



# C'est la vie beside the sea

This cool and contemporary beach house makes its own French connection, writes **Robyn Willis**

When most designers talk about coastal style, this house is not the first thing that springs to mind. With Bouddi National Park over the back fence and Killcare Beach spread out in front of it, this house in the last stages of construction could have gone very differently. But interior designer Alexandra Donohoe from Decus Interiors says the clients were very clear in their brief. "The clients travelled extensively and they really love old farmhouses in France," Alexandra says. Her challenge was to create that French farmhouse feel that would still feel right at home on the Australian coast. "It was a bit tricky but the styles are not polar opposites," she says.

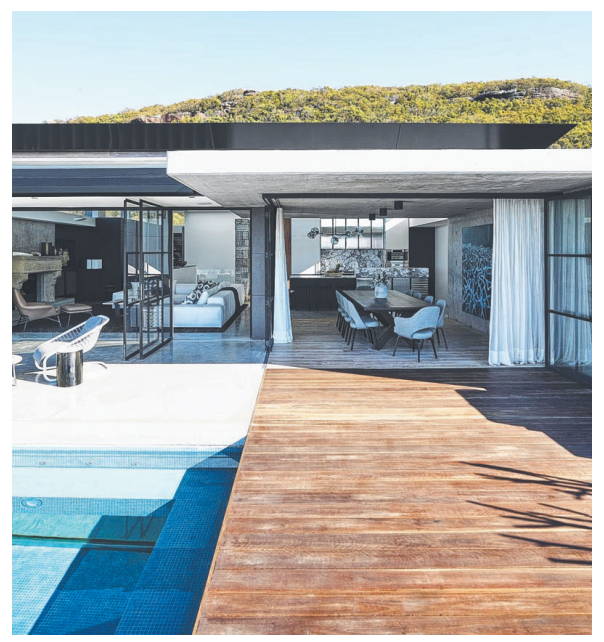
**From the farm to the beach**  
By the time Alexandra was called in, the overall structure of the house had already come together, thanks to Sydney builder Dan Clift from Square Design. While the main materials were concrete and glass, most of the interior architecture was still a work in progress. Alexandra stepped in to create the French farmhouse look the clients desired. "Initially we came in for the furniture but towards the end it became apparent that Dan had quite a bit on and we were asked to do the joinery as well," she says. "They started the process before we arrived and we were tasked with marrying those elements with polished concrete flooring and off form concrete walls." Getting the balance right and looking for

commonalities proved key to its success. "You cannot place French farmhouse style next to a concrete floor and expect it to work," Alexandra says. "It has to be massaged by adding things like darker joinery in the library and living areas and then using furniture with reference to relaxed beach house style with farmhouse dining elements." She also used a couple of images the owners had given her of rooms they liked as reference points throughout the process. Each room also has a clear palette, with two paintings, including one by artist Tim Summerton, providing the colour cues. "The artworks were from the clients' Sydney home," she says. "We weren't sure we were going to use them both but in the end they worked really well.

"The dining room one is perfect from a scale and palette perspective." **When less really is more** Alexandra admits that this house had the potential to be a design disaster. "This could have gone either way," she says. "Sometimes clients want to put every single ingredient in the room and we have to navigate those waters to remove as many unnecessary elements as possible. "It's a real challenge to talk people back but if you include everything, nothing will be able to shine through. In the end, we want the clients to be happy." **More** Decus Interiors, decus.com.au; Square Design, squaredesign.com.au **Pictures** Anson Smart



The outdoor space overlooking the beach is a mix of glass, concrete and timber



The owners' artworks perfectly suited the kitchen and dining space.



The fireplace imported from Europe was high on the owners' wish list for their new house.

**Universal design principles**  
There's nothing run of the mill about this project, including the budget. But that's not to say that there's nothing to take away for those of us living on more, ahem, modest means. Here are the main lessons from this beautiful house.  
✓ If you want to mix styles, look for the common features in both. In this case, French farmhouse and Sydney coastal share a use of natural materials like stone and jute, as well as rattan seating.  
✓ Have a clear palette for each room. An artwork or floor rug is a good place to start. As you choose pieces, refer back to it for a consistent result.  
✓ If you're building new, adding older materials like recycled timber or furniture with a patina of age will add character to the house.  
✓ Look for the hero piece in each room and give it space to shine. It might be a striking chair, a stone splashback or a sculptural light fitting.



Natural elements such as stone and coral mix in easily with antique rattan chairs.