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July's profile of a well-designed living space

Take a look at a photo gallery of the home at www.newsobserver.com, search 'home.'



the sneak-away

Barbara Myers' tiny weekend home on a bluff overlooking Core Sound suits her vision. 'Most people come to the coast and clear it down and put some big thing up,' she says. 'I wanted to be in nature, in the trees. Ultra-simple and ultra-intimate. I wanted a place you could go to and feel secluded, and like you were a part of the landscape.'

PHOTOS COURTESY OF BARBARA MYERS

small space, big views

Home of the Month, a collaboration with the N.C. State College of Design, shows possibilities for constructing a living space built with homeowners' living patterns and preferences in mind. Each month we profile a new home, selected by an expert panel, from designs by area architects. The goal: to offer inspiration and knowledge that can be applied to any living space.

By MICHAEL WAGNER
GUEST COLUMNIST

CARTERET COUNTY

a dense grove of live oaks occupies the bluff overlooking Core Sound where the modest weekend home sits. The house — tiny by most standards, at less than 800 square feet — blends into the landscape so well it nearly disappears below the fluttering green canopy.

Yet lining the edges of its gables is a thick band of turquoise, showing that this is not an ordinary home, but a weekend cottage by the sea.

It was with this almost fanciful attitude that Raleigh architect David Maurer and his client, Barbara Myers, approached the project more than three years ago when they first met to discuss a weekend house for Myers and her husband, Eddy. Barbara Myers had been thinking about the design almost from the day she and her husband bought the property.

"When I first saw the property, I just thought it was a fantasy land," Myers says. "I started drawing it in bed that very night."

With a single magazine cutout of what he seemed like the ideal weekend house, a head full of ideas, and her own hand-drawn floor plans sketched on graph paper, Myers approached Maurer with her vision.

"Most people come to the coast and clear it down and put some big thing up," Myers explains. "I wanted to be in nature, in the trees. Ultra-simple and



the sleeping nook

Myers drew inspiration from the compactness of a ship's cabin. That feeling is re-created in this queen-size bed nook, which has seaside views through a long horizontal window.

the project the atlantic sneak-away

architect |
David S. Maurer
226 E. Martin St.,
Raleigh
Phone: 829-4969
E-mail: david@maurerarchitecture.com

location |
Carteret County

square footage | 706
heated, 317 unheated

key design concept |
Very small, modest weekend beach house; clever use of space that can sleep up to eight; lots of outdoor deck space to enjoy views.

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ATLANTIC

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ultra-intimate. I wanted a place you could go to and feel secluded, and like you were a part of the landscape.”

The result is about as intimate as you can get. Myers says she was inspired by the compactness of a ship’s cabin. That kind of tight space is more comfortably recreated, however, in one of the home’s queen-size bed nooks.

As a bonus, there are seaside views through a long, thin horizontal window at the foot of the bed. Only a single foot of space surrounds the bed — just enough room to slip in to put on sheets.

Suiting the site

Maurer approached the project with an eye for seaside architecture.



Architect
David
Maurer

After growing up in Virginia Beach and spending summer vacations at Kitty Hawk, he says, he has the traditional bungalow-style oceanside home ingrained in his architectural vocabulary. The site, too, dictated some of the home’s proportions. Though the plot was expansive, the low-hanging branches of the live oaks meant the house couldn’t be tall.

“To get the benefit of any shading, the house would have to be small enough to fit underneath the trees,” Maurer says.

Despite its small stature, the house feels open and spacious, with each room spilling into the next. What’s more, Maurer was able to fulfill another of Myers’ design goals: to fill the house with natural light and air, keeping it cool without making it dark.

Its site on the edge of the bluff helps with the temperature — cool ocean breezes are always moving through the home, which faces the water.

The home is, in many ways, a study in outdoor living. Individually screened, removable panels — nearly 30 in all — wrap the

house, giving its interior at times the feel of a single, large screened-in porch.

Indoor and outdoor living spaces blend seamlessly. A garage-style door over the downstairs bed can slide up against the ceiling, turning one screened porch — complete with an outdoor shower — into an extension of the bedroom.

From the hammock nook on one of the side porches, a ladder leads to yet another upstairs hammock loft. And nearly everywhere, tiered decks surround the house, giving it 317 additional square feet of outdoor living space.

Only the front of the house, which faces south, is left without any significant overhang, enabling the structure to soak up the natural heating and lighting benefits of the sun, but tempered by the shade from the thicket of deciduous trees.

Parking is confined to the rear of the house and, for the most

part, is out of sight. Only a few tree limbs obstruct the ocean view.

“It’s sort of like the ultimate camping experience,” Myers says. And while it is efficient, she notes that its design had nothing to do with trying to pack the largest number of people into the smallest possible space.

She said she wanted it designed mainly for two people — herself and her husband — with the occasional group of friends.

“It’s really not about sleeping a lot of people,” she says. “It’s more about having choices about where to take your nap. It’s about options for leisure, all in a small space. It was built purely for maximum enjoyment.”

“I frankly don’t think people need as many square feet as they have,” he says. “My motto is do something small, but live big.”

But even Maurer was stumped by how to maximize the space for large groups, while still providing all the comforts of home, in such a tiny space.

“We looked initially at modular cabins, but quickly realized we’d need to design every square inch of it,” Maurer says. Looking back, he credits Myers with keeping the project well within the scope of her initial vision, and not an inch larger.

“It was a lot of fun, and a very creative process,” he says. But it was still, quite possibly, the most challenging 700 square feet he’s ever drawn.

For Maurer, the job was an exercise in constraint. A guiding principle of his practice has always been making well-designed, high-quality, small homes.

Today’s Home of the Month is reviewed by Michael Wagner, a master of architecture graduate student at N.C. State University’s College of Design.



the living area

Though small, the house feels open and spacious. One of Myers’ design goals was to fill the house with natural light and air, keeping it cool without making it dark.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF BARBARA MYERS

the kitchen

Myers’ kitchen seems to mimic the compact galley of a sailboat. The house ‘was built purely for maximum enjoyment,’ she says.



the plan

Architect David Maurer approached the project with an eye for seaside architecture. The site dictated some of the home’s proportions. Low-hanging branches meant the house would have to be small enough to fit under the trees.

