

the life.

MARK ROPER



BREEZING IN

Interior designer and television personality Darren Palmer was introduced to New South Wales haven Hyams Beach by his husband Olivier Duvillard (left) five years ago. Soon after, they found the dream fixer-upper just 100 metres from this white-sand shoreline.

Palmer wears Nique top, MJ Bale pants; available at Myer. Duvillard's clothing, his own



Ocean-hued bed linen from interior designer Darren Palmer's latest collection at Myer mirrors his holiday home's idyllic seaside surrounds

EASY LUXURY DARREN PALMER
HOMESPACE DARREN PALMER
THE BIG BOOK OF LOFTS

the great escape



An old oar that Palmer has had for years is a feature. "That entrance was one of the least inviting areas in the house," Palmer says. "Now it's light, bright and relaxed, which is how people want to feel when they stay here." MJ Bale blazer and T-shirt, Ben Sherman pants; all available at Myer. Brogues, Palmer's own

INTERIOR DESIGNER **DARREN PALMER'S** COASTAL HOLIDAY HOME IS A LESSON IN MAGICAL FACE LIFTS THAT DON'T BREAK THE BANK

by **RACHEL SHARP** photographed by **MARK ROPER**

For all his serious interior design skills, television fame and impeccable artist contacts, it's almost hilarious that the standout piece of decor greeting guests inside Darren Palmer's beach "shack" front door is a worn-down old oar he's had for years.

Then again, it's rather symbolic of the five-bedroom Hyams Beach home he and husband Olivier Duvillard have spent the past four years slowly renovating to budget: something run-down with character that's totally repurposed to become cool.

"It's the perfect addition to a coastal styling story, don't you think?" prompts the interiors expert of his budget wall sculpture. "I like the house to welcome someone in from the front door. I think entrance appeal is super important and that entrance was one of the least inviting things in this house [before], so I screwed it into the wall there. Now when you walk in, it feels really light and bright and the staircase invites you up and it feels really beachy and relaxed. That's how I want people to feel when they're here."

While Palmer has loved transforming the place—named Akora, an Aboriginal word for dwelling—to a sensible budget, what makes it special in his opinion is its secluded location. The tiny, but now incredibly trendy, seaside inlet of Hyams Beach is an accessible 200km—or 2.5 hours drive—south of Sydney. When the couple bought their (then run-down) home just 100 metres from the beach in 2015, the area was still relatively unknown. Since then, prices have skyrocketed. "The location is the drawcard because Hyams has about 200 houses surrounded by national park so it can never get any bigger. There's never going to be development, no apartment buildings. It's always going to stay frozen in time. People are building bigger houses and getting a bit fancier with it, but their [existing] block size is [it]. There's one tiny shop and a cafe, but for everything else you have to drive 10 minutes to the next town. It's secluded but really pretty." Equally as enamoured are the family's three dogs—English bulldog Brutus, 6, Brussels Griffon Razzie, 3, and French bulldog Frankie, 2. "They love the sand and the waves. The three of them just have a ball down here."

Even when the weather chills, Hyams still has charm in spades. "Winter is my favourite time here," Palmer reveals. "It's very cold and very quiet, but it's still extremely pretty and I can rock down to the coffee shop in ugg boots and track pants and no-one raises an eyebrow. It's good for my soul."

Mirroring his family's principal abode in Sydney's Bondi Beach, Akora has a predominantly white palette and vinyl-plank flooring that's chic and well-considered but still inviting. Its current incarnation, however, is a far cry from the retro throwback condition it was in when he and Duvillard discovered it. "Actually, it was pretty crappy," he concedes. "There was old bottle-green '70s tiles in the foyer, there was cypress pine floors. It was really shabby." Surprisingly though, the aesthetic wasn't the first thing the designer was determined to fix. Rather, he set about completely reconfiguring the living areas, turning what was originally a television room and playroom into a bedroom with a grand four-poster bed. A hallway from that leads to a huge cinema room at the rear, which was once filled with multiple bunk beds, but



The waves at nearby Hyams Beach (right) can be heard from the couple's relaxed living room (above), which features a modern black ceiling fan and furniture

Shiplap panelling lines all the interior walls, offering a luxury look at an affordable price. Palmer loves to dress his home with foliage from his garden





In the lounge room, a blue artwork by Sarrita King and cushion from Palmer's Myer-exclusive collection set a more relaxed mood.
ABOVE: Blue agate napkin rings around raw-look linen bring a formal feel to the eight-seater table.
LEFT: A bleached coral ornament rests on a coffee table alongside a tray from Palmer's Myer range

now houses a generous screen and three large sofas. Upstairs is another lounge room, this time with a 120-degree view of the ocean, which appears especially blue thanks to the area's fine, silica-rich white sand. Palmer invested in a huge dining table that easily seats eight, plus a smaller fold-out children's table to seat six more.

Palmer painted the interior walls, made of (shiplap) panelling, with a spray gun, opting for the same white on walls and roof because it made it quicker and easier to do. Eucalyptus-coloured doors break up the whitewashed interiors, as do the black ceiling fans (a concession on Duvillard's part, which he eventually fell in love with) and handles. "Contrast is really important to any great interior," he says of the less customary choice to team black rather than pale wood hues with the white surrounds. "The black...and eucalyptus provide relief, allowing the white to have more impact."

The family—married couple, their young son and three much-loved dogs—mightn't stay there full-time, but there are still plenty of sentimental touches. "The blue artwork in the lounge room is by Sarrita King. I first saw her art in the Bondi series of *The Block* and thought it was stunning. I bought this one for my husband's 40th birthday and then we moved it down here." The blue cushion that rests below it is also a personal touch, albeit a savvy one. "That's from my new range that's exclusive to Myer. It's exactly the right colour. In fact, all of the linen and cushions are from my range and couldn't

look any better than in this house."

