



This page: A surfboard hanging in the Florida room is a nod to the home's "beach farm" motif. Opposite: The home utilizes many natural elements—including wood flooring and wainscot (both of which came from a movie set on which Starr Sanford once worked).



Bohemian RHAPSODY

ARCHITECT AND DESIGNER JULIA STARR SANFORD CREATES
A TRANQUIL, BOHO RETREAT IN OLD TOWN FERNANDINA.

WORDS BY VIRGINIA CHAMLEE // IMAGES BY WALLY SEARS



Julia Starr Sanford was living on a sailboat with her son and his father when she first stumbled upon what she now calls "the beach farm" twelve years ago.

"We were traveling around the Eastern seaboard, looking for deep water, and we saw the house," she says. "It was old, like so many of the homes in the area, but it was very solid, with no major damage."

Damage or not, renovating the 19th-century house required quite a bit of work. Fortunately, Starr Sanford is a pro when it comes to renovations—literally. As principal of Starr Sanford Design Associates, a residential design and

development firm based in Amelia Island, she has presided over numerous historical renovations, museum and commercial projects and has even designed feature film and television sets (including those for *My Cousin Vinny* and the 1996 Centennial Olympics broadcast). Still, bringing a 150-year-old home into current standards of living came with its fair share of challenges. "The house was built in the 1860s," says Starr Sanford. "It was a captain's house. It was built onsite. The story goes that they shipped the logs right to the site. Our main goal was to bring the house up to 21st-century standards."

The house is located in "Old Town"

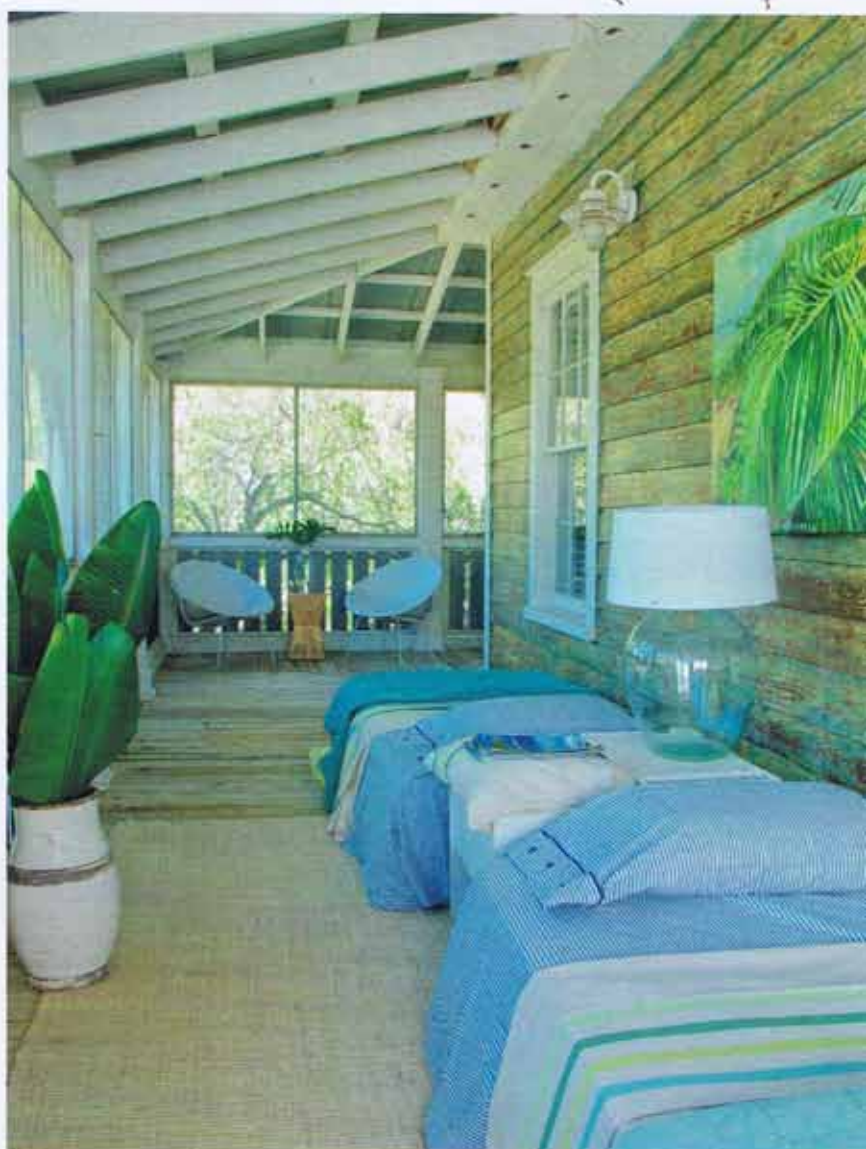
Fernandina, a historic neighborhood roughly bound by North 14th Street, the Bosque Bello Cemetery and Tiger Point Marina. Old Town was the last Spanish city to be platted in the Western Hemisphere (in 1811) and, in 1990, was added to the U.S. National Register of Historic Places.

