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Breezy chic is the byword
for this Pine Island cottage



One truth you will hear again and again if you are one of designer Karen Benson's clients: The only objects that belong in your home are the ones that you love. Everything else is keeping your home from being the sanctuary it's meant to be.

For a local couple's Pine Island getaway cottage, Benson helped create a space that showcased loved objects but that wasn't so overstuffed it became fussy or cluttered.

With artificially weathered cabinets and warm white and pretty but easy to maintain furniture coverings, it feels lived-in but not worn, light and airy but still cozy. In the home, vintage pieces are mixed with new ones, some of which have been artificially weathered or crafted out of salvaged wood so that they blend in with heirloom pieces. There's an innate appeal to those, Benson says, "a huge comfort level. You aren't intimidated — or afraid to spill something." A nautical theme runs lightly throughout but doesn't overwhelm the space. As a designer, Benson understands the joy that

her clients get from the things they love, a rare found shell or a favorite piece by a local artist. But she also has a gift of seeing when too many good things can drown out those that are really special. "Clutter encumbers you and weighs you down," she says. "You want that 'ah' feeling when you walk into a room." In addition to helping them pare down a collection, she teaches clients ways to make a collection of objects look more deliberate and more visually striking, grouping them in an organized way on a wall, shelf or within a framed area of a display table. >



The owners of a Pine Island cottage enlisted designer Karen Benson to create a space that feels well-loved but not fussy; whitewashed cabinets holding favorite objects, top, pretty but carefree room treatments, top right, and cozy nooks hiding extra storage space.

PHOTO: GREGORY H. HARRIS