



A sunny canal home reflects the beauty of nature with the colors of sea-glass blues and greens, understated furnishings in neutral fabrics, natural shell and stone accents, quirky finds and original artwork.

Artist-in-Residence

Interview with
Camilla Houghton

Photography
by Cindy Dyer

Left: The “lounge area” faces the water and is bathed in beautiful light from a bank of windows that face the canal. The furnishings are simple—white leather, linen and cotton pillows, warm wood and natural materials—such as this coconut shell coffee table, which hosts a collection of natural and ceramic shells. Two of Camilla’s paintings add her favorite colors—blue and green.

I have been friends with Camilla Houghton since 1986 and have enjoyed watching her transform every house she has inhabited. She is as fearless as I am when it comes to decorating. One afternoon I was visiting her small rental house in Alexandria, Virginia, when, in the middle of our conversation, she declared, “I must paint that fireplace. It’s just too blah!” We brainstormed and decided that periwinkle was the color of the day. I assumed we would head to the hardware store for paint, but she ran down to her basement, grabbed three buckets of paint and mixed up her own shade, right there on the spot. In under an hour, the fireplace became the focal point of the living room. She has since moved four times, most recently to a beautiful canal home in Sarasota, Florida, where I visited her last November.

You moved from a condo in Upper Marlboro, Maryland to the Laurel townhouse, then to the single family home in Annapolis. How did your decorating style evolve from each environ?

The condo had kind of a retro style. I installed black and white checked floors in kitchen and baths, painted the walls a pinkish peach, and added blue-green accents in upholstery pieces and painted furniture. The art was mostly vintage. The townhouse was decorated in a more Mediterranean style with hand-rubbed yellow ochre walls, country French and Italian furnishings, tone-on-tone fabrics, and golden neutrals. The Annapolis house was more eclectic.

How would you describe the style of your house in Annapolis? What were your favorite transformations in that house?

It started out as a 70s contemporary split level “Brady Bunch” house, and evolved into a contemporary eclectic home. The first thing we changed was all of the lighting to update the home. I found a beautiful gilt palm-leaf chandelier from Florence, Italy, for the dining room. We did some fun things there, like put in a slide from the basement stairs into the kids playroom, painted murals on the walls, installed a mosaic on the entryway floor, did a powder room with seashells embedded in the walls and an iridescent ceiling, then created an

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FORM & FUNCTION

"I love IKEA. I have metal and glass pieces from them as well as these cabinets and bookcases that Jim used to create the look of custom built-ins. The grid pattern of the bookcases works perfectly to house books, baskets of office and art supplies, and to display all kinds of objects." The focal point of the wall unit is one of Camilla's mixed media and acrylic paintings, a departure from her loosely-painted and colorful Florida landscapes and seascapes. Entitled "Dark Flight," the 24" x 24" painting won third place in a local art competition.





LIGHT-FILLED ATELIER

Stella keeps Camilla company in her studio. The open floor plan and furniture on casters allows Camilla to move things around on a whim. IKEA Expedit bookcases serve as an open divider and showcase some of her small paint studies and other objects d'art for inspiration.

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English pub complete with vintage door and handcarved transom. My husband's heritage is English, hence the inspiration for the pub. We used his family crest and castle on the carving. The room had a dart board, fireplace with a resin moose head, wet bar, travel souvenirs, a coaster-covered ceiling and my husband's baseball mementos all over the walls. We had great parties in that room!

My absolute favorite change was our master bath. We commissioned a tile mural on a visit to Portugal and had it installed above a beautiful air jet spa bathtub. The room had a modern but distinctly Mediterranean feel. It had limestone countertops, glass block, and a huge double shower. Very luxurious. Gorgeous.

Tell me about your day job.

Design is my love and graphics is my profession. I create logos and branding, annual reports, magazines, brochures, signage, all kinds of printed materials. I've worked for design studios in the past, but find working for myself and my client is best. I started my own design company in 1997. My designs are unique to the client and are current without being trendy.

So you moved to Florida for your husband's work. When you were house hunting, were there specific things you were looking for in a home?

