



The Delehanty children (from left: Maclean, Daisy, and Peter) on the lawn of the family's late 19th-century cottage

WHEN DESIGNER CHENAULT JAMES TAKES ON A TURNKEY COTTAGE IN A THROWBACK LAKE MICHIGAN COMMUNITY, THE RESULT IS LIKE AN OLD BLACK-AND-WHITE MOVIE REMASTERED: VIVID WITH COLOR AND WONDERFULLY NOSTALGIC



**RETRO:** Pine wall paneling

**REVIVED:** In the living room, designer Chenault James left the original whitewashed woodwork unpainted, turning it into a rustic foil for a more modern, vibrant seating area. "The paneling is so typical of cottages in the neighborhood, so keeping it exposed in this one room was a fun nod to the house's history," James says. Along with adding bright citron seating, she framed a pair of vintage Brunswick & Fils fabric scraps and hung them above painted white consoles. The rattan chairs, acrylic lamp, and flatweave rug came with the house.

# SUMMERHOUSE REVIVAL

PRODUCED AND STYLED BY JENNIFER BERNO DECLEENE  
PHOTOGRAPHS BY KIM CORNELISON



**S**martphones and video games don't stand much of a chance in the summer communities along Lake Michigan. It's as if the immense inland sea sucks the power right out of them, tucks it into the lakebed, and doesn't return it until the cars are packed up again, and everyone is taking a last backward glance at the water (and not a minute before).

"It's like taking a step back in time," says Emilie Delehanty, whose parents and grandparents grew up summering on these shores. There were considerably fewer beeps and flashing screens to leave behind in decades past, but this turn-of-the-century community near Michigan's Upper Peninsula is still an old-school escape today: Children ride bikes everywhere, neighbors roast hot dogs together at night, and everyone swims until the sun goes down. Wanting that free-roaming experience for her children, Emilie and her husband, Matt, rented houses in the area until they found a turnkey 1898 cottage in the old neighborhood. With a stash of wicker furniture, feminine floral wallpaper, and sturdy plank walls, the summer home was all heart. So they bought it.

"I felt so lucky that the house came furnished, because it had the retro look I was used to," says Emilie. "I knew it needed updating, but I didn't want to lose that feeling." How to pull that off was a no-brainer: She asked her longtime friend, designer Chenault James (who also spends summers in the idyllic enclave) for help. "This is one of the most special places in the world to me, so the look comes second nature: It's vintage, casual, and energetic," says James. "I always say, 'If it reminds me of my grandmother, in a good way, then it belongs.'" Here's how she and the Delehantys, along with architect Dan Gorman, revived the retro spirit of the old Michigan summerhouse and turned its vintage furnishings into modern-day gems.

**RETRO:** White wicker furniture

**REVIVED:** James pulled a pair of chairs from the home's cache of vintage wicker to use as hardy, super practical club seating in the sunroom. "Because of the amount of natural light the space gets, and because it functions as an overflow spot for the kids' games area, I wanted everything to be very durable," says the designer, who paired the chairs with a canvas twill slipcovered sofa and parrot green draperies made from fade-resistant Perennials fabric trimmed in yellow Greek key tape.



**RETRO:** Farmhouse-style Windsor chairs

**REVIVED:** James gave the simple wooden seating and oval table a fresh coat of glossy white paint—"a little sheen makes everything look a little fresher," she notes—and contrasted the buffalo-check cushions with a sunshine yellow bamboo chandelier that she found at a flea market and spray-painted. With the guest chair and apple green mirror, which came with the house and also got a new coat of paint, the room has just enough shine to make it really special.

**RETRO:** Formal china wall displays

**REVIVED:** "Hanging plates can sometimes look stuffy, but the bright yellow and turquoise pieces turn an old-fashioned idea on its head," says James, who spent two years hunting flea markets and antiques stores to complete the collection. The banquette seating was carved out as part of the kitchen renovation and upholstered in a fig-leaf print. James laminated the material in a matte plastic to protect against wet swimsuits or juice spills. "It's a great work-around when you want to use a designer fabric or a crisp white in a high-traffic spot," she says.







**RETRO:** Vintage geranium wallpaper

**REVIVED:** Rather than tearing down the existing vintage Brunschwig & Fils floral wallpaper in this twin guest room, James decided to amplify it by painting the wide-plank floors electric yellow (Daisy by Sherwin-Williams with a glossy finish) to match a similar hue in the wall print. Then she covered the old wicker beds in linens with a vintage ticking stripe. "The kids all rotate in and out of this room," says Emilie. "It's a lot like summer camp here."



**RETRO:** Vinyl floors

**REVIVED:** In the new laundry room, James created cool cabana stripes out of the old-standby flooring with a simple arrangement of colored VCT tiles that echoes the blue in the Lulie Wallace custom wallpaper. Marble counters and side splashes flank a washtub sink.

**RETRO:** Trough sinks

**REVIVED:** In the kids' bath upstairs, Gorman and James added character-building details like beadboard wainscoting, penny tile, and this charming trough sink (a special request of Emilie's). James painted its black, cast-iron bottom yellow to pop against the beadboard wainscot and modern peach wallpaper by Texas artist Leah Duncan. "It's okay to go 'cute' in a kids' bath, especially with a sophisticated color combination," says James.



**RETRO:** Yellow and green

**REVIVED:** Nearly everything in daughter Daisy's room came with the house (including the daffodil yellow coverlets), just spread through different rooms. The bed skirts, for example, were formerly in the guest bedroom, but James loved how they looked with the original green vine wallpaper. Chic blue accent pillows and new beveled table lamps put a fresh, handsome spin on the old-school color pairing. "I also added green trim to the lamp shades to keep them from appearing too contemporary," she says.



**RETRO:** Decorative privacy screens

**REVIVED:** James snapped up this rattan screen at a flea market, painted it a glossy periwinkle, and turned it into a headboard (and a graphic contrast for the white shiplap walls) for the guest room. "I've found that people have a tendency to overanalyze patterns, but Emilie is not afraid to mix," says James, who added graphic bird-print shams to Emilie's small-print floral duvet and yellow trellis print on the floor.



**RETRO:** Tufted cotton coverlets

**REVIVED:** Contemporary spins on classic patterns, like this vibrant fauna headboard print by Christopher Farr, help bridge old-fashioned summerhouse staples (the coverlet and peacock wicker mirror) with 21st-century bedrooms. "There's no reason to play it too safe," says James, who advises clients to take more risks in decorating vacation homes. "You spend most of the time outside, so go for it!"

Emilie and Matt Delehanty's home faces its neighbors across a narrow pedestrian avenue that leads down to Lake Michigan.



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**—CHENAULT JAMES**