

at home

living with style in west hawaii



Beachside Bungalows

Vintage Cottages Retain Retro Charm

Beach Cottage Cute



Photo by Sunny Paul'ole

Small Puako Cottages Big on Charm



Photo by Giselle Thompson

Interior designer Shirley Wagner ASID outfitted the Tiemroth's vintage Puako cottages with locally sourced furnishings like this desk set purchased at Container Warehouse. Replicating exotic wood, textured vinyl flooring is from Warehouse Direct. (Opposite page, top): Living room furnishings with custom upholstery from Plantation Interiors; cocktail table from Bamboo & Teak.

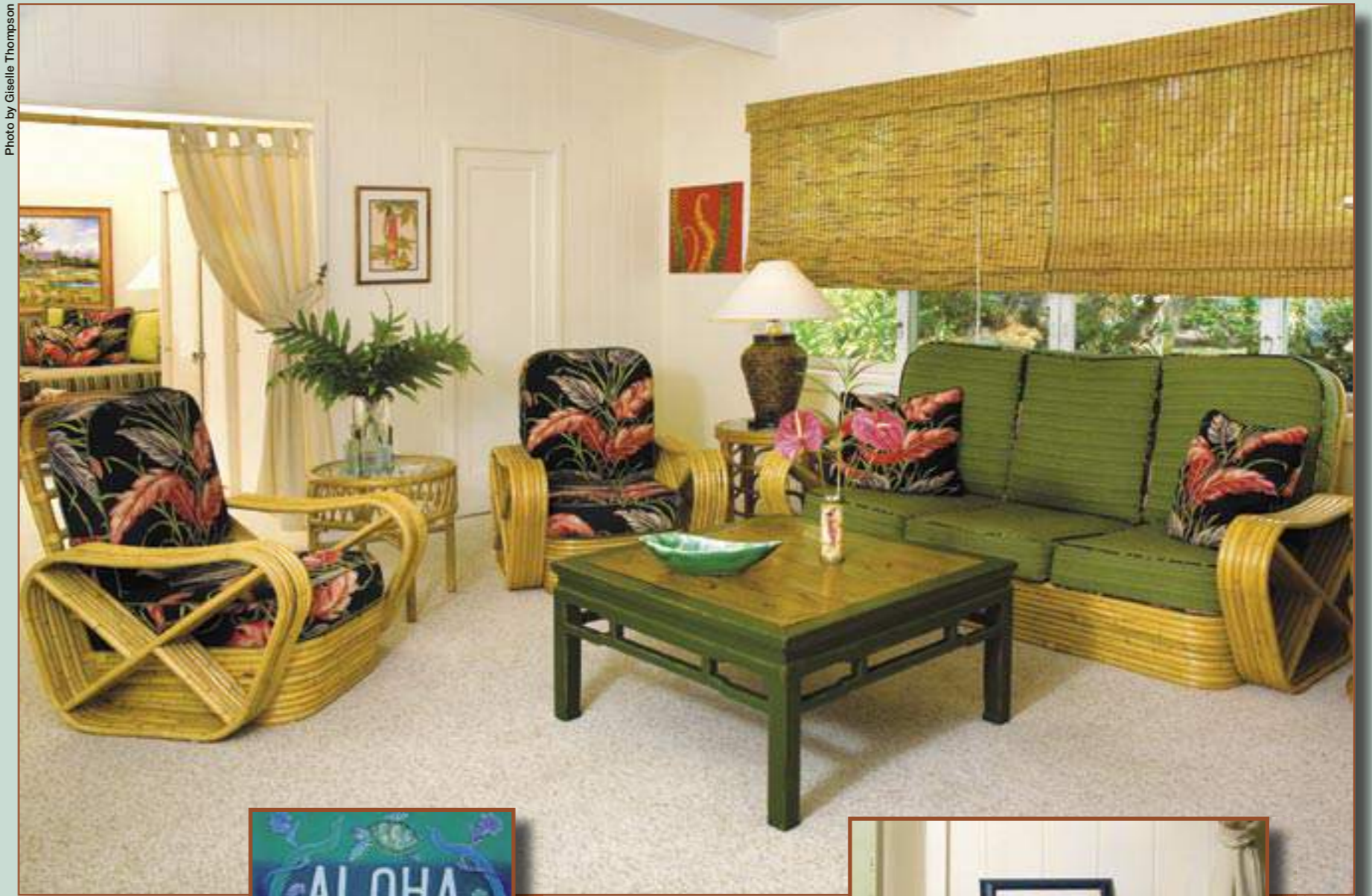


Photo by Giselle Thompson



By Kristina Anderson

Hawaii was still a U.S. territory in the 1950s when an assortment of modest fishing shacks and beach cottages began popping up along the isolated, windswept Puako coast. Starting at \$500 for oceanfront (\$350 for inland), many of the lots were purchased by Hilo residents escaping the rain, as well as by local boaters and fishermen.

Most used their shacks as weekend getaways. After all, in those days there was barely a useable road, no electricity and a single overground pipe for water. Until the late 1950s, in fact, only two families lived full time in the remote hamlet.

