural or painted wood floors with throw rugs are the hallmarks of cottage style. Think basic. Think organic. Think sisal and textures. Or paint your own canvas throw rug with sea-inspired motifs, such as shells and starfish.

- * Lighting – Think soothing versus overly bright or dimly lit. Recessed lighting works like magic in any room. If you want to go for a more quirky look and make lighting a focal point, display inexpensive figural lamps in the shape of lighthouses or anchors. Or perhaps find one made from driftwood or shells.

- * Souvenirs – Make use of those shells, sand, beach glass and driftwood you collected during your week away in paradise. Fill decorative bowls and jars with sand and shells. Display beach glass in vases of fresh flowers. Paint driftwood with beach-inspired images and hang it on the wall as art.

- * Artwork – Make use of those vacation pictures, especially the ones you took of gorgeous ocean sunsets, lighthouses and sailboats. Use existing snapshots and enlarge some of your favorites, framing all to create a collage that not only says beach living, but also reminds you of a great time your family spent together at the seashore. Why buy artwork when you can make use of something that brings back such great memories?

“It all comes down to thinking light and breezy in everything you do decor-wise,” Ward says. “Use your imagination to create a true feeling of openness that beaches offer. Beach-inspired cottage style is casual, comfortable and fun – and reminds you of vacation, even if you’re miles away from the nearest beach.”

Courtesy of ARAcontent