

A woman with blonde hair, wearing a blue denim jacket over a white top and white shorts, is sitting on a wooden porch swing. She is smiling and holding a small white dog. Another dog, a brown and white mix, is lying on the swing next to her. The swing is suspended by chains from a wooden ceiling with a ceiling fan. The porch has a white railing. In the foreground, there is a large, striped rug in shades of blue, yellow, and white, with two pillows (one green, one white) and a pair of sandals. The background shows a beach, the ocean, and a building with a porch.

LOLLYGAGGING IN STYLE

AN ARTFUL AERIE
ON FLORIDA'S
GRAYTON BEACH



BY SAXON HENRY PHOTOGRAPHY BY COLLEEN DUFFLEY PRODUCED BY LISA MOWRY



A candle lantern is right at home with the jaunty nautical fabric in the bunk room at Lollygag, the beach house of Debbie and Walt Rowson. **Left:** Debbie relaxes on a roomy porch swing with pups Smokey and Bart, two of the family's six dogs.





DURING TREKS TO GRAYTON BEACH, FLORIDA, OVER THE PAST 20 YEARS,

Walt and Debbie Rowson of Atlanta have maintained a singular focus: to perfect the art of dawdling. In 2003—on the off chance that they might forget their resolve—the couple built Lollygag, a restful retreat on the sugary sands of the Gulf Coast panhandle that discourages even the slightest hint of hustle or bustle.

“We named the house Lollygag because it’s absolutely what we do here,” explains Debbie, who, like Walt, is an employee-benefits consultant. “Our lives are normally so hectic that we live for our time on the beach.” Every decision made when they designed the three-story structure was motivated by the idea of relaxation for the whole family, including 20-year-old twins Geoffrey and Morgan. The porch ceilings were reinforced to hold commodious swings; the dining room was planned for lingering after appetites are sated; and a soothing, unobtrusive color palette—a contrast to the bright and energizing hues of their Atlanta home—was a priority.

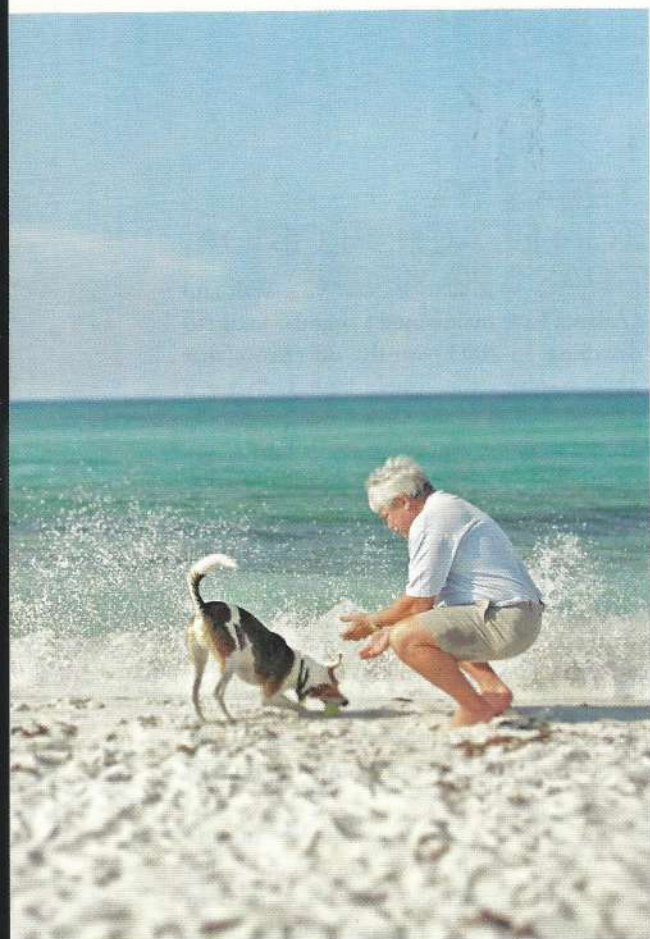
“We didn’t want anything to compete with the amazing beauty of the ocean and the beach, so we chose colors that flowed into the view,” Debbie remarks. “We also wanted an open house where everyone could do their own thing but still feel a sense of being together.”

The Rowsons saw the film *Something’s Gotta Give* while the plans for Lollygag were being drawn, and the kitchen/great room of the character played by Diane Keaton was exactly what Debbie had in mind for the combined living room, dining room, and kitchen on the third floor of the family vacation home. She called on Atlanta-based kitchen-and-bath designer Matthew Quinn to help her create a similar aesthetic. “The upstairs is one huge square,” Quinn explains. “We tried putting the kitchen in a variety of configurations when we were working with the plans in order to sculpt a space made for relaxing, for accommodating multiple cooks at their tasks, and for gathering—because that’s what vacationing is about.”

Debbie points out how swimmingly the thoughtful planning paid off. “We rarely eat together when we’re in Atlanta. In fact, most times we don’t even eat sitting down; we just stand at the counter!” she explains. “But when we’re at the beach, we cook together, and sit after dinner and talk or play games, which is the way it should be.”

