

# COASTAL LIVING<sup>®</sup>

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MAGAZINE  
FOR PEOPLE  
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THE COAST

autumn on  
cape cod

21 inns  
we love

come inside our  
cottage retreat

# idea house

# new attitude



Barbara and Les Kaplan

When Barbara and Les Kaplan commissioned Mike Ryan to design a home on New Jersey's shore, the architect immediately hit the beach. He spent hours roaming the dunes, observing the sea grass, tracking breezes, and photographing views. He pored over surveys and maps of the Long Beach Island area. "I get obsessed with a site and what's special about it," says the principal of

Michael Ryan Architects, based a half-mile north in Loveladies. "Then I try to compose a structure to match it."

Two things set the Kaplans' site apart. First, the parcel includes two and a half lots—a rarity on this popular sliver of barrier sand—which gave Mike more than the standard "build a house and park cars" space. Second, deed restrictions on adjacent tracts leave open views of both the Atlantic Ocean and, to the west,

Architect Mike Ryan designs a sunny contemporary home floating above the dunes on New Jersey's Long Beach Island.



Barneget Bay. With the help of project architect Chris Jeffrey, Mike responded to the one-of-a-kind site by designing a long, transparent structure that appears to hover above it. "Because of the length and profile of the dunes, we raised the home off the ground," Mike says. "When you pull up in the driveway and see dune grass under the house, you know immediately where you are."

The beach house met all of the Philadelphia couple's expectations for "a place to hand down from generation to generation, where family would always get together," says Barbara, a former creative director at an advertising agency. Big, welcoming, comfortable, architecturally exquisite, easy to maintain, and worthy of their extensive art collection, the house has confirmed her build-it-and-they-will-come predictions. People pop in

**B**uilt on a concrete-and-steel superstructure, the sturdy home boldly faces the elements. Curtains of glass line the facade. Soft furnishings, furry pups, and relaxed guests warm its interiors.

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The vast living area can serve as a great “social chamber”—and often does, with its world-class views of the ocean and professional-grade kitchen at the ready.



for weekends. The five bedrooms are often full. “Everybody who comes wants to come back,” Barbara says.

Modern in appearance and attitude, the home suits the needs of beachgoers, says Mike. “People don’t move into a beach house for the summer the way they used to,” adds the architect, who has designed homes up and down the Jersey coast. “Today’s beach houses need to have a hit-and-run feeling. I think the openness of a modern house lends itself to that approach.”

How does “hit-and-run” translate into design? It means clutter-free space. The architects left the home’s lower level open instead of adding a garage (they often become messy storage areas), and Mike designed custom-built wardrobes for the guest rooms in place of closets (hit-and-run guests

pack lightly). It means practical design. Mike’s wife, Randee Spelkoman, the firm’s interior designer, chose Velcro-fastened slipcovers made by an Italian company, and hip, stainless-steel and plastic kitchen chairs (no connotations over wet bathing suits). “Barbara wanted a beach flop,” Randee says. While stylish, “the furniture needed to be comfortable and durable.”

Hit-and-run also means versatile spaces. “The house works as well for an individual as it does for 50 people,”

**T**he Kaplans’ Jack Russell terrier, Mariah, and their daughter Emily’s Australian shepherd, Alpine, relax beneath 22-foot ceilings. Left: In the kitchen, cherry cabinets complement the lighter countertops.



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says Chris. The vast living area can serve as a great “social chamber”—and often does, with its world-class views of the ocean and professional-grade kitchen at the ready. An overstuffed sofa and chairs and a few well-placed Turkish rugs warm the gathering space, making weekenders feel at home. A long, lava-stone dining table beneath the 22-foot-tall ceiling awaits large, boisterous dinner parties, while a smaller table tucked into a screened porch beside the kitchen

**E**xotic ipê hardwood floors on the screened porch (above) can be hosed clean. Crisscrossed cables outside the screens provide lateral support. Left: Mike designed the master bedroom’s bed platform. Heated floors warm bare feet, while frosted-glass doors make the room seem larger.

caters to intimate family meals or breakfast on the fly. A massive green-and-blue coffee table made by Asheville, North Carolina, artist Randy Shull anchors the living area. “We wanted to have something wonderful there,” says Barbara of the conversation piece. “We sit on it. Kids dance on it. It’s got 45 layers of auto paint, so if you chip it, another color shows through.”

Even when there’s a full house, guests have no trouble finding private spaces for conversation, contemplation, or losing oneself in the pages of a book—those magnificent, restorative activities beach trips inspire. Small terraces jut from various rooms. A bridge with glass railings spans the living area between bedrooms. A pool deck and pool house with a sauna and wet bar hunker down in the dunes. Steps from the kitchen,

Clean lines and quality materials drove the home's design. The stair landing's leather wall sculpture is by an Australian husband-and-wife team, Graham and Tanija Carr.



the screened porch full of rich wood surfaces beckons the sun-weary with its dark, calming ambience. The Kaplans might sneak off to the porch for a quiet lunch at a terrazzo table or collapse into cushioned chairs after an active day on the beach.

In that sense, the porch resembles the whole house—“a haven,” Barbara calls it. “The sound of the ocean, the changing light—Mike captured it all,” she says. “You walk in the house and you can’t help but feel peaceful and happy.” It’s probably how Mike felt when he first roamed those dunes, dreaming of a house worthy of the site. 🐚

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