Actually, Jim can live any place for work. The company he works for is based in the UK. It was more of a desire for change. He wanted his boat in the back yard, with palms trees swaying. When we decided

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HONING HER SKILLS

At right: Camilla has studied with artist Joseph Melancon. Her painting style has evolved into loose, colorful works reflecting the landscapes and seascapes found around Sarasota. She has also taken abstract classes with artist Fernando Madrijevos to broaden her skills. From the top: Caspersan Path, acrylic on canvas (14" x 18"); Ora Path, acrylic on canvas (18" x 24"); Ora Gold, acrylic on canvas, 16" x 20")



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to move to Florida, we looked at demographics—we have small children and wanted a town with lots of kids—and we wanted lots of water and culture for us. We found everything in Sarasota. It's a beautiful small city on the Gulf Coast, with water and islands, a lively art scene, and plenty of palm trees! We chose Siesta Key to search for our house. It has a laid-back island vibe that we love.

When house hunting, we were looking for a smaller home (the Annapolis house was huge), built with cement block (termites and hurricanes are a concern), a dock, easy access to the Gulf by boat, lots of light, close to the beach on a quiet street, and move-in ready. Many of the homes on the key were built in the 60s and have been remodeled or need to be. Because of the kids, school and our busy work schedules we had to find a home we could live in right away. I'm in love with contemporary architecture right now, but the style of the house wasn't as much of a concern.

How was the downsizing process from a large house to this smaller footprint?

Downsizing was liberating in the beginning. It felt good to let go of lots of heavy furniture and clutter that we didn't need. There were certain pieces I loved and had to bring with us. One of them is a handmade carved armoire from Indonesia. It was dark brown wood with a trace of hand-painted color. I loved it in my office

in Annapolis. It looked big and bulky in our new house. I considered getting rid of it, but decided to paint it white. It looks great now! I also had to bring my rough-hewn teak tables. They were also used in my office as art tables and a desk. One of them is now our dining room table. We paired it with low-backed white leather and chrome chairs. It looks awesome—still a favorite piece.

Another piece I brought was a huge antique oak dining table. I bought it because it reminded me of a table my grandmother had. It was the perfect family gathering place—perfect in my Annapolis dining room—but not so perfect here. It has a very warm homey feel, but just doesn't work in this small beachy house. It was one of many pieces we brought that didn't work. Most were easy to sell or donate, but the oak table is still waiting for a new home.

What type of architecture are you drawn to?

I am fascinated by mid-century and modern design. I love the clean lines and open spaces. Sarasota has many great examples of this architecture.

How many houses did you tour before you found this one?

We looked at countless houses. I flew down for house hunting trips, but didn't find the right house. We moved to Siesta Key without one. We packed up two cars, towed the boat with bikes inside, and loaded up the kids to spend the summer in a condo on the beach. We had two

months to find a house before school started and our lease on the condo ran out. We were work-ing with a realtor who searched tirelessly to find what we were looking for. We put contracts on four or five of them, but for some reason or another none of them worked out. She must have been exasperated by us. While out on a bike ride one day, I saw a "For Sale by Owner" sign on the lawn of this house. She couldn't believe it. "You've found your own house!" she exclaimed. She had worked so hard for us, we made sure she was fairly compensated.

Do you know anything about the original owners?

There were two previous owners and a "flipper." One of the owners added a room onto the back of the house which now serves as our master bedroom. It blends seamlessly with the rest of the house. The flipper bought the house, which had an original kitchen and baths, and updated them, installed stone floors, mouldings, and generally cleaned up the house.

How would you describe the style of this house?

I'd call it a chic beach cottage. We have references to the sea everywhere. You see the water when you walk in the house. It's a bit cottagey and a bit refined.

What was your first impression ?

We walked in the door and saw a nice wide water view through the back windows. The house felt bright and clean and ready

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BEACH HOUSE CASUAL

"I love the dining and lounge area. It faces the water, has huge windows for lots of natural light, and has furnishings I love. It's all white leather, warm wood, natural materials, like the coconut shell coffee table. It also has my capiz shell chandelier that makes a tinkling sound when the breeze blows through. It's beautiful."