The Rowsons used “green” products throughout the house because daughter Morgan has severe allergies. In the kitchen and bathrooms, cabinetry made from pressed hay, which contains no

A painting by Henry Barnes adds a dash of Mediterranean flair to the living room. “I collect paintings by Barnes,” says Debbie. “The scale and feel of his work are right for both Florida and Atlanta.” The tiled table in the corner by the window and the scrolled screen for the arched fireplace were lucky finds in antiques stores.



formaldehyde, was used, and paints with only a small amount of volatile organic compounds (low-VOC) cover the surfaces in every room. "There's nothing toxic in the house," asserts Debbie. "It's probably one reason we feel so good when we're here!"

Floors made from jarrah, a hardwood from Western Australia, and oak trim were stained dark, bringing sophistication to the casual interiors. Amidst the sea of warm wood tones in the main living spaces, pale walls, rugs, and upholstery create a serene chiaroscuro. Slipcovers proliferate, making the furniture sand- and pet-friendly, and the measured introduction of highly expressive art imbues the home with a graceful sensitivity. "I think the art anchors the house," confides Debbie. "I chose each piece because it was strong but soft and peaceful."

An antique fireplace surround with flanking cupboards, all in chalky shades of blue, is a focal point in the dining room. "When I saw it, it literally stopped me in my tracks," says Debbie, who inserted an antique mirror in the old fireplace to match the mantel mirror above. "This is one of those pieces that make the inside feel like the outside, one of my main intentions."

Four bedrooms with attendant bathrooms make up the second floor. One of the bedrooms is a bunk room. "Our son Geoffrey plays football at Wheaton College, and we always seem





to have brawny boys around," Debbie says. "We wanted a fun, efficient room that would accommodate a group of football players, young children, or adults."

The fabrics in this room are a nod to Lollygag's nautical address, as are the aqua accents in Morgan's bedroom, which were inspired by a tropical-print duvet. Also reflective of the shoreline below is a striking ethereal screen of sea glass and shells that Debbie designed to trickle down the wall behind Morgan's headboard.

The first floor holds the laundry room and the mudroom. Because it serves as a catchall for beach paraphernalia, the mudroom has a naturally nautical feel with its ever-evolving collection of stripes and bright colors.

The twins were just toddlers when the Rowsons first vacationed in Grayton Beach. As children, they were drawn to splashing around in the feeder streams that flow from the town's

lakes through the sand dunes to the ocean. The mix of salt and fresh water in the lakes holds an array of fish species, which draws a variety of birds and waterfowl. "It's always warm and shallow, so there are usually kids playing in it," says Debbie of the watery runnel that meanders onto their stretch of the beach. "It's also a great place to go crabbing."

This inviting natural setting along the hem of the Gulf of Mexico can be viewed from nearly every room, including the master bedroom and bath, which are awash in calm neutrals similar to those of Lollygag's surroundings. The bathroom's ample tub is one of Debbie's favorite do-nothing destinations.

Above: Debbie strung beach glass and shells on fishing line to form a hanging above Morgan's bed. The white wicker tables provide contrast to the dark wood of the bed. This interplay of light and dark is one of the motifs seen throughout the home.

The wistful blue cupboards and fireplace surround that command one wall in the dining room was the starting point for the space's design. A mirror above the fireplace reflects hues of ocean and sky. **Opposite top:** It's playtime on the beach for Walt and Smokey. **Opposite bottom:** The kitchen has two ample islands topped with honed granite in a seaworthy blue. "Matthew knew we would live in our kitchen, and he did a great job of making it comfortable and inviting," says Debbie.





Left: A painting by Heather Barron, purchased by Debbie during a ski trip to Park City, Utah, hangs in Morgan's room.
Above: Bold stripes, informal fabrics, and cotton rugs give the bunk room a festive feel. The sofa was a flea-market find.
Below: "I love baths, but I find most tubs too big," Debbie says. "This is the best one I've ever found—it's plenty deep and plenty wide to fill with lots of water, but not too tall to get in and out of easily."

Sleeping in, taking time for naps, and watching the sunset from a porch swing are other ways the Rowsons unwind. "Even if the weather is horrible, being at Lollygag is total relaxation," Debbie says. "It's the only time I ever get to read a book!"

Besides the occasional long weekend, the family always gathers with friends for the Fourth of July holiday and to celebrate the New Year. "During our first Fourth of July, a bunch of my son's friends were here; I can't tell you how many chickens and ribs we grilled. Some of the boys had whole chickens on their plates!" Debbie says, laughing. "When we're here," she adds, "it's absolute quality time." This is no accident, as every aspect of Lollygag's tranquil personality was pondered long before the first footing was poured. "We designed this house to be more than a second home," says Debbie. "It's a home away from home."

Kitchen and bath designer: Matthew Quinn

For more information, see sources on page 182.

