

A Sensual Indulgence

A neglected storage space is transformed into a room with a view.

WRITTEN BY JILLIAN BLUME | PHOTOGRAPHY BY STEVE VIERRA

Life in Cape Cod has a saltwater fragrance. It is painted with textures of sand and driftwood and accompanied by the rhythmic chant of the sea. In one of the houses perched on a hill above the ocean, a porch full of possibility was being squandered as a storage room. The owners commissioned Rita Pacheco, a designer and avid gardener, to turn storage into living space. When she arrived on the scene, she took in the waves, the sun-flooded gardens, and the rustic wood of the overlooked porch, and saw a room with a view where the family could bask in the beauty of the landscape.

“My vision was an English gardening room and a transition place between the outdoors and the interior of the house,” Pacheco explains. “The porch was unattached from the main house, yet still connected by a covered walkway. If you had been working in the garden and you weren’t quite ready to go inside, the porch would be a shady place to sit and catch your breath. You could put your gardening tools down, or maybe make a flower arrangement, or sit down with a book and relax.”

The dark pine of the room’s structure had a rugged quality, providing the foundation for the emerging design. She began by redoing the floor. Working with freelance artist James Tobey, they repainted it to resemble birch by superimposing a faux birch-tree finish over the original wood. She then divided the room into four sections: an entrance space, a living space,

a dining area, and a working garden space with a potting bench.

Pacheco placed a rustic twig bench made of birch and cypress branches in the entrance space where a weary gardener or a sunburned child could pause and listen to the gentle music of the wind chimes. “It was not a lie-down bench, but it was very comfortable, and it created a garden feeling,” she says. The twig bench was painted green and then distressed to look like a family heirloom.

Large clay pots filled with smaller pots and topped with round glass became tables. While the lines of the bench are long and low, the ivy topiaries dotted with tiny clay pots and tall plants draw the eye up to an old birdcage, which both add the impression of a conservatory. She placed a bird nest on the windowsill and a book on the bench, as if someone had just left the room.

The working area contained an unusual potting bench. “I had James Tobey make it from different pieces of reclaimed wood because I wanted it to have some history,” she explains. The back piece was made from an old headboard, and the shelves display the patina of mossy clay pots. The green British Wellies, the straw hat on the wall, the basket of dried flowers, and the gardening tools forged in a classic Cornwall style all add to the atmosphere.

Pacheco mounted rough wooden pegs above the windows and strung curtains of flowers to dry. The glass cloche on the

bench could be used to start seedlings, and an antique fan with a green glass base offers relief. “The fan was very unusual,” she says. “You don’t often see a fan made of glass—and it still worked! It looked special, like it had once been someone’s treasure.”

She created a living area, with its own perfume of citrus and rose petal potpourri. The space is enclosed by a twig end table and a magazine rack. A dark arch of branches hangs above the windowed doors like a rustic swag, and white silk hydrangeas add splashes of light. Comfortable, bowl-shaped chairs cluster around a twig “coffee” table, with a fisherman’s net in place of an area rug.

“The house overlooked the ocean, and the porch overlooked the gardens,” Pacheco explains. “I wanted to stay true to the garden



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theme, but since the house was on the Cape, I couldn’t ignore the sea environment. I decided to bring in just one element, but I didn’t want a bowl of seashells. So I used the fisherman’s net.” The overall effect is an intimate place for conversation or lying around browsing through whatever is housed in the twig magazine rack.

The room is completed by the bright white of the dining space. “My vision was an inviting place for a meal, a cocktail in the afternoon, or a lighthearted tea party,” Pacheco says. “Or if you had planned a luncheon in the garden and it was inclement weather, you could bring the party inside.”

Adirondack-style chairs and an antique table painted decorator white are the focal point. The chairs are higher and straighter than true Adirondack chairs, allowing the family and guests to sit comfortably at the table. Pacheco turned the saucers of clay pots into charger plates and lined them with glass dinner plates. The handles of the silverware look like twigs, and a papier-mâché pear wrapped with leaves sits on

the top of a three-tier iron basket. The vertical shape of the iron basket is balanced by a whimsical white ceramic wedding cake topped with ceramic tulips. Pacheco hung a black wrought-iron chandelier over the center of the table and used inverted clay pots instead of candles. A wild arrangement of branches, draped above the windows, defines the borders of the space.

The overall intent was to create a comfortable retreat for the family. “I’d go back and add something here and there like a bird’s nest or the starfish underneath the fisherman’s net—objects that the family might gather on the beach or in the garden,” Pacheco says. “The idea was to indulge in all the senses in this room. You could smell the scent of the garden; you could hear the tinkling of the chimes and see the beauty of the garden around you.” When it was finished, the room achieved and surpassed the designer’s vision, being transformed into a private oasis welcoming the family at the end of a busy day. ■