SEA-INSPIRED VIGNETTES

Left: Decorative elements in the master bathroom take their inspiration from the sea with ceramic fish, real starfish and small shadow box "shellscapes" created by Camilla.

RESTFUL RETREAT

Right: One of Camilla's favorite pieces of art is an image of a Cuban dancer, photographed by family friend Isabel Chicquor. It hangs in the light-filled master bedroom, which overlooks the canal. The bedroom is her second favorite room in the house. Says Camilla, "It's a sanctuary. Light, clean lines, simple."



SUNNY SIDE UP

Left: Camilla's very whimsical "Sunny Side Up" series (acrylic on canvas, 24" x 36"; one of a pair), brighten two walls in the galley-style kitchen.



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for us. We immediately saw the possibilities in this house. Our kids ran around claiming bedrooms, everyone wanted a water view. Not all could have one, but we realized our neighbors have a Ferrari, so our son was content with the Ferrari view!

Did you immediately have a vision about what you wanted to do with the house?

I knew right away I wanted to create a comfortable beach house that had a bit of shimmer. I like reflective surfaces, so I planned on using lots of glass, metals, light colors and natural sea elements. The biggest challenge was deciding how to utilize the space. I had to carve an office and art space, family room, and dining area, all out of one large space. Furniture moved many, many times! I like to live in a space for a while before committing. We knew

right away where the dining table should be but all other spaces were up for grabs.

What changes did you make to the home after you moved in?

After we had lived in the house for a year or so, and I'd rearranged it countless times, we settled on a layout that flowed and worked for us. We then installed built-in cabinetry for the TV console, book, and art supply storage. I found a beautiful capiz shell chandelier for the dining area and ceiling fans to keep things cool. I painted the walls in the family room and kitchen a pale sea glass color. It's soothing and gives the house a nice cool feeling. Great for hot Siesta Key summers!

We expanded the patio with matching pavers, widened the front walk and driveway, and added a lovely path around the

house. I had to paint the exterior of the house as soon as possible. It was a peachy fleshy color that I couldn't stand. It's now a pale denim blue with bright white trim that works with the water, sky and bright light here on the key. I researched Bermuda house colors for my inspiration when choosing the blue for the exterior.

Do you choose a color for a particular reason?

I love color. I've found that even though I love bright color, I can't live with it. I'm a high-energy person, and feel better in a calm environment. I like to paint walls, which is good, because I change my mind, and have tried bright orange, green and blue walls. They feel great for awhile, but eventually feel too intense.

I love natural color, colors found in nature. A soft muted grassy green, sea glass blue, rocky neutrals. Florida is such a bright place that a few pops of color are enough for me now, either in artwork or as small accent pieces. I love bringing in single hibiscus flowers to brighten my desk or the kitchen counter. The blossoms are huge and exotic and only last a day or two, which makes them even more special. I have four different hibiscus colors in my garden, so I can pick depending on my mood.

Right now, sea-glass blues are all over my house. I can't get enough of it.

Do you have plans for more remodeling or decorating?

I'd like to open the kitchen up a bit more. We have large windows that face the back

of the house and pool. We're thinking about changing those windows to slide open to reveal a bar that is part inside, part outside. I want to add more glass to the kitchen with new backsplash tile. We need some kind of waterproof covering out on the back patio, either a pergola or lanai. Someday, we'd love to add a second floor to part of the house for a large art studio and guest space.

I'm planning to re-work the main living area again soon to allow for a larger art space. Our daughters love to craft and make art, and want to do it with me. I think the bright lounge area may soon be a studio!

Is Jim involved in the decorating decisions?

Thankfully Jim is almost always happy with my decorating and doesn't mind a surprise new color or repurposing of space. He cares and enjoys what I do, but doesn't usually have strong opinions himself. He travels extensively for work, and is gone many weekdays. When he gets home on the weekend, things may be very different! I tend to let an idea percolate for a while while I consider every side of it. Jim wants decisions made quickly. I'll run an idea by him, but most times I find it easier not to ask! However, expensive changes or improvements are decisions we make together.

What is your favorite room?

