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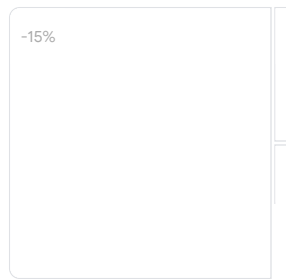
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## A Modest Beach Cottage on Martha's Vineyard Goes from "Bad Seventies" to "Good Seventies"

by [Meredith Swinehart](#) Published: August 23, 2021



When NYC interior designer [Ellen Hamilton](#) undertook the renovation of a 1970s beach cottage in Chilmark, Massachusetts, she knew it would be neither the biggest project she'd ever undertake, nor the most dramatic transformation—but its modesty is exactly what appealed to her.



Authentic Danis  
Danish Design Store

Chilmark is a town on Martha's Vineyard, a small island near Cape Cod that's both undeniably beautiful and undeniably wealthy. "When you see a coastline like this," says Hamilton, "everyone's initial instinct is to overbuild—to have a glamorous and big house." (The next-door neighbor is a well-known billionaire.) But her client wanted to keep both the footprint and the character of her small abode: "She could have torn it down and put up a big number," says Hamilton. "Instead, she used restraint all around, and I think that's pretty great."

What did need changing about the house—which serves as guest quarters to a new home next door—was the interior finishes. The house hadn't been updated since it was built and flaunted a color scheme of turquoise, purple, and green. The renovation required a fast turnaround—work began in mid-January and the first guests arrived July 4, so Hamilton made quick work of tailoring the cottage to her client's "clean, Scandinavian" taste. They retained the existing windows to keep costs down, and added shiplap paneling, a coat of



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and took the 'under-improvement' approach. In other words, it was bad seventies, and we turned it into good seventies.”

Photography by [Max Kim Bee](#), courtesy of Ellen Hamilton.



Above: The kitchen, which overlooks the living room, kept its previous footprint but otherwise received a complete overhaul with Carrara marble countertops, a backsplash of textured white tile from Ann Sacks, and locally made Shaker-style cabinetry with Swedish hardware.

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Above: At one end of the living room, a [drop-down sofa](#) from the Danish Design Store converts into a single bed for extra guests.

Hamilton was able to incur a huge cost savings by keeping the cottage's original windows—which had white screens, brass handles, and heavy oak trim. She swapped in unassuming white handles and a thinner, white-painted trim, saving time and money while “lightening the room substantially,” she says.

At the other end of the price spectrum, says Hamilton, “there were a few pieces of furniture we really splurged on”: specifically, a [Hans Wegner Circle Chair](#) and [Kaare Klint for Carl Hansen Safari Chair](#), both shown here.



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Above: The two [off-white living room sofas](#) are from Croft House; pricey, says Hamilton, but balanced with a lamp and corner table from Ikea, among other affordable finds.

The main question for the interiors, says Hamilton, was “how to take a boxy little house and make it feel really pleasant.” She chose furniture with rounded sides and corners: “When you’re in such a boxy space, you can use the furniture to do some of the heavy lifting the architecture can’t do,” she says. She also positioned everything slightly off-kilter, “never on a grid—that’s furniture placement 101 in a small space.”

A small deck off the living room serves as a “lookout point” for viewing across the water.



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Above: A small bathroom with shower serves the upstairs social spaces (the living room and kitchen). The [wall-mounted vanity](#) is from WetStyle and the [wall and floor tile](#) is Ann Sacks.

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Above: The master bedroom, with a bed from West Elm. The flooring (used throughout the house) is whitewashed, refinished wood from PID Floors in Brooklyn.

“We really gutted everything,” says Hamilton, even requiring some structural changes. A “bizarre” beam in the center of the bedroom precluded a king-size bed, so the contractor redistributed the weight so the center of the bedroom could be post-free.



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Above: The private spaces—the bedroom, master bath, and a small office—are all sited downstairs. The off-white tiles in the master bath are from Stone Source; they're squatter than typical subway tiles but also not quite square, notes Hamilton.

