



Seaside living at its best

The Cooksey Cottage

WRITER: **VICKIE KITE MILBURN** PHOTOGRAPHER: **AUGUST SELCKMANN**

When Betsy Cooksey was ready for a new stage in her life, she knew that Solomons was the place she needed to call home. Betsy, who was raised on the Cooksey Farm in Dentsville just outside of La Plata, has deep roots in Southern Maryland. She has a love for spending time outdoors, equestrian living, bike riding, and spending time with family and friends. She loved the quaint waterfront community, had made friends with so many of

its residents, and fell in love with one particular street, Calvert. The stars aligned and it just happened there was a lot available and a team of people ready to help make it into her home address.

AVONDALE COMMUNITY

The project started with meeting Donnie and Jean McDougal, the developers of the Avondale community of

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Above: View of the back of the cottage looking into the back porch with 15-foot ceiling height. Mill stone steps lead up to outdoor patio and curved retaining wall built with brick made to look aged without looking artificial. Betsy Cooksey sitting in back yard reading from the journal she kept during her recent trip to Mongolia.





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historically inspired heirloom quality homes in Solomons. They brought together their architect, John Toates, and builder, Rymer Construction, and designed and built a custom one-bedroom cottage that was made to fit Betsy's lifestyle and décor preferences. The design was reminiscent of a Bohemian cottage inspired by Caribbean architecture.

She is a minimalist by nature, so she didn't want a large home. She wanted a space in which she could enjoy the outdoors, entertain her friends, surround herself with only the keepsake items she loved, and a place her son and grandchildren would enjoy. She wanted a house that was easy to maintain.

ARCHITECTURAL DESIGN

John Toates designed the house

with front and back porches, high ceilings, and a plethora of windows topped with transoms to let in loads of light which gives the house a larger feel. The kitchen design was based on Betsy's lifestyle of cooking with only fresh foods. She opted for fewer cabinets and open shelving. The lower cabinets and island provide the storage she needs, and the open shelving provides a place to display the pieces that are special to her and easy access to daily use items. The dishwasher was hidden in the large island. The appliances are reproductions with designs from 1930's-50's. The design fit the historical concept perfectly.

Instead of a second bedroom, Betsy opted for an expansive back porch which overlooks Back Creek and is the ideal space for reading, journaling, or entertaining, and is a favorite spot for her grandchildren. The space was maximized with the

Below: Betsy loves to spend time on the back porch, reading, journaling and spending time with friends. The porch overlooks Back Creek and opens to outdoor seating and a small deck area. The doors and the hinges are original from the 1860s, hinges allow the doors to open in either direction, allowing to change the use of space.



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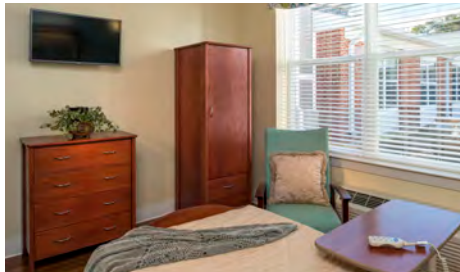
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Clockwise from top left: The master bedroom looking into the back porch, with one of the two fireplaces in the house. Betsy decorates with her favorite art pieces, family antiques and keepsakes. The kitchen was designed with Betsy's lifestyle in mind, less storage and open shelving. Reproduction appliances reminiscent of the 1930-50's add to the authenticity of the cottage design. The vent above the stove is a functional vent salvaged from the early 1900s. Wood trim panels were used to give texture and interest to the aesthetic. A specialty grill was built in to disguise the HVAC return. The photo (on metal) hanging on the brick fireplace is by Steve Wolf. Looking from the back porch towards the front of the house, the open space is ideal for entertaining. Cow hide rugs are used throughout the house atop the natural heart pine floors.



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laundry placed in her closet; a space for a small desk for paper and computer work was built into the hall and is hidden when not in use.

FUNCTIONAL SALVAGE DETAIL

The difference is always in the details, and if you look closely, you will see working vintage pieces that make the property a one-of-a-kind custom home. John Toates used salvaged architectural treasures from his collection to enhance the functional aesthetic of the cottage. The bedroom's double doors are dated 1860; the original hinges allow the door to swing both inside and outside the room. The vent above the kitchen stove is a cast iron vent from more than 120 years ago which can be closed when not in use. It covers a functional exhaust fan from the 1940's.

RAISING MONEY FOR MONGOLIAN CHILDREN

When I met with Betsy, she had just returned from a life-enhancing trip to Mongolia where she spent 84 days participating in the Blue Wolf Totem Charity Ride to raise money for the Veloo Foundation which serves to feed, educate, and care for nearly 1,000 Mongolian children who are living in the dumps of the land.

After going through a difficult time in her life, she reached out to a friend who introduced her to the charity. She took her first journey in 2019, returned in 2021, and just completed another trek in July 2022. This year she raised more than \$23,000. She also opened a library named after her grandson after he gave her his savings of \$75 and told her he had everything he needed, but he knew the kids in the dumps were really in need. The Liam Library is a place where kids can read, learn computer skills, and set themselves up for a better life.

The trek included riding a horse 2,232 miles during harsh weather and living conditions and several bouts of illness in order to raise funds in support of these children. The charity team riders rode their

From left to right: Betsy sitting with children in the Sanctuary of the Peak Kindergarten in Mongolia. A hand made mosaic table is one of Betsy's favorites, and the first purchase she made for her new home.

horses for eight hours during the day, set up tent camps each night, and repeated this daily until they reached the finish line and celebration. Betsy journaled her experiences every day, noting that the bond and friendships made with the team of riders, the serenity of the scenery, and the confidence gained is life changing.

These days Betsy is happy to be living her best life in her seaside cottage, riding her bike through Solomons, and spending time with her family and friends. Most mornings you'll find her enjoying her coffee out on her front porch, sitting at the mosaic table she loves. It was one of the first purchases she made for the new home. She's making plans for her next athletic adventure to raise money for more of the disadvantaged people of the world. •



CRAB IMPERIAL (mother's recipe)



INGREDIENTS:

1 lb crabmeat	1 egg
1 tsp. dijon mustard	1 T sherry
2 T butter	½ cup mayonnaise
¼ cup chopped green pepper	Topping
¼ cup chopped onions	3 oz. cream cheese
1 T flour	1 cup grated sharp cheddar
1 cup half & half	2 T butter
	1 tsp. worcestershire
	1 T milk

PREPARATION:

Heat butter in large skillet. Saute peppers and onions about 10 mins. Add flour and cook for 1 minute. Stir in milk and add crabmeat. Beat egg, sherry, mustard and mayo together and combine with crab mixture. Add pepper to taste. Pour into buttered 1 ½ quart casserole dish. Beat topping ingredients together and spoon on top. Bake at 350 degrees for 40 minutes. Let stand for 10 minutes.

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