

"We wanted to [build a house at the coast] now—  
when our daughters could do it with us.

When they're young, you can get the beach in their blood."—Maria Adams



ride by this place and ask each other, 'Who would ever build here?'" says Alan. Despite initial doubts, both couples weighed the benefits. The price was right, and though the lot wasn't directly on the Gulf, it came with plenty of amenities. A serene bay and land preserve flank one side, while two miles of undeveloped, uncrowded beach are just across the street. Both families can dock boats out front. Dolphins, herons, pelicans, and ospreys evoke constant awe. And the water is the perfect depth for swimming, dock fishing, canoeing, and crabbing. But the best part is the good times shared here.

Living side by side with Ross, Hayes and Grey have adopted him as a

brother. "The kids stay in the water all the time," Clay says. "There's no sleeping past 7 a.m., and no one is allowed to hang out indoors." When the day is done, both families can retreat to their own private spaces.

"While it is still considered a duplex, the structure appears more as two individual houses," he says. Elevated on posts above carports, the 1,800-square-foot units have mirror-image plans, which helped minimize construction costs. Instead of the common walls and paired doors of

*Clay designed the vaulted space to encompass the TV silting area, kitchen, and dining table. The hall leads to two bedrooms with private baths. The girls' bunkroom is upstairs.*

traditional duplexes, the two units are linked only by a ground-level structure devoted to storage and back-to-back outdoor showers. Separate entry staircases rise to sheltered decks that serve as front porches.

The units are set off by distinctive yet complementary hues: The Adamses' side is painted apple green; the Moores' side, lilac. "The houses are so bright," says Clay, "one of our friends says he can see them from the top of the bridge five miles away."

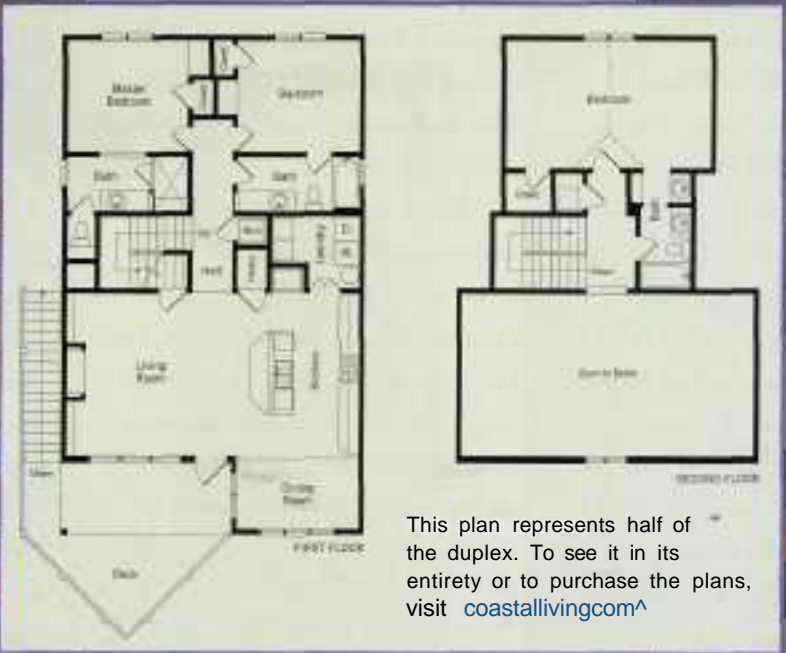
The interiors also gain character from color. Wherever their house lacks architectural detail, Clay and Maria compensated with bold tones. They painted the living area walls lima bean

green. The sofa, floated in the center of the room, displays a bright Matisse-like design. Reinforcing its vibrancy, Maria's pitcher collection commands attention behind glass-front kitchen cabinets. Bedrooms are painted purple, green, and blue. "Color is free," says Clay. "You might as well use it."

He met budgetary constraints with ingenuity, as in the railing he accented with cutout fish shapes. He made deft use of found objects, such as the old doors fashioned as wainscot in the girls' bedroom. "You'd have to pay a carpenter a lot to do this from scratch," he remarks. "You can find an old door for about \$25 and cut it to fit." Similarly, reclaimed

medicine cabinets are built into bathroom walls. In the vaulted great room, salvaged screened doors outfitted with vintage glass doorknobs give an ordinary pantry and closet a down-home flavor. "Found objects add character that doesn't always come with new construction," says Clay. "I've got a pile of stuff in the garage that I've collected. If you buy things before you build, you can design around them."

Bargain furniture and children's and regional art complete the mix. A teak trestle table from a local antiques shop goes with catalog-order side chairs and a pew from an old church in Fairhope. "You can line up 10 children on that side with hot dogs," Clay says. The chandelier



This plan represents half of the duplex. To see it in its entirety or to purchase the plans, visit [coastalliving.com](http://coastalliving.com)

**T**he open floor plan entices family and friends to gather at the counter bar. "If we're not eating next door at the Moores', they're usually over here," says Clay.

Buoys, driftwood, seaglass, and shells—many of them souvenirs *of* boating excursions to isolated island beaches—line shelves and decorate countertops.

"You can't take yourself too seriously at the beach," Maria says.

above it reminded him offish hooks. Elsewhere, drawer pulls are boat cleats. Chairs crafted from water hyacinth came from a roadside stand.

Clay and Maria weren't casual, though, about wanting the home to be low-maintenance. As with most of **the** houses he designs near water, Clay chose building materials that would stand up against the coastal climate, such as the exterior's fiber-cement siding. "It looks like wood but it doesn't rot and doesn't require a new

**T***he bedrooms burst with color mid inviting details. Opposite top and above: the master suite; left: Hayes and Crecy's room; above, right: the guest room*

## COST-CUTTING TIPS

- Share land costs by buying a lot with a friend.
- Split contractor costs with a neighbor by building a duplex.
- Consider a canal or bay lot instead of oceanfront. The property is usually much less expensive, and the land shield offers substantial protection from rough weather.
- If you aren't an architect, barter with a friend who is. Offer a periodic vacation in your new home in exchange for the design.
- Keep it simple. Clay's home is essentially a square box with one roofline. The more complex a plan becomes, the higher the cost—and the more to maintain.
- Choose low-maintenance building materials to nearly eliminate the need to repair, replace, or repaint.
- Collect salvaged materials to add inexpensive character to otherwise plain designs.
- Decide what you want to splurge on and what you can live without.

paint job every few years," he says. "[I can spend hours collecting driftwood, but I don't want to come down here and spend time on repairs.]"

**The** time they do spend at their beach home is for family and friends. In summer, Maria and the girls head here every Wednesday afternoon and stay through Sunday. Clay joins them Wednesday evening after work and commutes the 50 miles back to Fairhope the rest of the week. "The most fun is when everybody's down here," he says. "This place is about sharing." \*  
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