



# COASTAL CONTEMPORARY

AN ARTIST WITH ROOTS IN DENMARK CRAFTS THE INTERIORS OF HER CONNECTICUT HOME TO REFLECT HER LOVE OF THE SEA AND THE DESIGN SENSIBILITIES OF HER HOMELAND.

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At the front entry, homeowner and artist Charlotte Sabbagh, who was responsible for the design of the interiors, styled a pleasing vignette of collected furnishings and accessories. Here, an antique ebony altar table and a vintage mirror mix with antique sconces from Circa Antiques.



Ask artist Charlotte Sabbagh to describe her paintings and without hesitation she references her Danish roots. “My work is an abstract expression of where I come from,” says Sabbagh. “I still have a summer house in Denmark, and I’m drawn to the contrast of the dark and light of the water.” Contemporary in style and boldly colorful, Sabbagh’s work is also informed by her extensive travels. “Wherever I go I get ideas,” she says. “I was just in Marrakesh and brought back these pure ink colors and incorporated them into a whole new series.”

Not surprisingly, what’s elemental to her art also forms the basis of her Rowayton home in Connecticut, where Sabbagh, who is also drawn to midcentury Danish design, fashioned her own interiors and used her artwork to create the first layer of its “coastal-chic” style. “The art went on the walls first,” says the artist, who upon moving in, repainted the entire house a crisp, clean white. “Then, I selected colors

from that and accented the spaces with pillows and other accessories. I wanted to create a very neutral palette so that my artwork would stand out and could be interchangeable.”

The design style works well with the furnishings, including Scandinavian pieces collected over the years, and in accordance with the home’s relaxed overtones, many items were chosen to encourage social interaction. Regarding the latter, a trio of barstools pull up to the white marble-topped kitchen island, a casual wood trestle dining table offers seating for six, and a cozy grouping of sofas and chairs resides in the living room—all providing distinct gathering spaces. In various places, the same bay windows that flood the rooms with natural light carve out welcoming vignettes within the larger spaces. Off one side of the living room, for instance, an elegant tufted daybed pairs with a Fortuny light fixture and a vintage stool. “You can see the water from the bed,” Sabbagh says about the carefully composed lounging spot.

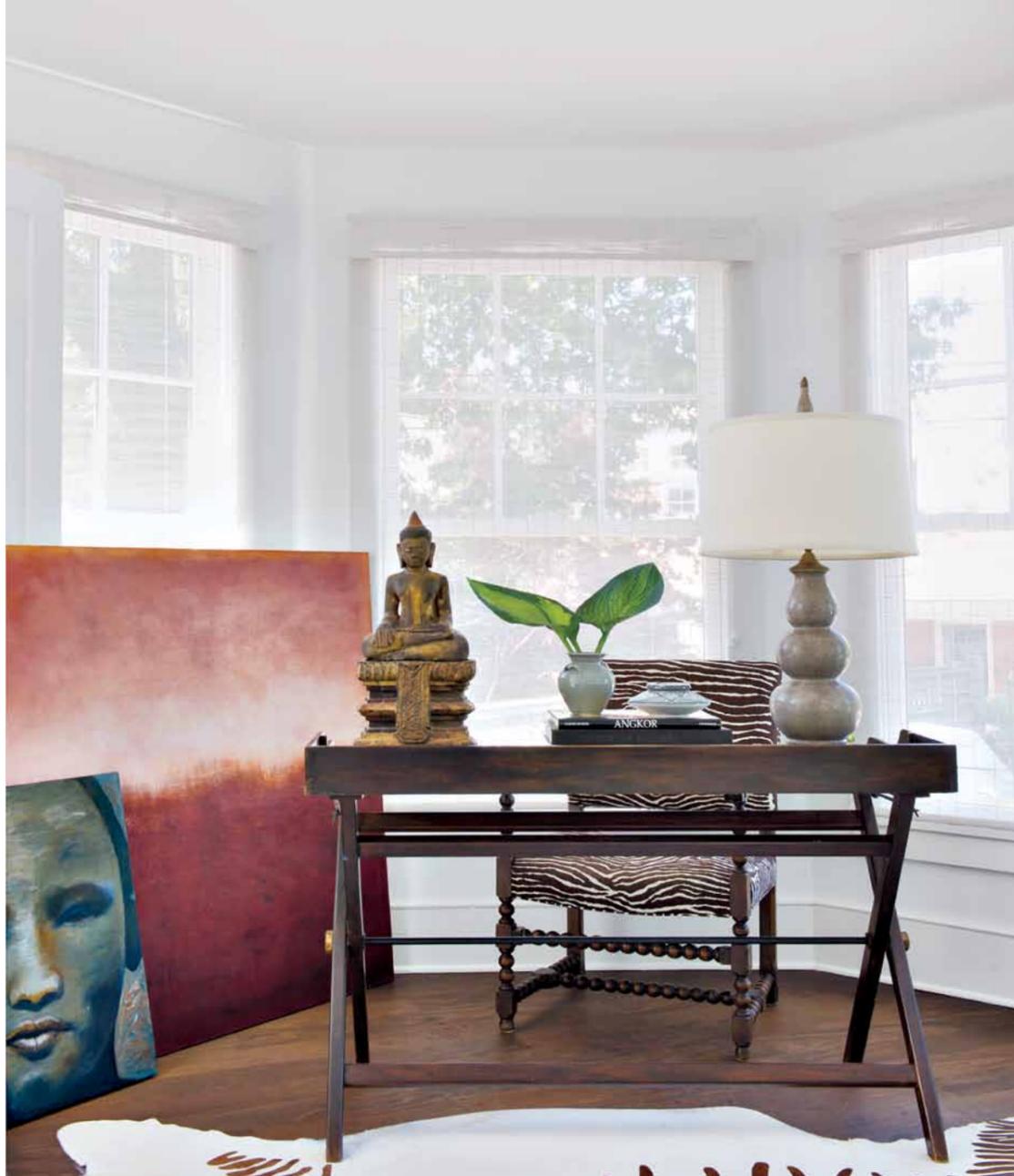
Carefully positioned on a tight triangular lot, the home sits on a mature property surrounded by old-growth trees. Architect Richard Swann introduced local stone, regionally popular shingles and a Dutch Colonial gambrel roof in response to the local vernacular.