I love the dining and lounge area. It faces the water, has huge

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Coconut Breeze, natural palm fibers and acrylic on canvas, 20" x 24"

"I love natural color, colors found in nature. A soft muted grassy green, sea glass blue, rocky neutrals. Florida is such a bright place that a few pops of color are enough for me now, either in artwork or as small accent pieces."



Access 5, acrylic on canvas, 12" x 16"



Nolan, Camilla, Ellie (holding Stella) and Claire



- 1 Blue and green accents pop up all over the house in paintings, ceramic bowls and vases and pillow covers.
- 2 A tropical oasis frames the pool by the canal. A small, fenced yard located by the sitting area contains a small garden and play area for Stella, the family Yorkiepo.
- 3 Camilla's antique bronze fairy sculpture made the trek from Maryland to Florida and was transformed from a woodland fairy to a beach goddess with the addition of a shell-covered pink bra.
- 4 A capiz shell-covered lighting fixture is the highlight of Camilla's favorite room—the dining and lounge area overlooking the canal. Contemporary leather and chrome chairs combine with a worn wood table for texture and contrast.
- 5 The angelic faces of twins Claire and Ellie hide their rambunctious and mischievous personalities.
- 6 The master bedroom opens to poolside with this seating area.

- 7 A dresser in the master bedroom showcases Camilla's collection of eclectic rings, which was featured in the winter issue of *Celebrate Home Magazine*.
- 8 The front door, surrounded with starfish mobiles, welcomes guests with tropical landscaping surrounded by a rock bed.
- 9 Paintbrushes, ceramic glove molds and a revolving art gallery area are nestled into the built-in storage unit in the studio.
- 10 Collections of shells, both natural and ceramic, are clustered in bowls throughout the house.
- 11 A tufted headboard serves as a backdrop to fresh tropical linens in shades of blue, green and gold in the master bedroom.
- 12 Camilla's paintings are found throughout the house. "Sabal Inlet," a 14" x 18" acrylic painting on canvas, hangs in the master bath.
- 13 A ceramic water fountain is the latest addition to the front entrance.
- 14 Camilla with son Nolan



windows for lots of natural light, and has furnishings I love. It's all white leather, warm wood, natural materials, like the coconut shell coffee table. It also has my capiz shell chandelier that makes a tinkling sound when the breeze blows through. It's beautiful. My bedroom is my second favorite. It's a sanctuary. Light, clean lines, simple.

I love the wonderful IKEA built-ins in your studio.

I love IKEA. I have metal and glass pieces from them as well as cabinets and bookcases that Jim used to create the look of custom built-ins. The grid pattern of the bookcases works perfectly to house books, baskets of office and art supplies, and to display objects. I use one of them as a room divider for my office and art space in the family room. When I look up from my computer, I can see straight through to the water. Great solution. We also used IKEA elements in the kids' bedrooms to create tiki-style loft beds.



Woman on a mission—Camilla's favorite haunt is The Women's Exchange, Inc., in Sarasota.

What inspires you?

I'm inspired by the sunshine, palms blowing in the breeze, the sparkle of sunlight on the water, landscapes, nature, travel and art.

How would you describe your personal style?

Kind of quirky. I'm always changing and evolving. I thrive on change. I also love collecting.

Kitchy sculptures made of sea shells are charming on a shelf in the bath, glove molds, Mexican ceramic birds, real coral from antique stores, vintage ceramics, all kinds of things that strike me in form or color.

I also love old Florida style vintage bamboo furniture. I have a coffee table I found at a junk shop that I repainted glossy black for the family room. It adds a hint of the tropics to the room without being overpowering. My desk chair is a Goodwill find that I cleaned and reupholstered. I have to be careful because I love airy open spaces, but come home constantly with new finds.

You have many unusual paintings and illustrations throughout the home.

All of the art in my house is by myself, friends, or purchased from the artist. I have a few favorite pieces—one of them is a large photograph of a Cuban



This fantasy painting by Mihail Kivachitsky, a Russian-born artist in Sarasota, is one of Camilla's favorites. www.mishastarart.com

dancer made by my friend Isabel Chicquor. She was a college friend of my parents. I always admired her work and asked her opinion on mine every chance I got.

