

A home on the water — or the next best thing

I've always wanted a house on the water. I don't have one.

Twenty years ago, I had a house in California with a pool. More recently, during my stint as a live-in home stager, when I inhabited six houses in four years, I lived in a house that wasn't mine on a lake. Every morning I woke up to a lake view from my bedroom. I would look out at that calm water and feel lucky. I'd think, Look what I get to see! It never got old. At night, I would often sit on the porch until the sky grew so dark that the horizon disappeared, and the lake and sky became one.

However, when D.C. and I bought the Happier Yellow House five years ago, a water view wasn't high on our priority list. It wasn't on our list at all. Other factors, like location, number of bedrooms, access to good restaurants, price, a fenced yard for the dogs, were.

A few years later, when we re-did our landscaping, since I couldn't manifest a lake or ocean view, I lobbied for a pool. I lobbied hard. After all, we live in Florida, pretty much on the equator. In summer, it gets hotter than asphalt on Mercury.

"I've had a pool. I don't want another one," D.C. said. "They're too much work."

"I've had a pool, too," I said. "We can hire a service. Plus, swimming is good exercise."

"You never swim," D.C. said. I hate that he's so practical.

"I would if I had a pool!"

"Join the Y," he said, not kidding.

"But I want a pool just to look at," I said, "and to sit by with my feet up and a fruity umbrella



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drink."

"We'll put in a fountain. You can prop your feet on that. I'll bring you an umbrella drink."

Argh!

Our landscape designer drew up two plans, one with a pool, one without. We priced out both. We looked at not only the cost of putting in a pool (a lot), but also the upkeep, which surveys say runs between \$3,000 to \$5,000 a year for maintenance, repairs, electricity, and water.

I couldn't justify a pool, either, but that didn't stop me from wanting one. Not then. Not now. Some desires, including most of mine, are not rational. What's rational about diamond jewelry and designer handbags?

We put in a water fountain. Sigh.

Anyway, all this whining is to say that when I was offered the chance to review a new book, "At Home on the Water," by Jaci Conroy (Gibbs-Smith, May 10, 2022), I jumped on it. If I can't have a house with a water view, at least I can live voyeuristically through those who do.

The coffee-table-style book arrived. I pored over its 208 polished pages. I vicariously (and enviably) toured 12 coastal homes, ranging from a rustic

cottage in Nantucket, Massachusetts, to a grand, modern revival house in Palm Beach, Florida, to a Spanish Colonial in La Jolla, California.

"What inspired this book?" I asked Conroy, when I got her on the phone at her Boston home, where she lives with her husband, son, 11, and daughter, 9. Turns out, she does not have a home on the water, but does have a second home on Cape Cod within walking distance to the beach.

"The idea came during the early days of the pandemic," said Conroy, a writer and editor for home magazines and current editor of New England Modern magazine. "We were all home sitting with uncertainty and a lot of down time. I started asking myself, where would I want to be right now? And I started picturing the kind of home I personally was craving at the time."

Which is the kind of home I crave all the time.

She drew on her magazine connections for candidates to feature. Then did all her research, including interviews with owners, architects, and designers, remotely. "Each home in the book represents an escape," she said.

Her personal favorite is a home in Hyannis Port, Mass., featured in a chapter called "Past Presence." It speaks to her because "it's not too fancy, and it's move-in ready for a family with kids."

For those fortunate enough to live on the water, as well as those who just want to incorporate a waterfront vibe in their homes, Conroy offers these design tips:

• *Make the view the star.*

Never obscure a water view. A lot of the waterfront homes don't have any window treatments or the ones they have are minimal.

• *Tone down décor.*

Avoid any furnishings, including fabric, paint, or wallcoverings, that compete with the view.

"I am a fan of bold design and taking risk," Conroy said, "but in

a coastal home, I think you should tone that down."

The same holds true for lake view properties. "Any time you can see a body of water, maximize it. That's the reason for living there."

• *Capitalize on the colors.*

Pull the coastal colors inside. Using shades of white, off white,

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