Sabbagh's oil-on-linen artwork, titled *Squares*, pops against a pure-white background in the living room, which also features a Poliform sectional, a commodious Lucite table by Lillian August, a circle-framed chair by McGuire, and drum tables discovered at an antiques store in Stamford. Accent pillows in a variety of colors and textures complement the décor.

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-CHARLOTTE SABBAGH



An assemblage of items situated against the living room's bay window depicts Sabbagh's knack for mixing antiques; a desk and reupholstered vintage chair look right at home with a variety of found objects from her travels. The artist's rust-colored oil painting, titled *Perfect Horizon*, is a personal favorite; the smaller one is titled *Masai*.

For her bedroom, the artist chose to accentuate pale gray grass-cloth walls and a neutral upholstered bed with lavender accessories and polished accents. "I like to mix it up," she says. Her daughter Chloe's room mixes it up, as well, with a modern four-poster bed paired with vintage pineapple lamps. A third-floor attic sitting area doubles as a bedroom for her twin boys when they visit from boarding school. "I designed the third floor with a nautical look because the theme creates a more casual feel," says Sabbagh, whose furniture choices for the space include a blue-and-white striped rug, a white vintage table and a blue pouf.

Indeed, it was the home's "beachy" look that first attracted Sabbagh and her then-husband to purchase it as a weekend house. "Architecturally, I found it very interesting, with a contemporary, coastal feel," she explains. "I loved the stonework, windows and shapes, and that there was a lot of natural light all situated in a lovely seaside community."

Responsible for that look was architect Richard Swann, who designed the house for its original owner. "It was meant to be a shingled beach cottage," says Swann. "The use of stained shingles, river-washed stone and the Dutch Colonial gambrel roof was intended

The white-on-white kitchen—open to the living and dining rooms—was already completed when the owner bought the house. Sabbagh added a set of Nuevo stools from Dovecote to the central island, which is lit by pendants from Lillian August. Throughout the house, the floors are stained mahogany.





A beautiful arched divided-light window floods the open dining room with natural light. Midcentury modern chairs by Arne Jacobsen surround a simple trestle table found locally; the rug is from West Elm. At the foot of the stairs, Sabbagh's *Light* painting complements the beachy colors and coastal-chic décor.



Seaside hues are prevalent in the master bedroom, where the West Elm bed, with its beige-toned upholstered headboard, is reminiscent of sand and the painting, aptly titled *Deep Sea*, recalls the color of the ocean. An elegant mirrored side table is backed by Hinson & Company grass-cloth wallpaper.



Color-blocked drapes, a reupholstered vintage loveseat and a textured West Elm rug imbue the sitting area in the master bedroom with comfort and style. The round textured accent table is from Oly and the chandelier is from HB Home.



to be contextual and reverential to the surrounding environment and neighborhood." The unique shape and height, largely necessitated by the triangular footprint of the lot and the fact that it was in a flood zone, resulted in quirky little corners and bays that unwittingly made it the perfect artist's house for its future inhabitant.

Referring to those idiosyncrasies, the architect admits they may have pushed him to be more creative. "When you have a great big square field you can do anything you like, but sometimes it's hard to give your designs as much character as they want to have," he says. "And then sometimes when you have these little in-town properties, you get better architecture. It's a delightful irony."

Before moving in, the couple enlisted the home's original contractor, Bob Calve, to rejigger the main floor's layout somewhat to open it up. Certain architectural elements, such as the red mahogany kitchen counters and stairway to the second floor, were changed out,

along with an elevator shaft he converted into closets and a pantry. "They could certainly add the elevator back in the future if needed," says Calve.

The builder also reshaped the outside areas. "From the road to the finished first floor was over 8 feet, and on the small lot the grading was minimal, so we added terraces, steps and landings," explains Calve. "We also softened up the river rock and hardscape with beds for trees and shrubs. Everything added aesthetic value." It also allowed for a large tree-lined back patio where Sabbagh furnished an outdoor living area with modern beach chairs and teak tables.

Of all the things she loves about the house, Sabbagh claims the fact that "the house is always changing" tops her list. "I sell pieces of art and make new ones, which go up in the house first, so there's always something new," she says. "My art and my house are a reflection of who I am. They have my personality and soul." **L**

**Opposite:** Builder Bob Calve introduced terraces, steps and landings to the property, which allowed for the addition of a private tree-lined back patio. Designed with both lounging and outdoor dining in mind, the space features a sofa by Restoration Hardware and a table from Trip Trap in Denmark.

**Below:** Stained shingles and river-washed stone surround the home's French doors (left), which open from the living room onto the back patio. Playful Brazilian beach chairs from the homeowner's collection are light enough to move around the space and provide casual seating as needed (right). The stone walls around the perimeter match the exterior façade.

