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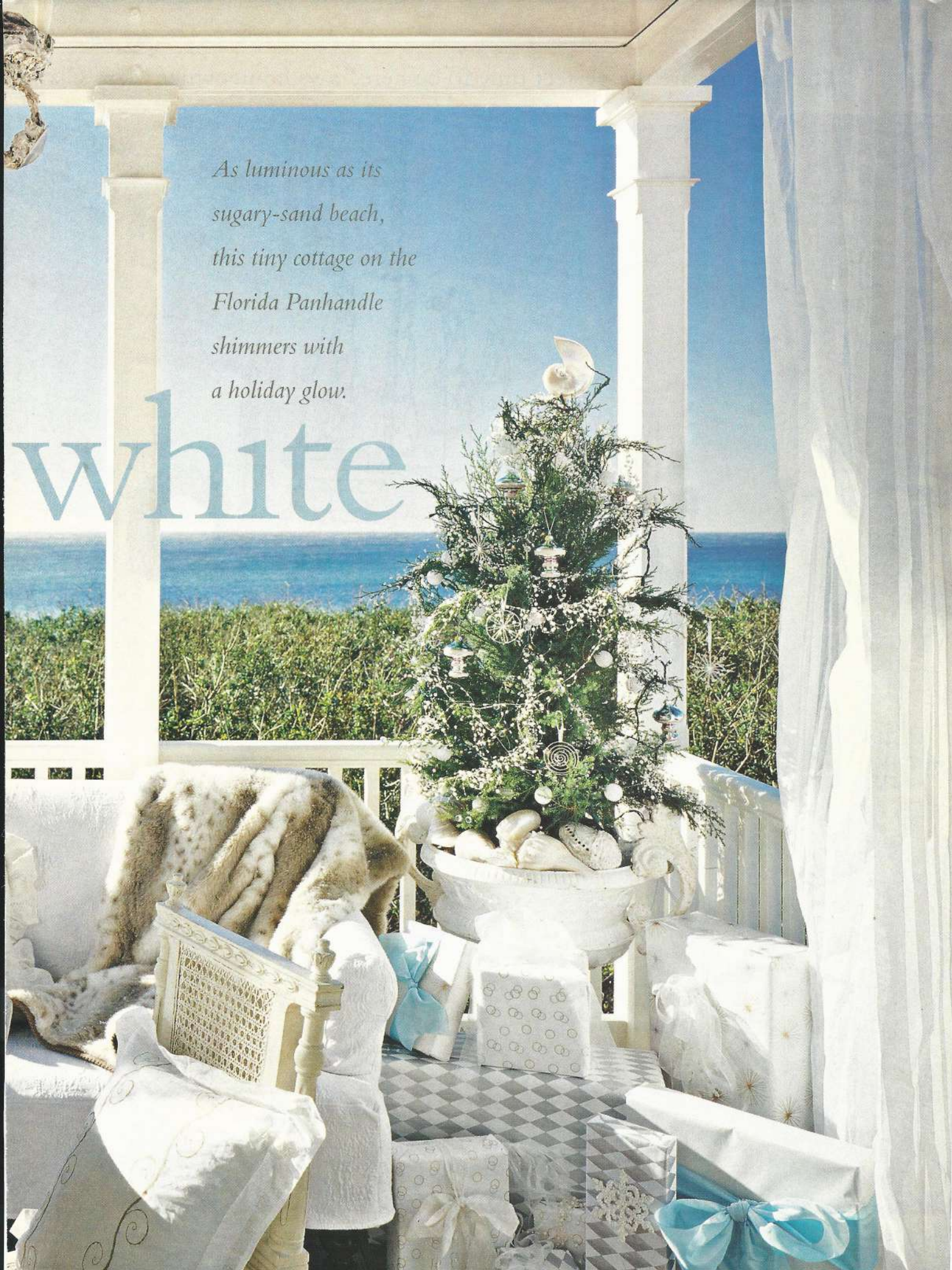
# rhapsody in

TEXT BY SAXON HENRY | PRODUCED BY MARY CLARK  
PHOTOGRAPHY BY DEBORAH WHITLAW LLEWELLYN



*As luminous as its  
sugary-sand beach,  
this tiny cottage on the  
Florida Panhandle  
shimmers with  
a holiday glow.*

white





"The holidays are the perfect time to be here," says homeowner Mary Clark.





