



# A Beauty *on the* Bay

Old and new mingle effortlessly  
in a Harbor Springs cottage

*By George Bulanda*

Photos by Justin Maconochie



The word “cottage” likely evokes images of small, often ramshackle structures with hodgepodge furniture and nautical-themed clichés.

But there was a time during the Gilded Age when the mansions of early Grosse Pointe and Newport, R.I., were referred to as summer cottages. They were spacious vacation homes where financially comfortable families could spend languid, carefree days sailing, swimming, and sunning.

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“Cottage” was not used so much to describe the size of a home as a state of mind. A cottage was simply a luxurious escape from the frenetic pace of the city, a place to “get away from it all.”

It was in that spirit that Kevin Serba and his assistant, John Rattray, of Birmingham-based *Serba Interiors*, approached designing a 6,800-square-foot cottage overlooking Little Traverse

Relaxing on the extensive porch affords an ideal view for watching the sunlight sparkle on Little Traverse Bay (off Lake Michigan), as well as spectacular sunsets.

Wicker furniture seat cushion fabric:  
PINDLER, SUITE 69



Bay in Harbor Springs, a winsome town in northwest Michigan where many metro Detroiters and Chicagoans own vacation retreats.

The home, designed for a family of four from Bloomfield Hills, is spacious without being sprawling, elegant without feeling stiff. Serba had a vision, but it took some work to unfold.

After looking at plans for the house, the homeowners were dismayed by the daunting scale and turned to Serba for advice. "They wanted comfortable, cozy spaces that were not too large, but the original plans called for huge rooms with 12-foot ceilings. The house was something like 11,000 square feet and filled the entire lot," Serba says. "The kitchen also had two islands; it wasn't cozy and the house had lost its charm."

It was precisely what the clients didn't want, so Serba worked with a builder to devise a plan with a more intimate feel.

*As a result, the home has a timeless yet fresh quality.*

Originally built in the early 1900s, the structure was partially razed, though most of it is new. It was once home to a bishop, and an architectural detail left no doubt about its owner's vocation.

"A room that was torn off that is now the master bedroom had an altar at the end of the room," Serba explains.

"We worked with an amazing builder," he adds. "He took what I had sketched and then went further with space planning and added a second story, making it look as though the house had been there for a very long time."

As a result, the home has a timeless yet fresh quality. The interior feels

An antique Scandinavian tall-case clock and antique bench lend whimsy to the foyer.

Toss pillow fabric: LEE JOFA, SUITE 105 | Toss pillow welt fabric: KRAVET, SUITE 105  
Seat cushion fabric: LEE JOFA, SUITE 105

OPPOSITE PAGE | The dining room leads into the sun porch through French doors. The blue-hued room has gorgeous views of the water.

Wicker furniture cushion fabric: PINDLER, SUITE 69 | Valance fabric – Cowtan & Tout: TENNANT & ASSOCIATES, SUITE 61 | Valance tape trim and cord – Samuel & Sons: TENNANT & ASSOCIATES, SUITE 61 | Dining chair seat cushion fabric: DURALEE, SUITE 38  
Dining chair cushion cord and tie fabric – Glant: TENNANT & ASSOCIATES, SUITE 61



The dining room reveals the wife's love of animals, from the roosters on the chair cushions to the iron pigs embellishing the overhead light and the birds on the wall sconces.

Ceiling light fixture & wall sconce – Ironware International: ROZMALLIN, SUITE 60  
 Chair seat cushion fabric: DURALEE, SUITE 38  
 Chair cushion cord and tie fabric – Glant: TENNANT & ASSOCIATES, SUITE 61



contemporary but retains a vintage vibe. For instance, oak hand-hewn floorboards have a weathered look but are actually new, as is the tongue-and-groove paneling. Antiques freely mingle with new furnishings.

Similarly, the exterior also looks like a mixture of old and new, with a veranda-style porch, stucco, cedar shingles, and field stone. It works, naturally and seamlessly.

The mother of the family informed Serba that she loves color, and the designer happily took the bait – without going overboard.

