

Casual Elegance

In this London-meets-Hamptons-meets-Southern California dream home, less is more, while a sand-and-surf color palette proves itself a classic.

writer and producer Jenny Bradley photographer Michael Garland

The carefully edited furnishings and subtle patterns in Jill and John Kohler's living room give the formal space a casual appeal. Grand architectural details throughout the house called for understated furniture, designer Mark Williams says.



With the beach just blocks away,

a quiet, tree-lined street that feels far removed from the hustle and bustle of nearby Los Angeles, and an idyllic clapboard home designed with young children in mind to grow into, it's easy to understand why John and Jill Kohler put a nomadic life behind them to put down roots in California.

"Manhattan Beach is a lovely community," Jill says. "It has a very small, familiar feel. We walk to town, walk to the beach. That is unheard of in L.A., and it's a big draw for us, having lived in big cities before."

After finding a lot on a street coveted for its towering eucalyptus trees, John and Jill enlisted architect Douglas Leach, builder Matt Morris, and designer Mark Williams to create their dream home. The couple's design direction for the interiors was simple yet stringent: Less is more. "I wanted a home that was white and light," Jill says. "I asked Mark for a very muted palette—sand and sea—but minus the predictable beachy elements. No seashells, no cabana stripes, no nautical knickknacks. Just clean lines, relaxing and serene, comfortable yet striking."



On the main level, white woodwork and the muted palette prevail. Layer upon layer of sun-drenched rooms spill into one another, aided by expansive doorways and the continuity of wide-plank hickory/pecan floors, hints of subtle sea-glass blue, and crisp linen upholstery. Mantels and shelves are left uncluttered so beloved items from the family's travels get the attention they deserve. The furniture is architectural and mostly custom-designed by Williams. A quiet elegance prevails, thanks to simple patterns and upholstery choices.

"Having moved here from London, I wanted the house to feel classic," Jill says, "but I also wanted the furnishings to feel less formal. More like a Hamptons-style beach house. Classic and sophisticated."

No space heralds the success of the Kohlers' and Williams' simple-yet-elegant approach more than the most lived-in room in the house: the family room. A custom-designed mahogany coffee table anchors a pair of linen-upholstered armchairs and a plush sofa. The intricate angles of the coffee table are echoed by the stylized backs of the breakfast room's chairs, and the armchairs' nailhead trim is repeated on upholstered benches that pull up to the blue kitchen island. "I tried to design furniture with clean lines and warm, traditional woods," Williams says. "Each piece had to be simple in design, yet have a point of view."

Upstairs, in the master suite, the sand-and-sea-inspired color scheme balances the starched London formality with a bit of Bridgehampton beach nonchalance. A turned-wood four-poster and English painted camphorwood chest seem restrained under the lofty beaded-board ceiling.

The Kohlers love that the classic, light-filled rooms put everyone at ease and that the house can't be classified as one particular style—its sophisticated mix makes it a true reflection of their well-traveled family.

This photo: Williams swathed every room on the first floor in the same creamy shade of white. The palette allows the eye to travel freely through the dining room—where a square table paired with a bench expresses a conversation-friendly vibe—to the inviting backyard beyond. **Opposite:** The white clapboard exterior is part California, part Cape Cod.



The allure of the comfortable family room is in the details—nailhead trim, geometric furniture-frame designs, and muted patterns. The adjacent patio seating area and fireplace offer an ideal spot for outdoor entertaining and family campfires.







“We live in the kitchen and family room. I love

that I can stand at my kitchen counter and be a part of the action.”

—HOMEOWNER JILL KOHLER



Opposite: Dark woods lend a masculine attitude to the master bedroom, but their visual weight is balanced by soft colors, delicate lines, and soaring proportions.

Left: The elegant master bath is a study in contrast—dark vanities anchor the otherwise bright-white space. **Below:** The large kitchen and breakfast room connect to the family room and form the Kohler family command center. The extra-wide upholstered benches are a family favorite.

“They’re unpredictable,” Jill says, “and totally practical. They are easy to keep straight and always look nice and neat rather than cluttered, like bar stools.”

