



LEFT Gift tags, some made from vintage cards, include riddles and stories about what's inside each box—a family tradition for homeowner Braxton Jarratt. Before the gift is opened, a lot of guessing and laughter takes place.

OPPOSITE Braxton's partner, interior designer Tanya Lacourse, selected a sofa that comes just up to the windowsill so as not to obstruct the ocean view. She pushed together two coffee tables with glass tops that reflect the light and mimic the ocean. "The open, distressed wood bases feel weightless and subtly resemble a lobster trap," she says. Faux-fur pillows are a wintry touch that visually link to the tree skirt.



CHRISTMAS *past & present*

A NATIVE MAINER STRENGTHENS HIS ROOTS, PURCHASING A CENTURY-OLD CLIFFSIDE COTTAGE WHERE EXTENDED FAMILY MEMBERS GATHER FOR HOLIDAY FESTIVITIES TO DIP INTO CHILDHOOD TRADITIONS AND CREATE NEW RITUALS.

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ABOVE The red front door opens into a mudroom with original beaded board where the family hangs coats in the winter and towels in the summer. A model sailboat that came with the house and vintage brass fire hose nozzles share shelf space with accessories of the seasons. A laundry basket from a local antiques shop holds plaid blankets—quintessential Maine must-haves. **OPPOSITE** Tanya reinvented a two-piece hutch that was once in the dining room for use in the mudroom. She donated the top half, painted the bottom portion with blue chalk-finish paint, and added rope knobs. “We use it to store old towels for the dogs and flashlights,” she says.

AS A BOY GROWING UP IN BRUNSWICK, MAINE, BRAXTON JARRATT explored Bailey Island as often in wintertime as he did in summer, during the waves to catch him on the geologic formation called Giant’s Stairs and stomping along Casco Bay’s rocky beaches with friends. As an adult, he introduced his own kids, Julia, 17, and Quinn, 15, to rustic island life, renting in the summertime and visiting his folks at other times of the year. “It’s been very grounding for them,” Braxton says.

While Braxton’s days of playing pond hockey are long past, he, his kids, and his partner, Tanya Lacourse, fly up from their home in Atlanta to spend holidays at the cottage he’s purchased on Bailey Island. Historic homes rarely come up for sale, so when Braxton saw this one, known by locals as “the house with the red roof on the cliff,” was on the market, he jumped. “It had the look, feel, and smell that instantly brought me back to childhood,” he says.

After donating some of the possessions left in the house by the previous owner (several carloads full), Tanya, an interior designer, rearranged the remaining furnishings, swapped the lighting, and added fresh pieces to the mix. “Braxton wanted a relaxed, comfortable cottage, not a themed beach house,” she says.

The 1904 dwelling had been upgraded after a fierce storm demolished the front facade in 1978, and the work held strong. Aesthetically, however, two walls in the dining room that choked the flow and blocked the view needed to come





“When I flew up in winter to see the house, it was one of those moments. I immediately thought, *This is it.*”

—HOMEOWNER BRAXTON JARRATT

down. In fact, Braxton decided to dismantle the walls just two days before the couple hosted their first Thanksgiving, an elaborate feast for 13 guests including extended family, friends from Iceland, and a Bowdoin College student from Africa. Tanya admits to having been nervous about a mess, but she needn't have worried. “Remarkably, it was like taking apart Lincoln Logs,” Braxton says.

The crew often spends Christmastime at the cottage, which Tanya adorns simply with evergreen boughs, winterberry branches, and pinecones, all cut and collected from the property. Potted Norfolk pines, poinsettias, and paperwhites from the mainland complement the Balsam Hill faux tree with twinkling white lights, a necessary convenience given the family's short stays. To enhance the ambience, she also burns candles with winter scents all week.

New traditions, including do-it-yourself lobster rolls on Christmas Eve and multigenerational coastal hikes, mingle with ones borrowed from Braxton's boyhood. “You can't just write ‘to’ and ‘from’ on the gift tags,” he says, detailing long-standing gift-giving rules. “You have to make up a riddle or a story about the gift that then has to be read aloud, followed by shaking the gift, guessing, and secondary hints, which makes for a very long morning.”

It all culminates with a scavenger hunt for the final present. The first clue is uncovered under the tree and the rest hidden in nooks and crannies around the house. “The cottage is like another family member,” Tanya says. “It's a character that helps us create memories; we have a special relationship with it.” □

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OPPOSITE Once Braxton removed the wall that ran parallel to the French doors, Tanya was able to fit a round pedestal table that seats 10 in the space. She also centered the light fixture. “It has a nautical feel that doesn't hit you over the head,” she says. **ABOVE** Braxton sits between his parents and sister in front of the firepit that he built with his brother-in-law the first summer in the cottage. Tanya sits opposite with her Cavalier King Charles spaniels, Piper and Fox, on her lap. The Adirondack chairs are from local retail behemoth L.L.Bean.



LEFT Simple white dishes and transparent glassware are easy to access from the open shelving. On winter mornings, Braxton makes pancakes (minus the blueberries that are so bountiful in summer) or lobster scrambled eggs for breakfast. **BELOW** A feathery evergreen, paperwhites, and poinsettias sit on the deep sill of the slate farmhouse sink, which faces the cove in the backyard.



“We both like cooking so we try and get creative during the holidays. I make something I’ve never made before. Last year I made a tres leches cake for dessert. It’s not too sweet so is a nice ending to a rich, garlicky meal.”

—INTERIOR DESIGNER TANYA LACOURSE

ABOVE Tanya jokes that the home’s country kitchen, which had been renovated in the 1990s, is back in style again. She and Braxton replaced the appliances and added an island with an Asian limestone top that works well with the existing soapstone counters. Tanya loves the kitchen. “It’s the perfect size, and everything is exactly where you need it to be,” she says. **OPPOSITE, BOTTOM LEFT** Tanya arranges evergreens in vintage pitchers that she and Braxton seek out at local antiques shops.



BELOW The reading nook both extends the main seating area of the living room and acts as a sitting area for the guest room to the left. "It's my favorite place to be with a book," Tanya says. She added blue accents to satisfy Braxton's desire for color. "The whole house is wood—basically orange," she says. "Watery blues and greens worked best." The map of Casco Bay hanging on the wall was a gift from their real estate attorney. **OPPOSITE LEFT** Braxton and Tanya relax waterside, where steaming mugs of coffee are necessary hand warmers. **OPPOSITE, TOP RIGHT** The couple's bedroom on the upper level looks out to the ocean. "In the morning we get giant cups of coffee, roll up the shades, and watch the ocean from the bed," Tanya says. The canopy bed, left by the previous homeowners, is a perfect match for the wood-lined room. Tanya freshened the space with new cushions and pillows for the window seat. **OPPOSITE, BOTTOM RIGHT** The cottage's stacked stone foundation was built right on the rocky cliff. "You feel like you're on a boat in the ocean with the waves crashing into the ledge," Braxton says. Tanya fashioned a wreath for the front door using branches picked up from the property, which boasts birch and pine trees.