“What is more romantic than Christmas in a Seaside honeymoon cottage?”



Mary Clark always dreamed of a white Christmas, but her vision had little to do with snow falling. When she and her husband, Joe, bought a honeymoon cottage in the storied community of Seaside, Florida, she wanted to create a romantic escape—a place where they could pass the holidays wrapped in a fur throw on the upstairs porch or ensconced in the spa tub on the ground floor’s covered screened porch.

“The first time I saw them, I thought how simple and yet how amazing they are architecturally,” Mary says of the row of two-story, 780-square-foot cottages. “When I had the chance to decorate one, I thought

*A banner declares Mary’s design intention—a dreamy space perfect for reflection. The living area’s crystal-bead ship chandelier replicates a 1920s design. Above: The mirrored bachelor’s chest all but disappears as it reflects its surroundings. A transparent candelabra sits on top, alongside a shell-crusted sculpture of the goddess Venus. Mary found the Gothic architectural artifact at Nashville’s Heart of Country Antique Show.*



that it needed to be clean and crisp inside so that the view would be the focus."

The project so enthralled Mary that she left careers in health-care finance and, more recently, as a retail shop owner, for a venture that lets others furnish their beach homes with a click of the mouse. "Beachdwelling.com is a result of buying this cottage, and the love that both Joe and I have for Seaside," she explains. "When I saw what I had achieved, it made me want to help people bring the serenity of this place into their homes."

To capture that tranquility, Mary chose a mostly white scheme interspersed with soft,



A handmade shell mirror hangs behind a buffet in the kitchen. Even when entertaining, Mary sticks to her blanded scheme, serving all-white cheeses and desserts.

Opposite: A narrow staircase leads from the cottage's only bedroom to the open living room, kitchen, and dining porch.















Mary nabbed the painted Louis XV-style cane-back chair (opposite) at the Brimfield Flea Market in Massachusetts. White linen slipcovers and mirrored glass dress the bedside tables.

oceanic colors. She painted floors ivory to heighten the sense of restfulness and chose fabrics, slipcovers, and bed linens that melt into the snowy backdrop. She added only a few divergent elements such as the wrought-iron bed in the only bedroom—a chiaroscuro against the pale walls—and a black-frame schooner chandelier strung with crystal beads dangling above the coffee table in the living room. “This place is so perfect for contemplating life, and I didn’t want to interfere with the mood by making the interiors too fussy,” Mary explains. “But I also wanted the rooms to be interesting and fun.”

Mary has a magician’s gift for choosing furnishings that disappear. “I based the entire design on that expanse of blue beyond the

windows,” she says. In the living room, a mirrored end table and chest reflect their surroundings, becoming virtually invisible. A clear acrylic chair only whispers its presence. Curtains and lamp shades seem sugar-spun, so sheer they dance with the slightest breeze.

This holiday season, as she celebrates in her opalescent hideaway, Mary is thrilled that her project has been the catalyst for a new career. As she suspends palm-frond wreaths in the windows on long strands of pearl beads and decorates a petite tree, she marvels at how much this place has shifted her focus. “Now I know so clearly what I want to do, and the clarity has to do with our cottage: There is something about the water and the view that changes your life.” 🌿

More info: page 178

A crystal chandelier hangs above a spa tub on the screened porch (above, left).

For privacy, gauzy sheers and natural scrub stand between the bather and the beach. To add interest to the mostly white interiors, Mary used a mix of textures. The bath’s shell-crusted table (above) contrasts a sumptuous, cotton chenille shower curtain.