Good Neighbors

A new Avalon beach house **gently and gracefully** fits in with its community

Left: The Avalon beach house is evocative of historic Jersey shore coastal architecture, architect Mark Asher says. The barn-shaped roof on the right "is a coastal aesthetic we like to mine," he says. "It also gives this large home a lower waistline, bringing it closer to the ground." **Above:** Wide porches grace the beachfront side of the house. Two are covered but Asher left the middle section uncovered so light streams into the house. Reconfiguring two adjacent lots enabled him to design the house lengthwise facing the ocean.

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Visitors are greeted by a welcoming foyer and grand staircase leading up to the home's public spaces on the second floor. A Palladian window admits streams of natural light. The staircase itself features box treads that extend beyond the staircase, creating a floating effect.
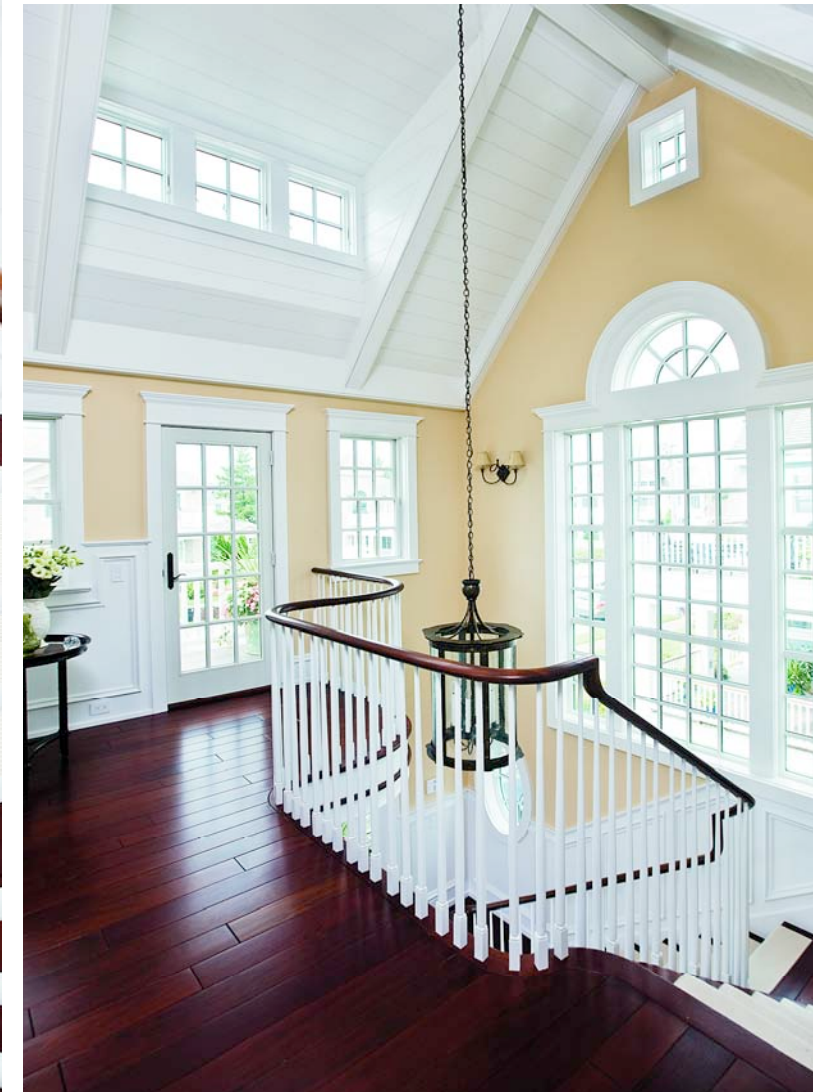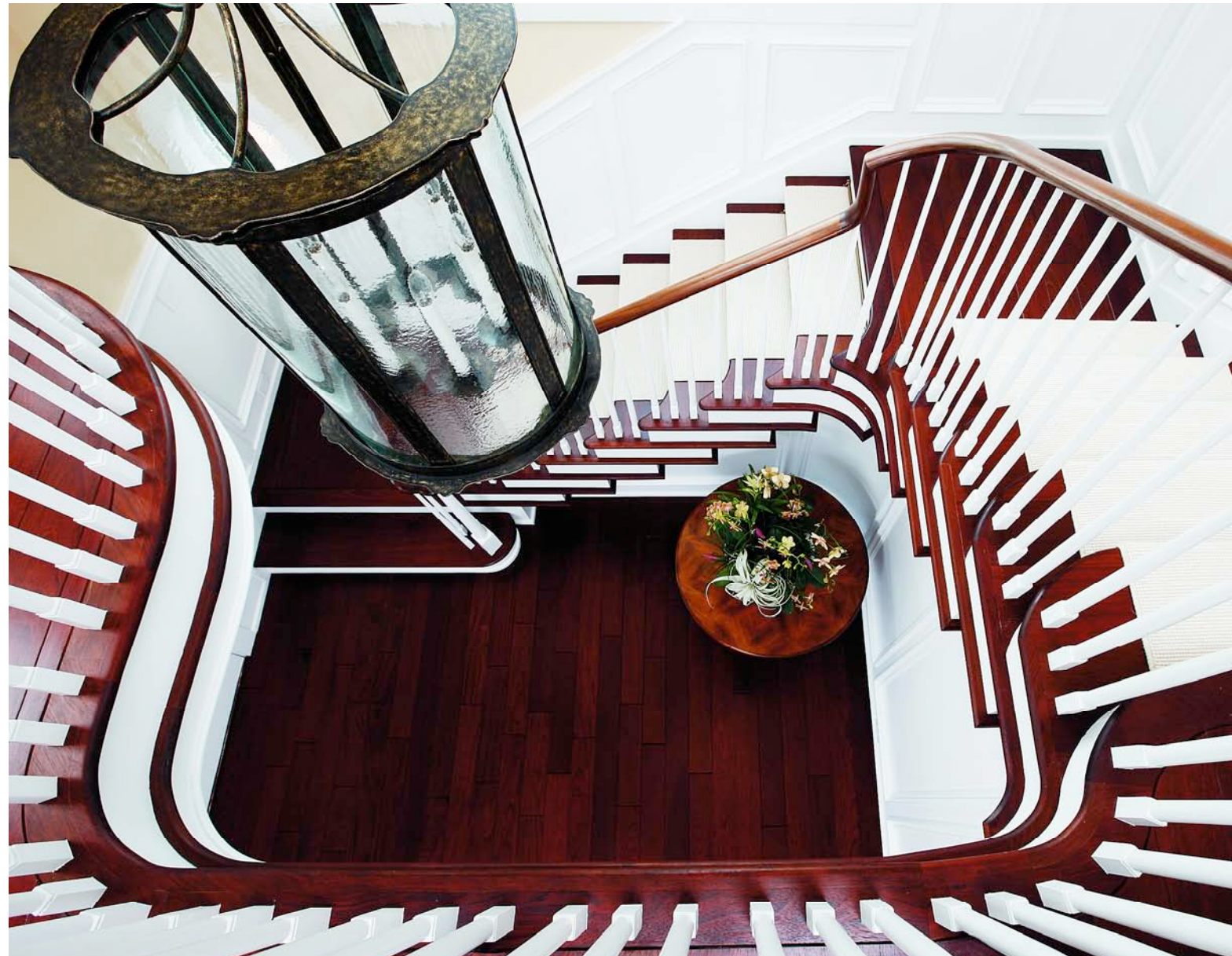
The beach house's staircase leads to a spacious landing that's more like a foyer on the second floor.

