

SHIFTING SANDS

A family of four's charming waterfront home in Amagansett is changing with the times—and the tides

BY BRIELLE M. FERREIRA PHOTOGRAPHS BY JONNY VALIANT STYLING BY ERIN SWIFT



Joshua Young and Christiane Lemieux with their children, Isabelle and William, at their laid-back fisherman's cottage

The credenza and cowhide rug are from DwellStudio. The Eero Saarinen Tulip table is from 1stdibs, and the chandelier is by Billy Cotton.



The walls are painted China White by Benjamin Moore. The bedding is from DwellStudio.



When Christiane Lemieux and Joshua Young met through mutual friends at a beach house in Amagansett more than 13 years ago, they had no idea what the future held in store for them: a picturesque wedding on the sand, two darling towheaded children, a successful joint business venture. (Together, the two run the widely adored Manhattan-based textile and furniture company DwellStudio.) As they park their car and walk up the wooden ramp to their family retreat on Napeague Bay, however, with Isabelle and William following closely behind, it seems only natural that they ended up here, not very far at all from the spot where they exchanged their wedding vows. It's where they feel they belong.

They walk past a distressed wooden sign that hangs from their deck's aged, graying railing. Its carefully painted letters spell out "Mermaid Avenue," a nod to an album title from William's favorite band, Wilco. "The summer we bought the house, Josh turned him on to it, and he was replaying it and singing along the entire time," Lemieux laughs.

But as happy as they are in the moment, they're acutely aware that this spot that they have grown to love is at risk, and that its nemesis—Mother Nature—is formidable, indeed. In the backyard, mere feet from the raised deck where Young



The children's favorite hanging seats on the back porch are from IKEA.

and Lemieux entertain guests during leisurely summer dinner parties, the sandy ground is being swallowed up by waves. While it's difficult to imagine that the friendly waters where the couple takes their children on mini fishing expeditions could pose such a threat, one look at the abandoned house next door makes it impossible to doubt.

"Less than 50 years ago, our neighbor had 60 feet of dunes in front of his home," says Lemieux with a nod to the stilted edifice visible through her sliding glass doors. "But now, it's in the middle of the ocean." The erosion on this part of the bay has been aggressive—add in unpredictable and highly destructive storms, like Irene and Sandy, which have ravaged the Northeast over the past few years, and the couple doesn't want to take any more chances. "When Sandy happened, we half expected to come up here and find our house gone," says Lemieux. "We were lucky, but we don't want to just sit back and wait for the next one to hit."

So they have decided to reclaim their home, but to do that they must first say goodbye. Their plan is to raze and rebuild: stronger and smarter, set farther back from the water with a stone revetment that will protect the house from high tides. To expedite the process, Young called Laurie Wiltshire, of Land Planning Services. She represents the interests of local private homeowners to the government agencies responsible for granting construction permits. "It's often not easy to build on the coast; the rules are constantly changing," says Wiltshire. "After Katrina, FEMA remapped the entire country for flood zones, which resulted in increased minimum elevation requirements for houses in this area."

With just one permit application still pending, the family will likely spend a final summer in their charming fisherman's cottage before having to temporarily take down their Mermaid Avenue sign. In the meantime, Lemieux and Young aren't concerned about how they will make their mark on the new place: They've had plenty of time to think about what their dream house will look like. "We're going to do something cool and contemporary with lots of windows," Lemieux says. "There's a great history of modern beach architecture in this area, and we want to honor that."

It's only once their new home is completed and they're safely settled in for some future summer, however, that the water can truly start making amends—transforming from a force of destruction back to the inviting playground where Young kitesurfs and the children take refreshing dips on long, lazy days. As Lemieux looks out at the views, though, it's easy to imagine the reconciliation won't take long. "The real heart of this place is the sunset," she says dreamily. "The view is completely unfiltered and unobstructed here at our spot on the bay. I could sit and watch it every day." 🌅

For more information, see Sources, page 121.



Dinner is served on sea life plates by artist Laura Zindel.