She came to visit in Annapolis after a show in New York City. She had done a one-woman show of some of her Cuban photography. I fell in love with this piece and bought it on the spot. It's an honor to own one of her major works. It hangs over our bed.

Never a dull moment in the Houghton household—Camilla, Stella and Nolan are in calm repose while the twins and friend Elena practice tumbling moves.

The other is a painting by a Russian artist who now lives in Sarasota. It's a fanciful work of a woman with sea grape leaves on her head and a flying fish in the background. It suits our home perfectly! My favorite newly-discovered plant is the sea grape, which I planted in our yard, and the mullet fish in the water behind the house that jump out of the water all the time. The painting hangs in the family room—you can look at it and see our sea grapes and fish at the same time. I love it!

If money were no object, what would you change next?

Let's see...a second floor studio with open air porches on front and back, raise the roof for a

bigger view out the back, a new ultra sleek kitchen, a luxurious master bath. I'm a big dreamer!

I hear you're the master of furniture rearranging.

I love furniture on casters so I can roll to a new position at a moment's notice. When I was still trying to decide how to purpose the space in the house, I wanted everything on casters. They drive Jim crazy. He doesn't want his furniture moving out from under him.

Where do you like to shop for home decor?

I love to shop consignment stores. I look for high-quality pieces, and get them at a fraction of their value. I've always been *continued on page 30*





AHOY, MATEY!

Left: Jim's boat is at-the-ready for an impromptu ride through the canal. "Jim and I have to pinch ourselves. We can take a walk on one of the most beautiful beaches in the world. The sand is cool and snow white and silky to the touch. The water is clear and bright turquoise. We used to take all of our vacations in tropical places, like Mexico and the Caribbean islands. Now we don't have to. We live on vacation! We can ride our bikes to the village for dinner, run and play on the beach, boat and fish, swim in the pool..."

LAIID-BACK STYLE

Right: The dining room/lounge room overlooks the pool and the canal.



thrifty, but also love the recycle-upcycle aspect of consigning. Also, if I don't pay much for an item, I don't mind painting it or replacing it. That works perfectly into my change-loving personality. I also love Home Goods and other discount/value-oriented shops. Many items are seconds, but after a month in my house they'd be seconds anyway! With a dog and three children, we don't need anything precious!

I love decorating magazines and design shows and absorb whatever I can, but use my own sensibilities to decorate. Trial and error is fun for me, and I'd rather make a mistake myself than pay someone else to do it!

What are your favorite shopping haunts?

The Women's Exchange is a great consignment shop for accessories and furniture, even an occasional piece of clothing. Proceeds go toward scholarships for local art students. I had my eye on a mid-century sofa recently. No room for it now, so I had to pass it up, but it was so cool and comfy. I'm waiting for my current family room sofa to die so I can replace it with something completely different. It's great for home accessories too. I've found art from other folks' travels, like my birds from Mexico and jade trees from Asia.

What is it like living by the water?

We love having the boat right outside the house. At a moment's notice we can pack a cooler, and head out for a day on the water



© Camilla Houghton

Jim and the kids enjoy fishing right off the boat in their backyard.

with the kids. Sandbars are especially fun. The water here is clear and shallow, so we can anchor the boat at a sandbar, swim, fish, catch crabs and other sea life (we let them swim in a bucket for inspection, then set them free), and enjoy the Florida sunshine.

Our canal is lively with many kinds of fish, sea birds and manatees. We have a wide area in the canal that's out of the flow that the manatees come to rest and play in. I've spent many afternoons watching them from the sea wall. They're amazing, huge, and gentle creatures. We have kayaks to enjoy the canals at a slower, close-up viewpoint.

Then there's "sand management." For the first year or so,

it seemed we had sand everywhere! We found it on the floor, on every towel, in every bag, on bikes, all over the garage, lining the washing machine, on the dog and in our beds. We have since put a large area rug in the garage that catches lots of it, a private outdoor shower—which is a luxury and a necessity—and shoes stay in the garage. It's not perfect, but helps us "manage" the sand.