Modernizing the structure required reconfiguring almost everything. "When I bought it, the house didn't have indoor plumbing or an HVAC system and the kitchen was detached."

"Each porch is really its own room," she says, adding that the distinctively Southern wraparound porches double the home's living space.



This page: A two-story screened porch was added to provide shade to the west, allow for open windows and provide cross ventilation. Opposite: A sleeping porch was incorporated into the north-facing second-floor porch, for open air sleeping and views of nearby Egan's Creek. An outdoor dining area on the first-floor porch provides the perfect place for al fresco meals eight months of the year.



The sunroom is a remnant of the original wrap-around porch, enclosed in the early 20th century. Before the renovation, it was finished with sheet rock and linoleum floors. Now, it's a bright studio space—with the original beadboard walls in place of the sheet rock (they've since been painted white, making the sun room the brightest part of the residence).

The original beach farmhouse consisted of only four rooms (two upstairs, two downstairs), with a foyer running along the perimeter of the house. The two downstairs rooms were remodeled into a living/kitchen combination, and the home now includes three bedrooms, plus a sleeping porch and loft (which can both be used for bedrooms, in the event that guests visit).

The grounds of the property feature native plants, like a pecan tree that provides a shady canopy during the hot summer months, and an garden supplying fresh herbs, squash, eggplant and tomatoes.

Despite the amount of work needed to restore the structure, many of the home's original fixtures remain. Almost all of the original, hand-blown windowpanes, for example, are still intact and the heart pine floors (now sanded and re-finished) are also original to the home. The back-to-back fireplaces are from a bygone era, too—though they've since been cleaned, repaired and made functional. Sitting back-to-back in the living room and kitchen, the fireplaces now act as the anchor of the home.

This page: Back-to-back fireplaces in the living room and kitchen (beneath the rooster painting) were repaired and made functional. The chimney was uncovered and sanded, so that its brick construction now serves as an accent in both rooms; **Opposite, from top:** A quaint dining area in the kitchen; The Florida Room's ceiling was opened up to a vault, with skylights and a sleeping loft for guests and stargazing.







The decor is a combination of family antiques and pieces from The Pearl, an imported furniture gallery that Starr Sanford is set to open in March. But nothing is overtly designed—just as Starr Sanford likes it. The look is relaxed, with beachy influences (seashell accents on the fireplace, a surfboard hanging on a wall in the Florida room) peppered throughout, a reminder of her family's love for the water. Historical accents, such as the characteristic tin roof, are also utilized.

