

sisteracts



Interior and fashion designer Ramey Caulkins puts her own colorful twist on a house in Maine once decorated by her style idol, the late Sister Parish



The needlepoint rug, with splashes of pink and a hint of blue against a lime green background, inspired Ramey's palette in the dining room. **SHOP THE LOOK:** For a similar wall color, try Green Bounty (16-22) by Pratt & Lambert. The chandelier is from Ballard Designs, and the chair cushion fabric is Burma in Green by Sister Parish Design.



EXTERIOR

This three-story retreat, built in 1902, overlooks Maine's Penobscot Bay. Every June, Ramey, Max, and their children, Hayden, 4, and Eliza, 2, leave home in Denver to spend summer here.

KITCHEN

Vintage charm meets modern efficiency: The kitchen gets frequent use because there are no restaurants on the island.

BREAKFAST ROOM

With a view of the harbor on clear days, the breakfast table folds out to form an octagon large enough to seat eight, perfect for little Eliza's blueberry pancake parties.

Whoever said location is paramount in the pursuit of real estate overlooked the emotional importance of finding the right house. Interior designer Ramey Caulkins' husband, Max, persuaded her to spend summers at his family's favorite vacation spot—an island in Maine's Penobscot Bay—but the native of Buffalo, New York, and 12-year resident of Denver, Colorado, fancied herself more urban girl than isolated island dweller. That is, until she found her soulmate of houses, a dilapidated century-old Maine cottage with a harbor view and a decorated past.

Despite its run-down condition, the house had more than enough curb appeal—with its sloped roofs perforated by a smattering of dormer windows, white clapboard siding paired with black shutters, and an original Dutch door painted a cheerful red—to lure in a potential buyer. But the house's provenance, that it had once been decorated by East Coast style icon Sister Parish, is what sealed the deal for Ramey. A devoted admirer of Parish's fearless approach to color and pattern, she seized the opportunity to follow in the footsteps of her favorite decorator and snatched up the house.

Ramey and Max wanted to use the house the following summer, so renovations began quickly. Although it needed a lot of updating—electrical wiring, plumbing, plaster and drywall repairs, and more insulation—Ramey worked hard to preserve the historic spirit of the house, particularly when it came to the addition that seamlessly follows the existing roofline.



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—SISTER PARISH, *SISTER* (ST. MARTIN'S PRESS, 2000)



LIVING ROOM Peachy-coral accents in the apple-green space were inspired by Sister Parish wallpaper that once hung above the wainscoting. **SHOP THE LOOK:** Moroccan Poufs, John Derian Company. For a similar Chippendale chair, try Jonathan Adler.

"Our contractor helped us maintain the purity of the home's original character," she says.

Once the structure was refreshed, Ramey focused on decorating. Sister Parish's touch was most visible in the living room, where she had added tall wainscoting capped by coral-print wallpaper. Water damage had destroyed much of the wallcoverings, so Ramey rebuilt the paneling and accessorized the room with the same bold coral color. "Your home directly reflects who you are. It really tells your story," she says. "This one already had a story; we just wanted to add ours to it."

Overall, the house reflects Ramey's "loose and livable" style. "I love anything with a patina," she says. She doesn't fret about scratches and dents that show up on the stainless steel kitchen countertops, and she preserved the house's imperfect original floors. "If they were a little too worn, we painted them or threw an area rug on top," she says. The kitchen, breakfast room, and guest room floors got paint in pale shades. "I'm drawn to soft aqua blue and light greens, especially in a house near the sea," Ramey says. Her fabric choices, mostly from Sister Parish Design, reflect that preference.

Now that the house is finished, the family spends most days on the water, with a picnic packed and an adventure planned. "We'll beach the boat somewhere, have lunch, and explore," Ramey says. They all can't wait to return to the island each June, she adds. "We typically stay through Labor Day, and every year we seem to arrive earlier and earlier. It's like summer camp for families." >

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get ramey's look

Take the guesswork out of pairing patterns with these tips from a designer who has mastered mixing-and-matching



VARY THE SCALE

"Combining fabrics that have similar tones but different size patterns adds energy and keeps the look from feeling too matchy-matchy," says Ramey. Another trick: Upholster the two sides of a pillow with two prints for versatility.



Left to right: Tucker in Blue, Palmetto in Blue, and Eliza in Blue/Yellow, Sister Parish Design



MAKE A BIG IMPACT

"Nothing lends coziness to the space beneath the eaves like wallpaper with a large repeat," says Ramey. "I love how it highlights the architecture." A small space requires fewer rolls—easier on the wallet.



Kinnicut wallpaper in Brown, Sister Parish Design



"LIKE SISTER PARISH, I LOVE LAYERING PATTERNS IN ONE COLOR SCHEME. THE MORE THE MERRIER!" —RAMEY CAULKINS

COASTAL STYLE ICON SISTER PARISH

Pinks, greens, and blues in stripes, splatter patterns, and dots are synonymous with classic East Coast beach style thanks in large part to famed decorator Sister Parish (1910–1994). Born Dorothy May Kinnicut (Sister was a nickname; she was the only daughter among four children), Parish was heavily influenced by English country style, but her spirited use of color lent a modern edge to traditional chintzes, quilts, and brocades. As a White House decorator during the Kennedy administration, Parish was one of the first in her profession to become a household name.

Inspired fabrics and wallpapers are available through Sister Parish Design, founded by her granddaughter Susan Bartlett Crater and her former colleague Libby Cameron; sisterparishdesign.com for purchase information.



WALLPAPER, FABRICS & BOOKS: TED TUCKER

PILE IT ON WITH ONE COLOR

"Sticking with just one color allows you to use more patterns in a single space," says Ramey. "I do that trick when I fall in love with a color and want it a million different ways."



Left to right: Chou Chou, Sister Stripes, Dolly, and Burmese (on headboard and bed skirt), all in Green, Sister Parish Design