*The palette is mostly cherry red and cerulean blue, with occasional bursts of yellow.*



“In Harbor Springs, you can really have fun with color, but I had all the millwork painted white,” he says. Serba chose Benjamin Moore’s Cloud White, his go-to white hue, which was also used on the ceilings and paneled walls. “We wanted everything to be about the lake view and let the colors pop, so the background couldn’t be too strong. The white is a good background for the colorful patterns and antiques.”

TOP | The fresh, clean quality of the kitchen feels both contemporary and classic.

Ceiling light fixture & wall sconce – Ironware International: ROZMALLIN, SUITE 60  
 Backsplash tile – Seneca Hand Mold: VIRGINIA TILE, SUITE 100

BOTTOM | The stone fireplace adds a cozy touch to the living room.

Sofa fabric – Alaxi: DESIGNER FURNITURE SERVICES + FABRICS, SUITE 22  
 Chair fabric – S. Harris: DESIGNER FURNITURE SERVICES + FABRICS, SUITE 22



The master bedroom is bright and airy, with evidence of the wife's affection for animals, as well as her favorite color, blue.

Duvet cover top, Euro-sham fabric and fringe: SCHUMACHER, SUITE 110  
 Duvet cover underside and welt: KRAVET, SUITE 105  
 Standard sham cord – Samuel & Sons: TENNANT & ASSOCIATES, SUITE 61  
 Standard sham and drapery fabric: DURALEE, SUITE 38



The palette is mostly cherry red and cerulean blue, with occasional bursts of yellow. The dining chairs are painted red, while a pair of painted blue chairs attend the kitchen island. A lovely antique Scandinavian tall clock is red with a blue floral motif. The girl's bedroom is a soothing blue (Benjamin Moore's Swiss Blue), while the master bath is adorned in cobalt-blue Seneca tiles. The first-floor sun porch, with gorgeous views of the bay, was designed using a scheme of blue and white.

"She really loves blue, really intense blue," Rattray says about the lady of the house.

The master bath is designed in a classic blue-and-white motif. Birds adorn the border of the mirror.

Wall sconce – Ironware International: ROZMALLIN, SUITE 60  
 Backsplash tile – Seneca Hand Mold: VIRGINIA TILE, SUITE 100

"That comes into play with the Seneca tile in the master bath; the whole shower is made of it."

Animals are another love of hers, a fact that's inescapable yet subtle in the interior design. "We tried to keep it limited to the pillows and accessories," Serba says.

Roosters adorn the red chair pads in the dining room, while pigs enliven an iron light fixture over the table. Birds add a cheerful note to the pillows and bedding in the master bedroom, a motif that's echoed in the border around the



mirror in the master bath. The curtains and pillows in the girl's bedroom are punctuated by elephants, giraffes, and other creatures. "A northern Michigan safari," Serba jokes.

The home is comfortable, bright, and cozy, a fact not lost on the family. They spend a good deal of the summer there, as well as occasional weekends throughout the year.

As for Serba, he was on familiar ground working in Harbor Springs.

"My parents ran an inn for 20-odd years in Harbor Springs," he says. Nearby Petoskey also carries a bloodline connection. "My great-grandfather had a tailor shop in Petoskey, and family remained there. When we were kids, we'd visit my aunts there."

Serba and Rattray – and, more important, their clients – are pleased with the results of the Harbor Springs

home, but Serba's work isn't quite finished.

"The mother is an artist and so is her daughter, so right now I'm in the process of doing an apartment over the garage and an art studio off the garage, which she and her daughter will use to paint."

One has little doubt that the completed project will be a work of art in itself.

TOP | The cerulean waters outdoors complement the attractive blue and white décor of the girl's bedroom.

Drapery and chaise fabric:  
SCHUMACHER, SUITE 110  
Coverlet and area rug binding fabric:  
KRAVET, SUITE 105

RIGHT | A jolt of red brings this bathroom to life.

Wallcovering – Peter Fasano: ROZMALLIN, SUITE 60  
Shower curtain field and band fabric – Cowtan & Tout: TENNANT & ASSOCIATES, SUITE 61