Since then, the march of time has brought beachfront real estate prices to a bit more than that original \$500 asking price, with luxury homes slowly replacing the characteristically humble Puako cottages. Fortunately, quite a number of the original gems remain standing. ▶



Photo by Giselle Thompson

Shirley Wagner special-ordered the custom carvings of her choice before she purchased this cabinet at Plantation Interiors in Kona.



Just beachy! Lively color palette brings chic fun to the children's bedroom. Lamp from Koehnens Interiors; quilts mail-ordered from The Company Store.

Situated on grassy, adjacent oceanfront parcels, Kirsi and Erik Tiemroth's two vintage bungalows (one is a 900-square foot, one bedroom and the other; a 1,200-square foot, two-bedroom) epitomize those languid, bygone days of early Puako. Old trees provide lots of shade for hammocks, lawn games or relaxing. The natural state of the beachfront is left untouched.

"We love the charm of the houses and the beach. It transports us to a nice and relaxing island feeling," says Kirsi, who was born in Finland and appreciates the marked contrast Hawaii offers to her cold homeland. (Her husband Erik grew up on the beach in La Jolla, California.)

"We even appreciate the bugs and geckos on the walls," she admits. "It's all part of island living at its

most authentic and finest."

Kirsi says that the larger cottage, "Hale Polu Wai," was in dismal shape when she and her husband purchased it about five years ago — not surprising, as the harsh Puako climate is one of the most punishing on the island.

"The house was dilapidated, musty and dank," she remembers. "It had dark wood paneling, awful curtains and no cute furniture."

The smaller cottage, "Hale Malia," was not for sale, but the Tiemroths took a chance, writing a letter to the owner to inquire about its availability. They made an offer and the cottage was theirs.

With the help of local interior designer Shirley Wagner ASID, the couple set out to help revive and make over their special, vintage cottages. ►



Another lazy day in Puako.



Putting the "beach" into beach house, island-inspired accessories work together with breezy color choices. Shirley found the lamps at Koehnens Interiors, while bedding is from The Company Store.



Custom-built punee (daybed) includes lauhala-trimmed base and stylish fabric, plus pillows made of retro bark cloth. Painting of Eva Parker Woods' cottage by artist "Pearce."

***"This is island living at its most authentic and finest." —
Kirsi Tiemroth***



Bamboo- and palm-inspired elements highlight the sitting room where a mirror from Import Outlet is the focal point. Lauhala pillows were purchased at the Crack Seed store in Waimea. Round table from Plantation Interiors; seagrass mats from Bamboo Too.



Original painting by Floyd Unger.



Originally a humble weekend getaway shack, the vintage cottage has withstood the harsh Puako elements since the 1950s.



Photo by Giselle Thompson

Kitchen retains its vintage retro charm including the original stainless-steel sink. Shirley replaced the old countertops with a colorful, tropical laminate.



Photo by Sunny Paule

Characteristic of '50s-style Hawaii homes, the classic divider with rounded shelves provides separation between kitchen and dining nook.



Photo by Giselle Thompson

Chair from Kona-based Island Collections was re-upholstered with outdoor acrylic fabric from Shirley Wagner's own fabric library.



Photo by Giselle Thompson

The essence of tropical bliss is captured in the beachside nook furnished with Plantation Interiors bamboo table, chairs and pillow. Rocker from Koehnens Interiors.

“These original cottages are the heart and soul of Puako, but they are fading fast,” says Shirley, who has worked on at least 14 homes — vintage and modern — in Puako. She considers the two quaint Tiemroth cottages the nearest to her heart.

“I love all the houses I work on, but these two are among my personal favorites. You walk in these homes and get such an enchanted feeling.”

The cutest of the cute, the smaller bungalow calls to mind a sleepy, simple era of old Hawaii. One bedroom, single-wall construction and endearing features like old-time, laminate countertops are reminders that it may really be possible — and perhaps even preferable — to live more minimally.

For the interiors of both cottages, Shirley, owner of Fine Design Interiors in Waimea, favored a warm, retro feel with the furnishings. She acquired most of the pieces from local sources such as Plantation Interiors in Kona, which builds furniture and cushions to order at their factory in the Philippines.

She outfitted much of the furnishings with Sunbrella fabric from her own library, including retro prints ▶

such as the vintage bark cloth. Other pieces from Fites Furniture, Island Collections, Bamboo Too, Bamboo & Teak, Local Color and Koehnens Interiors round out a truly local and high-quality selection of sources to complete the charming interior design. Chuck Shaver of Honoka'a, who is now retired, built the custom punees.

The Tiemroths say that living on the water's edge requires constant maintenance of the cottages. "Things rust fast and wood decays very quickly. We do a lot of painting around here!" Kirsi adds.

She is a believer in preserving the natural state of the beach as much as possible. "We enjoy the keawe trees, sand, lava and coral. We've left it all as is because we really dislike a manicured look. And we feel so good that our children (ages 7 and 10) get to enjoy the beauty of Hawaii, the creatures who live here and the natural environment."

Summing up the welcoming, island-style interiors and easygoing, comfortable scale of the cottages, Shirley, once a longtime resident of Puako herself, remarks: "These small cottages are truly the heirlooms of the future. Anyone could feel comfortable living here." **AH**



Ah, paradise. The guest-friendly bungalow offers a laid-back retreat at the water's edge, proving that simplicity is oftentimes preferable to extravagance.

Photo by Kris Anderson