



The Little Place BY THE SEA

BY LYNNE BRANDON
PHOTOGRAPHY BY DAVID WILSON

There's a happy house in North Topsail Beach that has the whimsical touches and attention to detail that make it a veritable doll house for grown-ups. White accessories and furniture give a nod to the nautical. Maps of the coast, model ships and black-and-white photos of family on the beach cover the walls. There is a tribute to the four grandbabies as their chub-

by little feet hit the water for the first time.

This home is sanctuary for Lee and Norma Gordon who have called Topsail home since 2000. The sea has always beckoned to the couple who vacationed at Wrightsville Beach when their two children were growing up. Kids upon kids would show up, and the Gordons knew that eventually they needed their own beach home. "I was just looking for a shack near the water," says Norma. She got way more than that.

Lee was traveling for business and Norma was tending her father while he convalesced after an illness. They decided to visit a family friend at Topsail Beach and saw "for sale" signs on several pieces of property. Norma loves porches, so her choice was easy. "I opened the door and said, 'This is it,'" she recalls. Lee chimes in, "The sales agent tried to talk us out of it because it was more expensive and had less square footage than the other house. We went with the porch."



The Gordons have been married for 40 years and clearly love each other and their beach lifestyle. They celebrate their individual interests in a put-up-your-feet-and-sit-awhile home that is undeniably made for relaxing and connecting with family and friends.



The four-bedroom, three-and-a-half-bath home is on three levels and is in a quad with six other Cape Cod houses with cedar shake roofs, lending a New England flavor.

The couple also wanted a house one block away from the water to feel more protected from hurricanes. “The timing was right and housing values were lower because people were dumping property due to the hurricane,” says Lee. The house met all their criteria for a beach house.

Within a month the deal was sealed and Norma was on a mission – furniture was soon stacking up at the rate of one new piece per day and quickly filled up a garage. Lee had a hand in the décor as well, he says, pointing to a beautiful white pickled pine coffee table that he made with his own hands.

The Cape Cod had some unexpected bonuses for not only the Gordons but for their family and friends. It has become a sanctuary for the ill, those seeking solace and others who feel a spiritual connection with the water. The Gordons’ minister has discovered it is a great place to write and got so inspired on his last “retreat” to their home that he wrote four sermons. A relative who had cancer visited often for the peace it offered, and others dealing with the loss of a loved one have been drawn



to the haven. “It is a healing place,” says Norma. “Everyone gets something back when they come here.”

A meeting place has always been important to the family. “We wanted to have a place for us all to meet together since our children live so far away,” says Norma. Daughter Amy comes every July from Connecticut and stays for a month with her children, Carley, who is four, and Cal, two. Son Mike lives in Alexandria, VA, and works in Washington. He brings his wife and children – Graham, four, and Sophia, who is two. All four grandkids call it Mimi’s house, and Amy loves it so much that she weeps when she has to leave. Who could blame her?

The Gordons met in high school in North Carolina and they married during Lee’s senior year at North Carolina State University.

At one time the man of many interests wanted to be a small-town doctor, architect and cabinetmaker. He ended up in textile

manufacturing, a career that has been good to him. He got a job in Richmond and they lived there until moving to Greensboro in the early ’70s.

The couple built a home in Browns Summit on Lee’s grandfather’s land where tobacco was grown. “I just knew there was a better way to make a living,” says Lee with a grin. He was right, and he had a long, fruitful career in working for textile companies Macfield, Inc., and later Unifi, Inc. He is now enjoying working as a consultant and having more leisure time.

“Sometimes I hate to tell people who I call on for business that I am sitting on my deck looking at the beach and checking e-mail on my laptop,” says Lee. “Colleagues and I usually laugh over it because they are doing the same thing in our new remote, wireless world.”

It’s a slower pace of life here on Topsail, but it appeals to the couple. Mostly the beach is quiet and the Gordons say that some people



might find it boring. Not the case this summer when a film crew shot *Nights in Rodanthe* (New Bern author Nicholas Sparks’ latest novel to make it to the big screen) on North Topsail with Richard Gere and Diane Lane. “It was exciting, and we could not believe how many people were in the film crew,” says Lee. “We watched them sweep the beach to remove footprints and check lighting with Richard Gere’s double. It was a lot of fun to watch.”

The Gordons have been married for 40 years and clearly love each other and their beach lifestyle. They celebrate their individual



interests in a put-up-your-feet-and-sit-awhile home that is undeniably made for relaxing and connecting with family and friends. Norma loves to read and spends a lot of time with books recommended by her son. She enjoys keeping a journal and recording family history for her grandchildren so they can remember the days of old and her parent's lives.

Norma is a professed "chicken of the sea" and prefers to stay on land, so it works out just fine for Lee to take to the waters solo where he finds his bliss with a rod and reel on his 17-foot center-console Scout fishing boat. "I had never owned a boat before and all of my buddies were telling me to get a big boat," says Lee. He followed his own intuition and bought a small



boat that was perfect for the Intercoastal Waterway.

For the fisherman, it is all about relaxing and getting away from it all. "It is not in the

catching, it's in the fishing." When he does catch, it is speckled trout, flounder, puppy drum and sea bass. Lee is the family chef and thanks to fishing and local markets, seafood is usually on the menu. Evenings are spent curling up with a glass of wine and enjoying the solitude.

The couple enjoys walking the beach every day. Norma admits to being a "gatherer" and collects shark teeth, shells and sea glass. She recalls the time when she happened on the beach on a fall morning and conch shells literally covered the beach. She is an

admirer of sea glass and has a beautiful dish full of green gem-like pieces honed by the beach and time. Like the glass, life just gets better with time. 🛥️