The whole house is painted in Farrow & Ball [All White](#), “our client’s favorite,” Hamilton says.



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Above: "Our real challenge in the bathroom was to combine a master bath with a washer and dryer," says Hamilton; there wasn't room anywhere else. She designed an oak wood frame to define separate zones around the bathtub and the laundry.

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Above: A small office accessible via sliding barn door off the entry hall sports a [Risom Desk](#) from DWR, [shelving](#) from Swedish company String, and a [Kaiser Idell Lamp](#) from Fritz Hansen. The desk chair is a vintage [Hans Wegner Swivel Chair](#). ("That was a splurge," says Hamilton.)



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Above: A small, slate-tiled entryway vestibule has hooks for storage and a bench for tying shoes (see our story on [The Organized Home](#) today to re-create the look).

The horizontal windows on the landing frame the beachy meadows as you ascend the stairs, says Hamilton.

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Above: A large deck is accessed via sliding glass doors off the bedroom. The [Terassi sofa and side chairs](#) are from DWR. The canvas [Camp Stools](#) are from Serena & Lily.

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Above: The outdoor shower is just outside the master bath, but it's accessed off the front porch.

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Above: The front entry offers a glimpse at “that Seventies look,” says Hamilton. The exterior remains unchanged save for a new deck, lighting, and front door, painted in Benjamin Moore [Bold Blue](#). The indoor/outdoor [PS 2014 Bench](#) is from Ikea (\$75).

For more beach style, see:

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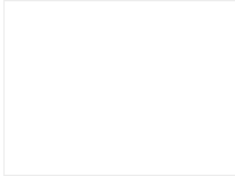
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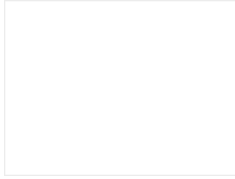
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Farrow & Ball

All White No. 2005  
Paint

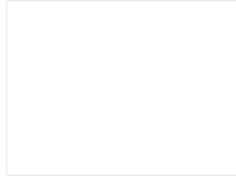
£82.00 GBP from Farrow & Ball



Carl Hansen & Son

Kaare Klint Safari  
Chair

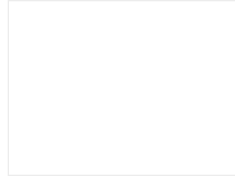
\$1,295.00 USD from Danish Design Store



Outdoor Benches & Stools

Ikea PS 2014 Bench

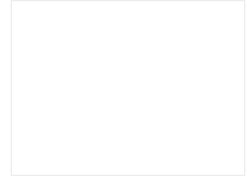
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PP Mobler

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More Info from Danish Design Store



Sofas & Couches

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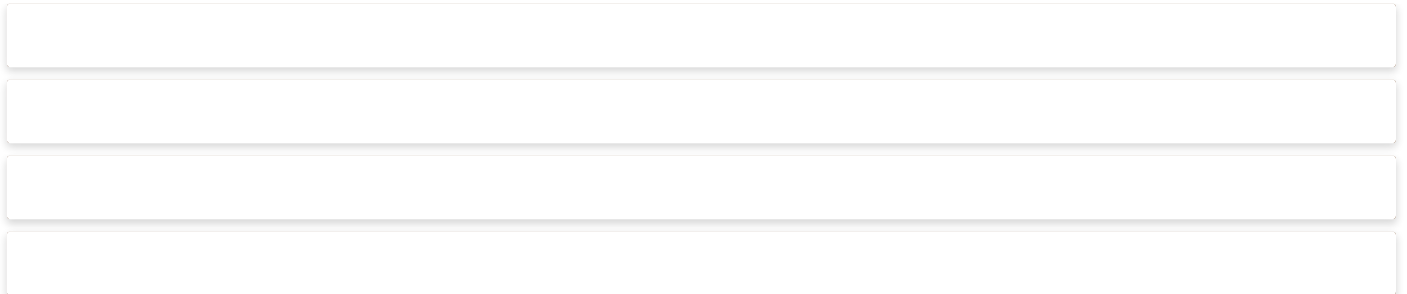
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