

Very Vintage

A Portage Lake cottage kitchen and bath, designed by Tiffany Birch, feature a snappy mix of old-school touches and practicalities galore // Photography by Jeff Garland

By **Megan Swoyer** - February 8, 2021



When Tiffany Birch, right, first spotted a sweet, 764-square-foot cottage on Portage Lake in Pinckney, all the interior designer could see were great bones. “It had wood ceilings and dark, nasty paneling on the walls. I immediately thought to paint it all white. There was so much potential,” says the owner of Ann Arbor’s Birch Design Associates. She did, in fact, buy the home, and she did seem to dip the petite beauty into buckets of Snowbound paint by Sherwin-Williams, using an eggshell satin finish on the walls so it “wasn’t glaring,” and semi-gloss on the ceilings to “reflect natural light.”



The self-proclaimed “lake girl,” who grew up in Adrian and spent summers on Devil’s Lake in Lenawee County, says she wanted the 1940 cottage to say “vintage” as soon as you walk in. To create that vibe in the galley-style kitchen, Birch opted to keep the original enamel sink and reglaze it. All-new navy cabinetry from Burdick & Associates (Adrian) were custom painted. Brass pulls evoke a nautical feel. “I like some contrast,” she says. “It’s fun to do everything white and then mix in some bold, rich navy tones.” As for the wooden countertops, “I always associate butcher block with cottages and lake houses. (I like) the ease of it; it’s user-friendly and casual — but it’s not just about style, it’s about how things function.”



A cement tile pattern in jaunty blues and whites pops.

Birch peppered the space with more hints of a nautical theme, including the light made of nickel above the sink and a few men standing guard. “The little wooden sailor men on the counter remind me of my dad because he was an avid angler and we had a collection at our cottage, as well,” she says. Thick cement tile with a white, navy, and turquoise pattern for the flooring, and floor-to-ceiling white subway tile add nice touches.

In the bathroom, Birch selected the same type of subway tile. The piece de resistance here is the cobalt-blue tile (Wave Tile, from The Tile Shop) that evokes waves. “It has a great lake feel,” Birch says. “It was fun to run the tile up vertically, contrasting with the subway.” For this space, she used a barn-style light. “It had to be a wall light because I opened up the ceiling to make it feel twice as big. I kept the beams and painted them white.”

More information: birchdesignassociates.com



The cobalt-blue shower tile (Wave Tile, The Tile Shop) evokes waves.

Designer's Secret

"I like to go to antiques stores and flea markets to collect vintage pieces, instead of putting all brand-new items in a cottage," designer Tiffany Birch says. One of her found pieces is a large creel (a vintage wicker basket that anglers use for carrying fish). "My dad was a big fly fisherman, so it reminds me of him." Birch follows two websites that features antiques sales: estatesales.net and chairish.com. She showcases antiquated artwork on a gallery-wall stairwell. "I collected images at flea markets that had sailing themes because I grew up sailing. I kept some of the frames in their original shape and spray-painted others black."

— *MS*

Lake Life Lowdown

Portage Lake (in Washtenaw and Livingston counties) is an all-sports lake. “We enjoy waterskiing on it,” interior designer Tiffany Birch says. The family also likes swimming in this 725-acre body of water because there are sand bars. “The nice thing for boating is that it’s in a nine-lake chain (part of a watershed of the Huron River), so you can go visit different lakes all day long. If you’re putzing on a pontoon, it takes about an hour from one end to the other.”

— *MS*

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