Architect Mark Asher believes that
buildings should be good neighbors,

designed to fit in with their surrounding structures and aimed at having a gentle impact on their streetscape and community. When it comes to the Jersey shore, this means a beach house that has a quiet grace, not a showy footprint; a connection to the historic tradition of coastal architecture; and a classic construction and look that will age well.

It's precisely these characteristics that drew a Burlington County couple to Asher when they decided to upgrade from their former summer home — located a few blocks from the ocean in Avalon — and build a new beachfront house on two adjacent oceanfront lots.

"We studied homes at the shore and went to several house tours," the wife says. "Mark's houses kept standing out. They have a quiet look, not flashy; they don't scream out at you. His designs are classic seashore, and we fell in love with them."

Asher wasn't an unknown quantity to the couple. The architect, whose firm is Asher Associates Architects with offices in Stone Harbor and Jenkintown, Pennsylvania, had built shore homes for their two daughters: one who lives next door with her husband and two sons, ages 2 and 4; the other who lives with her husband a few blocks away.

"It's the best arrangement you could ever have; it couldn't have worked out better," the wife says. "Everyone is close by, but we all have our privacy. It just happened this way."

The importance of family, in fact, is something Asher is very much aware of and addresses through his work. "So many of these coastal towns are family destinations," he says. "It's where the parents, kids, and grandparents spend their time and where memories are made. The houses are a backdrop to all of that." The architect also makes a priority of getting to know his clients and their families and developing relationships beyond the project at hand.

Aging Well
The Avalon project, Asher explains, "is evocative of homes that were here at the turn of the last century up and down the New Jersey coast. It's a house that we hope will age well and fade a bit into the background."

To that end, Asher uses natural materials that weather well and give the house "solidity and permanence." Among the materials: cedar siding, a cedar roof, and a base and chimney composed of used, hand-formed brick.

"The house has its feet in a couple of different worlds," Asher says. "It has a quiet elegance and it can dress up or down. It's comfortable for adults to be there by themselves or with the grandkids. And because of the traditional bent to the design, the older it gets the better it's going to be. If it gets a dent or a scratch, that only adds to the patina."

The house is built lengthwise across two lots fronting the

Opposite: The living room strikes notes of both elegance and informality. The light furnishings — beige-and-white-striped polished cotton sofas, a white-on-white cotton twill chair, and beige wool sisal rug — contrast with the dark stained cherry floors that run throughout the home. **Left top:** Windows overlooking the beach and ocean surround the breakfast area at the far end of the kitchen. A glass-paned door leads to one of the home's second-floor balconies. **Left bottom:** The kitchen is bright and airy with white cabinets and a taupe island with white granite countertops that resemble marble. Dark cherry floors and iron pendants above the island add contrast.

ocean. This was possible because the couple first bought one seaside lot and then the adjacent one when it came up for sale. Both lots were reconfigured to enable the length-wise design.

To take advantage of the oceanfront location, Asher designed the home with an upside down scheme. The foyer, family room, and three guest bedrooms are on the first floor; the public spaces — the living room, dining room, and kitchen — as well as another guest suite occupy the second floor. The master bedroom, its sitting room, and master bath are on the third floor.

Asher says the style is in "a classic coastal vernacular,"

but it has an unexpected feature for a beach house: a sensational foyer and staircase, a request from the homeowners. "The clients wanted a beautiful stairway pulling you up to the second floor," he says. "You enter the house on the first floor, but the second floor is the destination."

"You don't see beautiful entries a lot at the shore; you walk in and the steps are right there," the wife says. "The most unique thing about this house is the foyer and the graceful, custom staircase. It's very special."

A Refreshing Approach

Also not all that typical for a shore home was the

clients' approach to the interior design, says Christina Smith of the Summer House Design Group in Stone Harbor. Smith says the owners weren't overly concerned with having the kind of beach-resistant fabrics and other wear-like-iron features seen more often than not in beach houses. Nor did they overdo the nautical themes associated with shore homes.

The designer calls the home's casual but elegant interiors and its understated, neutral color palette of ivory, beige, and hints of pale blue "refreshing." The client didn't want a "cluttered or overaccessorized" look. And while the grandchildren are close — very close in the

house next door — they can visit but don't necessarily stay over, making kid-friendly fabrics and furnishings not much of an issue.

"The client can let the interior reflect who she is and not just the practical side of things," Smith says. "The fabrics are light in color, mostly cottons and linens; there wasn't the need to do acrylic-based fabrics. There also are wood floors stained dark cherry, a large mahogany dining room table, and lighting and hardware with oil-rubbed bronze and brass finishes that reflect more of a New England style.

