



Get Back to Nature

In Bald Head Island, North Carolina, architect Ruard Veltman brings a laid-back and woody perspective to his family's beach house

LIVING IN CHARLOTTE, Ruard Veltman dreamed of having a cabin high in the mountains, but his wife, Millicent, lobbied for a place at the coast. Ruard lost that debate but did get a second chance at creating a mountain-like retreat when he rehabbed this 1,800-square-foot Bald Head Island cottage for his young family, including son

Fritz, 8, and daughter Perrin, 6. First, he replaced the interior's 1980s-era peach drywall throughout with mossy green paneling. Next, he created relaxing outdoor spaces and then finished the look with rustic accents—not a seashell or mounted marlin in sight. “It’s a house tucked away in the woods, but near the beach,” says Ruard. “We’re both happy.”



MEET THE ARCHITECT

Holland-born and Alabama-trained, Ruard is known for his organic spin on classic style; ruardveltmanarchitecture.com.



A hanging lampshade illuminates Ruard's desk and echoes the tower's shape.



Ruard repurposed a broken concrete tabletop and base to make a shower stand.



A curtain screens the porch's lounge area from the main entry door.

what he did EXTERIOR AND PORCHES

HID IT IN THE TREES

Ruard changed the 1980s cedar-shingled and shiplap facade from brown to gray-green. "Now it fades into the foliage," he says. And upstairs in the octagonal tower-like "crofter" (what islanders call the garage for their golf cart, the main mode of transportation here) Ruard created a screened-in office for himself with a 360-degree view of the woods. "It's my tree house," he says.

FORGED AN ENTRY

The approach to the house wasn't interesting enough for Ruard, so he

handmade a tiered "folly gate" of timbers embellished with bird-baths made from plow discs. "It gives the place some flair," he says. He also "decentralized" the house by removing the front door. "Now you come in a side door through a porch. There's no grand foyer, so it's more in keeping with the casual nature of a beach house," he explains.

IMPROVED LIFE OUTDOORS

Because mosquitoes and woods go hand in hand, Ruard screened in the existing front porch—

including an outdoor dining room—so his family can live happily outside when things get buggy. He also added a second screened porch on the other side of the home. Now windows and doors are thrown open, and people flow in and out all summer long.

ENCOURAGED ALFRESCO BATHS

There's a shower inside the gate for rinsing sandy feet. But Ruard also installed two showers in the screened porch at the back of the house—one is a traditional showerhead, and the other is essentially a spout that fills a horse trough where the children take baths. "There are no neighbors, so we don't need privacy," he says.



WE LOVE THIS!
Vertical, not horizontal, planks cover the refrigerator, making it unobtrusive but not hidden.



what he did
KITCHEN

PLANKED THE ROOM Drab drywall was replaced with 6-inch wood panels painted the same olive-gray as the adjacent living room. The planks run over the ceiling, too, which Ruard dropped from 8 ½ feet (the height of the living room ceiling) to 7 feet. “The lower ceiling separates rooms without the addition of a wall,” he says. Even the refrigerator is hidden behind paneling, and the sink’s cabinetry floats off the floor like a console, so the space doesn’t read as a kitchen from the open living room.

CONNECTED IT TO THE WOODS Three small windows over the sink were replaced with a single oversize one without mullions. Ruard calls it “a portal to the outside.” Then, everything in the kitchen was pared down to keep the focus on the amazing view of palms and oaks. The window does double duty as a backsplash because it simply wipes clean, and the countertop seems to melt into the stainless steel sink.

CORRECTED THE TRAFFIC FLOW “Having just one doorway meant you would get stuck in the kitchen,” says

Ruard, who fixed the room’s circulation issues by adding a new, slightly disguised passageway in the back right corner of the kitchen. The wood scroll in front of the peninsula is a “way of creating a physical swoop between the kitchen and the living room,” says Ruard, who crafted the drape himself. “It also adds humor—it’s like a curtain pulled back to unveil the kitchen.”

TURNED DOWN THE LIGHTING Barely there sconces light the sink, and simple recessed lights illuminate the peninsula’s antique-walnut counters. “There is just enough light for food prep,” Ruard says. “This isn’t meant to be a place for the kids to sit and do their homework. It’s less about task lighting and more about creating a dark, cabin-like mood, even in a workspace.”

The enormous, rusty buoy (above, on the floor) is purely decorative, adding a pop of orange into Ruard’s moody, mountains-meet-sea style.

TRANSFORMED STORAGE INTO ART Ruard curates his pantry like an art installation. There are no upper cabinets; a long blond wood box mounted on the wall holds dry goods in glass jars. Baskets storing fruit and vegetables add texture. The family displays their plates and glasses in an open shelving nook between the kitchen and living room.

what he did
LIVING ROOM

KEPT IT DARK The entire living area is painted in the house's signature deep olive-gray—the same shade as the exterior. "It's dark on purpose, to be like a mountain cabin," says Ruard. "I even matched the rug to the wall color." He wanted to create a shadowy enveloping space where the sunlit windows, left bare, really pop from their sills and highlight the view.

INFUSED WOOD Wide-plank horizontal paneling replaced the dry-wall. "The walls help the house fit in the wooded landscape," says Ruard. A drinks table was made from a section of an old cedar post, and two nicely beat-up antique chairs add more richly grained interest. He even cut the legs off an old Indonesian dining table to create the coffee table. Ruard says, "Now when the room is crowded, you can walk right across it. And there's been many a party where people danced on that table!"

CREATED CONTRAST The antique wine table (behind the sofa) isn't used for its original purpose. Instead, the top tilts up to lend drama. "Its round shape feels like art," says Ruard. The floors are original Southern yellow pine, stained darker to bring out their "zebra stripes" for a hint of pattern in the sea of solids.



The weight and patina of the furnishings keep the rooms from feeling too modern.



what he did
DINING ROOM

BANISHED FUSS "I like a clean look," says Ruard. So he took down the column and lattice-work. He even covered the window seat cushion in the same shade as the walls and ceiling for cohesiveness. "This is a small space, so using a built-in, wrap-around bench helps it feel less cluttered," he says.

KEPT IT MINIMAL Ruard didn't want the interruption of a hanging fixture in the low-ceilinged room, "and the large table lamp makes it seem like more of a multiuse space," he says. He left all the windows bare to make them seem larger.



To get Ruard's favorite shade, try Kendall Charcoal (HC-166); benjaminmoore.com



BEFORE



what he did

MASTER BEDROOM AND BATH

MULTITASKED In the small house, the master bath also serves as the home's powder room. The sink sits atop an old drop-leaf table, making the room presentable for guests. An enormous wood-framed mirror slides aside to reveal shelves—where toiletries and towels are hidden. In the bedroom, the kitchen's original refrigerator hides between the closets behind the bed. "It's great for storing drinks, and there was nowhere else to put it. I stock it at the beginning of the summer," says Ruard.

LIGHTENED UP

The walls in the master bedroom and bath are painted white (White Dove by Benjamin Moore) for a complete departure from the living room. "I wanted to create a surprise," says Ruard. "As you come down the hall from the living room, the bedroom looks like the light at the end of the tunnel. It's a relief from all the dark."

GOT INVENTIVE

Ruard built the master bed's eye-popping barn-wood headboard himself, then floated it in the middle of the room. Behind it, curtains cover the closets, giving the effect of windows. Decorative fringe hides reading lights on the headboard. 🏠