Despite all of his personal graft on the beautiful interior, Palmer isn't afraid to admit his favourite space in Akora at the moment is still the original second-floor verandah with its built-in '70s-style seating. "There is this makeshift timber bar that runs along the balcony with five metal stools. You can sit there with a drink and eat your dinner and look at the ocean and watch the sun over the water. There's even an old-fashioned bottle opener screwed into one of the pillars next to it." Basically, he and Duvillard own the ideal escape for laid-back entertaining, not the least thanks to the view.

Whether at Hyams or Bondi, lunch parties for the couple are typically a chic but simple affair. "That usually means making a big platter of iced prawns, or a prawn, avocado and mango salad, or shaving some fennel with orange, or throwing together a simple BBQ. I love simple food, great energy, a small guest list and a beautiful table," Palmer says.

Not surprisingly, their Christmas lunch will follow a similar theme—one of his favourite things about celebrating the holiday in Australia. "We have some of the warmer dishes but we also have fresh seafood in abundance, lots of great-quality tropical fruits that you find hard to get elsewhere in the world, and we drink ice-cold drinks on a warm day, which is so different to the Northern Hemisphere's Christmas."

Palmer still has plenty of plans for their Hyams Beach dream house, including extending that aforementioned verandah, building a bigger kitchen, shifting the laundry and starting an extensive exterior face lift. But while he points out there's no rush, his professional sensibilities make it hard to stay patient. "I have really high expectations in terms of my work for other people, so this place does need to reflect, to a degree, how people perceive my work. And it isn't my work until it's a complete project," he says.

"I know one day it's going to be this beautiful little gem that we'll hold onto forever. The best house in the best street," he adds. "I have the capacity to take something that was once frozen in time, or maybe not seeing its best days, and make it something that's really quite special." ■



PARTY TABLE TIPS

Skip the tinsel and red paper napkins this Christmas. Palmer's beach-chic minimalist table is soiree perfection

DRESS FOR SUCCESS "I like to layer relaxed crumpled linen in muted colours with contrasting texture and shapes. Choose accent points that work with a palette consistent across the setting. Refined metallics offer great contrast, which is really important when you're dressing a table, too."

ALL THE TRIMMINGS "Elevate your table with things like these plates and tiered ceramic platters that are half black, half gold. Likewise, the agate napkin rings (left), which are from my new range at Myer as well. Those sorts of elements bring a sense of occasion."

GET FRESH "I do a love a Moscow Mule cocktail [ginger beer, vodka and mint], especially for entertaining—it's really fresh and relaxed—but the go-to is usually a jug of Aperol Spritz that we can serve on arrival. Cheeses and fresh seafood are a stylish summer touch for summer lunches."

KEEP FOLIAGE SIMPLE "I put Australian natives snipped out of our garden on the table because they're relatable and inviting. Hyams is surrounded by bushland but our garden has things that flower all year round, too—hydrangeas during winter and Japanese maple leaves when it's warmer. There's always something pretty to cut."

The Details

BE INSPIRED,
MAKE IT YOURS

SETTING THE TONE

Darren Palmer has mastered the art of creating a relaxed yet luxurious atmosphere to welcome his house guests.

"I like to focus on all the senses. I like the right music to be playing. I like everything that everyone interacts with to feel beautiful and tactile."

"I love simple food, great energy, a small guest list and a beautiful table"

—DARREN PALMER



"Adding elements like metallics and some cut leaves or flowers really softens the table and makes it look relatable, friendly and inviting" —DARREN PALMER

GIN AND ELDERFLOWER GIMLET

If you're a gin and tonic lover like Palmer, try this festive cocktail.

INGREDIENTS (Serves 2)

ice
60ml gin
60ml apple juice
10ml elderflower cordial
lime
sage leaves to garnish

1 Fill a cocktail shaker with ice. **2** Add the gin, apple juice, cordial and a squeeze of lime. **3** Shake it well, then strain it into a martini glass. **4** Garnish with sage leaves.

1 Domayne marble and brass coasters, \$34 (set of 4); domayne.com.au **2** Gordon Ramsay stoneware dinner plate, \$17.95; at royaldoulton.com.au **3** Georg Jensen polished stainless-steel cutlery, \$595 (set of 24); georgjensen.com **4** I Love Linen linen napkins (set of 4), \$39.95; ilovelinen.com.au **5** West Elm agate bookends, \$39 each; westelm.com.au **6** Vintage Letang & Remy silver-plated ice bucket with bakelite handles, \$475; at beckerminty.com; and Laurent-Perrier La Cuvee Champagne NV 750ml, \$70; at danmurphys.com.au **7** Nachtmann crystal glasses, \$99 (set of 4); at riedel.com **8** Aura linen throw, \$149; aurahome.com.au **9** Domayne brass and metal trolley, \$499; domayne.com.au **10** Darren Palmer stainless-steel bowl and ladel, \$89.95; at myer.com.au **11** Litala glass pitcher with two tumblers, \$299; iittala.com.au **12** Bloomingville iron flowerpot (used as vase), \$88; at amara.com **13** Cire Trudon scented wax candles, \$134 each; at netaporter.com **14** Ecology stoneware dining plate, \$16.95; at templeandwebster.com.au **15** Williams Sonoma marble cake stand, \$74; williams-sonoma.com.au **16** Sabre bamboo and stainless-steel salad servers, \$115; at beckerminty.com