"People at the shore don't need to live with just the

Opposite: A mahogany pedestal table dominates the dining room and is complemented by leather-wrapped cane chairs with a tortoiseshell stain. The chair seats feature a pale bluish-gray coral pattern on an ivory background. The chandelier has an aged gold finish, teardrop crystals, and delicate light blue shades. A light blue coffered ceiling with pale gray-blue insets strikes a note of formality. In place of a typical flower centerpiece, designer Christina Smith and her client fashioned a tableau of vases and seashells. **Left top:** A cream-and-pale green striped chest catches the eye at one end of the home's first-floor hallway. **Left bottom:** On the family room walls, bright white trim surrounds insets of deep beige, both of which coordinate with the furnishings: a canvas twill sofa and chaise of deep beige, a beige leather ottoman, and seagrass chairs with beige and white chenille upholstery in a lattice pattern. The walnut built-ins house the television. Beside the television is a bar with a sink.

Above left: Panoramic views of the ocean star in the third-floor master bedroom. The décor is muted and tranquil with white blinds, beige area rug, and white-and-beige coverlet with crewelwork in a chinoiserie pattern. **Above right:** A round window adds architectural interest in the master bedroom sitting area. **Far left:** A twin-bedded guest room, ideal for the grandchildren's sleepovers, features two of the home's few nods to a nautical theme: pale-yellow-and-blue-striped bedding and crab-and-starfish throw pillows. **Left:** The designer introduced a pop — albeit a subtle version — in the master bathroom with a bold aqua-and-cream-striped wall. It combines with linen white, bow-front cabinetry and a honed white marble floor.

shore," Smith says. Above all, the designer and client agree that, as Smith says, "The interior will always take a back seat to the ocean. You can't compete with that."

"I didn't want to fight with the outside," the wife says. "I have colors in the house that are the colors I see when I'm looking out. And I carried that through even to the exterior of the house. There must be 30 shades of beige, maybe more, and I chose one with a slight hint of green that looks like the grasses and the dunes outside." DNJ

SOURCES **Throughout:** architecture, Asher Associates Architects in Stone Harbor and Jenkintown, Pennsylvania; interior design, The Summer House Design Group in Stone Harbor, builder, Joseph G. Popper & Son Building in Wildwood Crest. **Staircase:** Distinctive Woodworking by Rob Hoffman Jr. in Edgewater Park. **Living Room:** sofas, chair, and table behind sofa, Century Furniture in Hickory, North Carolina; coffee table, Currey & Co. in Atlanta, Georgia; rug, Karastan from Kelley Karpets in Pitman; writing desk, David Francis Furniture in Vero Beach, Florida; cane chair, Ficks Reed in Cincinnati; shell lamp, The Natural Light in Panama City, Florida. **Breakfast Room:** table and chairs, Lexington Home Brands in

Thomasville, North Carolina; light fixture, Visual Comfort in Houston. **Kitchen:** cabinetry, Quality Custom Cabinets through Hargest Custom Cabinetry in Cape May Courthouse; countertops, StoneCrafters in Egg Harbor Township; light fixture, Visual Comfort. **Back Hallway:** chest, Bassett Furniture in Bassett, Virginia. **Family Room:** sofa, Pearson Furniture in High Point, North Carolina; chairs, Century Furniture; ottoman, Lexington Home Brands; wall unit, Quality Custom Cabinets through Hargest Custom Cabinetry; rug, Karastan from Kelley Karpets; blinds, Hunter Douglas in Upper Saddle River. **Master Bedroom Sitting Area:** desk and desk chair, Stanley Furniture in Stanleytown, Virginia; floor lamp, Oriental Accent in Farmers Branch, Texas; easy chair and end table, owners. **Master Bedroom:** bed, Lexington Home Brands; bench, Ficks Reed; rug, Karastan from Kelley Karpets; linens, Horchow/Neiman Marcus. **Master Bathroom:** vanity, Quality Custom Cabinets through Hargest Custom Cabinetry; countertop, StoneCrafters; flooring, Avalon Carpet Tile & Flooring in Rio Grande; wall treatment, Thibaut in Newark; sconces, Visual Comfort. **Guest Bedroom:** beds, Stanley Furniture; linens, Thibaut; nightstand, Lexington Home Brands.