

A Beach Find

A couple's new home assumes a quiet but powerful and distinctive presence along Florida's Gulf Coast

INTERIOR DESIGN BY *Robin Rains*
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Opening pages: Robin Rains, the interior designer for a new home on the oceanfront in Santa Rosa Beach, Florida, used a number of items from her antiques business, including a *faux bois* bench on the recessed porch, and inside, a vintage Qashqai runner, a Savonarola chair with its original green velvet, and a vintage geometric oil painting. Opposite: The living room, with one of the home's many reading nooks, features a Verellen Sophie XL sofa slipcovered in linen and a vintage coffee table with a stainless-steel base and marble top from Robin Rains Antiques. The reading nook is defined by a gauzy linen drapery, striped window seat cushion, and a 19th-century Swedish portrait.

Robin Rains is one of those designers who is never not looking—at the world, certainly, wherever she is, but also at where a client lives, what they see out their windows, how those people see their own homes. For instance, on one of her frequent shopping/scouting trips to France, seeking out antiques, she was wandering the stalls of a Paris flea market when she eyed a 1950s-era, multi-armed chandelier hovering in mid-air.

“I walked into the booth and there it was,” recalls Rains from her Nashville office, “and I knew the moment I looked at it that it was perfect for this couple’s bedroom. It was a new-old vintage piece meant for their home. I knew, too, that these homeowners would love it.” And because Rains is such a seasoned designer, she has an instinctive sense of scale and proportion, so much so that she felt confident in purchasing the lighting source knowing, without measurements on hand, that it would clear the iron canopy bed she already had in mind for the couple’s bedroom. Nevertheless, despite her trained eye and gift of good memory, she admits to carrying an actual list of things she wants to find for her clients.

Rains knows these clients well, having worked on prior homes of theirs. She recalls the process of their purchasing this residence, with its direct access to beaches along Florida’s dreamily beautiful coastal Highway 30A. As she tells it, the couple had seen this house years earlier and were determined to buy it right away when, suddenly, it went to other buyers prior to their offer. But like anyone who falls in love with a house, that love, not unlike the true romantic version, doesn’t dissipate. “They bought a far larger house that we came to call ‘Mont Blanc,’ given its scale and color,” says Rains, “but then this house suddenly came back on the market and they snapped it up. Because we, at our firm, always like to name houses that we work on, we called this one ‘Little Blanc,’ since it was smaller in size, but still had a big, lovely effect.”

As is her wont, Rains and her team, notably her Los Angeles-based co-designer, Evan Gibbs, went at the project room by room. “We pull one room together at a time,” Rains explains, “because that way the client, the wife here especially, can see, feel, and experience every texture we introduce. For her, the tactile experience of a room is very important. She and her husband are my favorite kinds of clients because she loves interiors. When clients enjoy the process of design, it’s just a great experience all around.”

The couple, who live in the Nashville area and use this as a frequent vacation destination year-round, purchased this house fully furnished, a not uncommon dynamic in



Above: A novel feature of the pantry/bar is its window, an oculus, and iron screen through which there is a view into the home's foyer. The scale, mortar and pestle, footed plate, and amphora are all from Robin Rains Antiques. Opposite: Rains designed the dining table, composed of an oak base and a leathered stone round top; she provided an upholstered bench for additional seating.





The moment Robin Rains spotted a six-branch, circa-1950s brass light fixture at a Paris flea market, she knew it was the perfect element for the primary bedroom. Fortunately, the chandelier cleared the frame of the four-poster bed, which is accented with a lumbar pillow from Lee Industries. The wife wanted multiple places to read, with one of her favorites being in the primary bedroom, where a vintage Dutch leather-and-cane armchair provides a proper and relaxing perch.



Rains accented the primary bath with a primitive-style, three-legged side table and a gilded iron floor candlestick from her antiques store. The room's vanity is fabricated from Calacatta marble, with painted wood storage units below. A sculpture by Ashley Benton was procured from the nearby Zoo Gallery in Santa Rosa Beach and is displayed on a shelf near the beveled mirror.





Opposite: The house offers panoramic views of and immediate access to the Gulf. A spacious terrace, defined by French limestone pavers, is furnished with a weather-resistant sectional and a grouping of concrete tables shaped like fluted columns.

this part of Florida. But, as Rains explains, those existing furnishings and hues on the walls were so distracting that the true architectural character of the house was obscured. Summerour Architects, of Atlanta, had designed a house filled with novel archways and classical pillars, nooks and porthole windows, a terracotta roof and expansive outdoor areas that embrace the Gulf views. “It’s ultimately a very European-style home,” says Rains. “From the front it presents itself as something almost English, completely charming and intimate, while at the rear, it’s more contemporary. We freshened the house, inside and out, taking away furnishings and décor that had been too beachy and cute and made it elegant and comfortable. It’s now a simple, non-cluttered, sculptural sanctuary. And because the Gulf is right there, we let that remain the focal point of many rooms.”

The designer characterizes the house as “having a lot of soul.” Yes, inherently, the architecture is soulful, but it is Rains’s work as a talented designer that infused every room with that special energy and vibe. A mobile-like chandelier, whose elements have the ability to swing with a push or gust of wind, occupies space over a dining table off the kitchen. She decorated the butler’s pantry/bar with an array of antiques gathered abroad and in America whose very forms echo that of the porthole window framed by a custom iron screen. One of the wife’s main pastimes is reading, and Rains fashioned a series of intimate reading nooks throughout that are as inviting as actual rooms.

There is no period or style that Rains doesn’t understand. She possesses a keen ability to combine decidedly modern accessories and artworks, most of which she chose for the house, with vintage furnishings imbued with character that is evident in their patinas. An antique Dutch armchair, made of leather and cane, provides a favorite bedroom resting place for both the husband and wife. “While she was particularly involved in the whole process, he was obsessed with a particular mid-century armchair that I found for the living room. He’s so happy with the finished home that every time he is sitting in that chair, he texts me to tell me that.”

Rains not only enjoys these clients, she thoroughly enjoys her work as a designer. “What gives me joy, every time I finish a home, is getting to see the joy we exude and they exude. It’s a long process to craft this kind of beauty.” ■