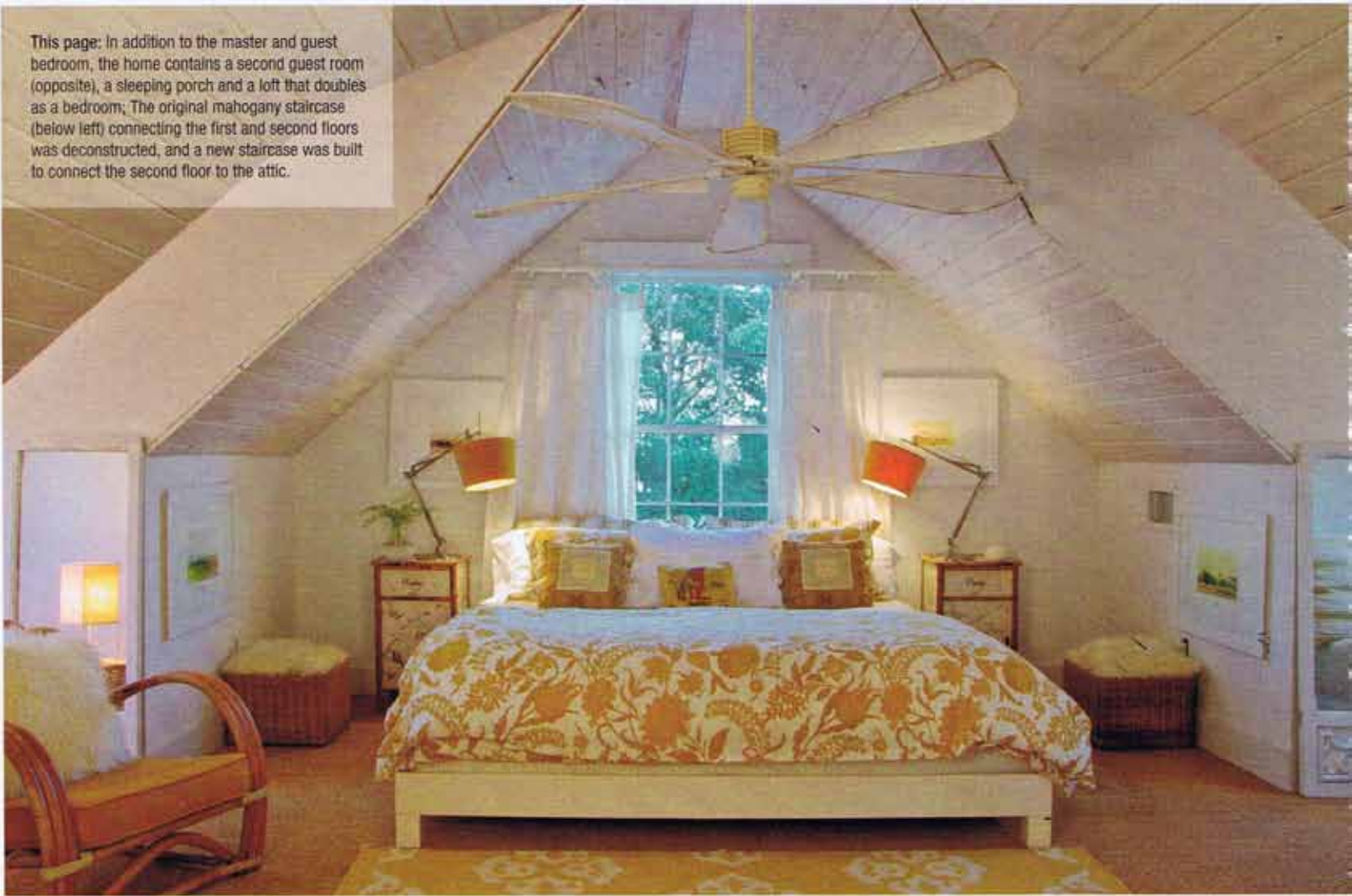
All in all, the project took six months—and perhaps a little bit more. “Six months and also ten years,” she laughs. “We try to paint one side of the home every year, and we just keep finding ourselves working around.”

This page: Several pieces of furniture in the home came straight from movie sets. An oak bench, coffee table and louvered doors can be seen in films like *The English Patient*, *Harry Potter* and *The Legend of Bagger Vance*; the home is full of natural accents, including bamboo and paintings of beach scenes. **Opposite page:** The living room fireplace utilizes a natural mahogany finished mantel with seashell accent





This page: In addition to the master and guest bedroom, the home contains a second guest room (opposite), a sleeping porch and a loft that doubles as a bedroom. The original mahogany staircase (below left) connecting the first and second floors was deconstructed, and a new staircase was built to connect the second floor to the attic.



Breathtaking though it may be (especially considering the amount of work it required), the home is livable and even, dare we say, casual? Starr Sanford thinks so.

"It's simple," she says. "There's sweat and love put into it. You can sleep outside, you can eat food fresh from the garden. I like to say it's Third World bohemian paradise." *

CREDITS:

GENERAL CONTRACTOR: Rodney Vincent Armanino

MASTER CARPENTER: Bob Jenkins (*Curved custom staircase, third floor, cypress sink and loft ladder*)

PORCH FRAMING: Collins Construction

ORIGINAL ART: Thomas Hager photographs, Jim Draper still life with a feather, and Ryan Ivy sub-tropical series on wood and canvas

PANTRY CARPENTRY: Jack Balance

HEART PINE FLOOR REFINISHING: Rob Lydle



The second floor contains a guest bedroom, with sitting area and sleeping porch.