

MANSION GLOBAL

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New Ways to Do Nautical Design



Each week Mansion Global tackles a topic with an elite group of designers from around the world who work on luxury properties. This week we look at how to pull off a nautical look at home.

For a home by the water, a nautical-themed space is a natural fit. But decking out a house with life preservers, naval flags and mini ships can take things over the top.

“People have always been drawn to the healing properties of water, and a nautical look evokes this, no matter where you are,” said designer Joni Banks of J. Banks Design Group in Hilton Head, South Carolina. It’s about taking inspiration from the views surrounding the property and creating a sense of place and a feeling of calm, Ms. Banks said.

“Think of the style as more of an overarching big-picture look for the house,” said Christine Markatos Lowe of Christine Markatos Design in Santa Monica, California. “If done right, it’s a classic and timeless aesthetic that you’ll never tire of.”

To design a tasteful nautical-tinged space that will stand the test of time, follow these tips from the pros.

Go for Subtlety

“Use classic colors and finishes mixed with more current and contemporary elements. Restrained use of obvious thematic elements, such as anchors and shells are a must.

“Blues and whites are fairly consistent in a nautical look and mixing blues with varying finishes—whites, dark stains, light stains and metal—helps to vary the look and feel while nodding to the views outside.

“I love adding texture with natural elements and mixed metals, all referencing the surrounding view (trees, sand, grass and shells).

“We often think of stripes when we talk nautical spaces. Stripes are great; however, simpler patterns and textures are also important. At Timbers Kiawah, we used patterns that suggest the ocean waves, seagrass, the sheen of shell and sand and combined them with contrasting textures to create subtle references to the locale.”

—Joni Banks of J. Banks Design Group in Hilton Head, South Carolina Take Your Cue From the Environment

“Water is generally the basis for a nautical theme. Go for a range of blues and add accents of oranges, purples and pinks and warm beige-white tones. For instance, a media room could have deep gray-blue walls reminiscent of a stormy day on the bay with a display of sailing flags. Similarly, a bedroom wall would look fabulous with ombre wallpaper in either the shades of a sunrise or the hues of the water.

“Natural elements, such as a vintage shell-encrusted mirror over a sleek vanity, add an authenticity to the interior. Petrified wood or bone-inlaid pieces also look great in nautical interiors, particularly when paired with warm sandy tones, orange and turquoise.

“Wood flooring adds a level of warmth. You can go light or dark, depending on whether you want the look to be more contemporary or traditional. Natural rugs such as jute, seagrass or sisal enhance the look, as can seagrass or linen wall coverings, which add texture and a beachy feel.

“Ikat touches lend a more boho beach look, while rope and rattan offer another way to use pattern.”

— **Lisa Melone Cloughen of Melone Cloughen Interiors in Old Greenwich, Connecticut**

Opt for Neutrals

“The nautical look is inspired by the sun, sand and sea. It’s light and breezy and can instantaneously make you feel like you’re on vacation. I like to keep the overall palette neutral and add color and pattern through accents.

“Blue and white stripes are the obvious choice when incorporating nautical decor, but I also add in loads of shells and rocks that can be found right at your local beach.

“My favorites rugs are woven natural fiber; they add great texture to the space and are reminiscent of the sand.

“Stripes, florals and geometrics patterns works really well together. Stick to one color theme to help tie them all together.”



A sunroom designed by Marina Hanisch of Marina Hanisch Interiors has a sun-bleached beachy feel due to texture and color.

— Marina Hanisch of Marina Hanisch Interiors based in New York

From Penta: [Dune Buggy Driven by Steve McQueen in 'Thomas Crown Affair' Heads to Auction](#)

Pick the Right Accent Colors

“Blue and white is a constant color choice in any nautical-themed home, but the specific locale can also be a factor for accent colors. For example, if the home is in Nantucket, you might add Nantucket Red. In a Northern California home, adding in gray or shell tones evokes the foggy feeling of the Bay Area.

“To offset blue and white, add in lots of warmer, natural tones through wood-framed chairs, rope accents and seagrass rugs.

“Wood floors are easy to sweep up after a sandy day on the beach. To make them feel really fresh, go for a painted finish. For walls, tongue and groove, beadboard and shiplap help to establish a nautical look.

“Stripes are always a classic part of any nautical design scheme. With that as a starting point, it’s good to mix in complementing geometric patterns. We always love an Indian print, too.

“Mixing in some small nautical inspired accents is fine but keep it classic with things like found coral or an antique sailing painting.”



— Christine Markatos Lowe of Christine Markatos Design in Santa Monica, California

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Keep it Casual

“A coastal home should feel relaxed, with nothing too precious. We use a mix of glass and metal, such as hurricane lamps, glass light fixtures and mixed metal items to reflect the water outside and keep things light and airy. Using a mix of blue-and-white pottery, ginger jars and vases keep with the nautical color palette without being too kitschy.

“In one home office, for instance, we created custom built-ins and used a teak desk to reflect the finish on the homeowner’s Hinckley sailboat. It’s a nod to the nautical without being too literal.

“We’ve used a mix of geometrics and organic patterns, including some from my own collection, Marika Meyer Textiles. Steer clear of anything too heavy or ornate. We’ve used lots of linens and lighter-weight fabrics with a few nautical patterns—a subtle sailboat fabric in the mudroom and a fish-themed pattern in the laundry room.”