Do you sometimes feel like you're on vacation because of laid-back vibe of Sarasota?

Jim and I have to pinch ourselves. We can take a walk on one of the most beautiful beaches in the world. The sand is cool and snow white and silky to the touch. The water is clear and bright turquoise. We used

to take all of our vacations in tropical places, like Mexico and the Caribbean islands. Now we don't have to. We live on vacation! We can ride our bikes to the village for dinner, run and play on the beach, boat and fish, or swim in the pool.

What has moving to Florida been like for the kids?

The kids missed Maryland, but as they've made good friends here, they love Florida. The only drawback now is the absence of snow. They love being able to play outside every day.

It must be fun gardening in a tropical climate.

I've learned a lot about palm trees since moving to Florida. The Sabal or Cabbage Palm is the Florida state tree. It's native and very hardy. We have clusters of them in the front of the house. We also inherited two gorgeous and massive queen palms. They are the prettiest ones I've ever seen. Jim loves coconut palms, so I planted a large one by the pool for his birthday. The cool thing about palms is they can be transplanted at a very mature age. You can instantly have full-grown trees in your yard.

We have some large bougainvillea plants on the side of the house. One over the outdoor shower is a beautiful hot pink. It also brightens my laundry room.

What do you like best about living in Florida?

The best thing about living in Florida is the bright sunny

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Above and right: Sarasota's lively arts scene inspires Camilla, particularly the annual Sarasota Chalk Festival, a ten-day cultural festival celebrating all forms of street and performance art. Last year's theme was "Circus City, USA." More than 500 artists participated, creating giant paintings in 3D and 2D using chalk as their medium and the road surface as their canvas.



weather. I live for light and color, and this place gives it to me. It makes it hard to stay inside and work. When we first moved here, I felt like I had spring fever all year long.

I also appreciate the lively art scene in Sarasota. There's always a new art exhibit, play or festival to attend. There are lots of galleries, Art Center Sarasota, co-ops and Towles Court which is an artist resident village. The Ringling Museum of Art has a very nice permanent collection and a full range of traveling exhibitions. The museum grounds include theaters (one of them was transplanted from Italy), the Ringling Ca' d'Zan Mansion and a circus museum. Great fun for the kids.

Art Center Sarasota is where I take my painting classes. A great venue for local artists. They hold juried exhibitions four to five times a year. I enter as often as I can. I've even won a few awards.

"The best thing about living in Florida is the bright sunny weather. I live for light and color, and this place gives it to me. It makes it hard to stay inside and work. When we first moved here, I felt like I had spring fever all year long."

The quality of local art is amazing and there are so many serious artists and artisans here. The annual Chalk Festival is spectacular. Chalk artists come from around the world to participate. We also have the Ringling College of Art and Design. I'm secretly hoping one of my children will be inspired to go there someday. I plan to take a course there soon.

How has the move inspired your creative pursuits?

I've been a visual artist my whole life, constantly trying new media and new styles all the time. I love learning new

processes and techniques. Since moving to Sarasota, I've taken acrylic painting classes with Joseph Melancon, and a workshop with Robert Burrige. They are both so good at what they do and so excited about it. They live and breathe painting.

I'm inspired by artists who can capture a landscape and its atmosphere in a way that's all their own. We just saw a show of California artist Gregory Kondos's work. He uses broad areas of color with more detailed areas, a light filled palette, lots of sky blue and pinks, greens, yellows—very appealing and inspiring. My work is still evolving—something between landscape and non-representational painting.

What creative projects do you have in works now?

I'm working on a mosaic to cover a new mailbox Jim built for me. The one we inherited was falling down, and I wanted a solid, never-tilting version.

I designed a column for an inserted vintage ballot box found on eBay. Jim built it for the holder out of cement block. It's now waiting for me to install the mosaic. The design for the mosaic was inspired by our environment—types of fish that live in the canal, mangroves, and water. The materials I'm using are scavenged (trash day can be treasure day) ceramic tile, sea shells, glass from broken wine bottles, marbles, glass bubbles, and traditional vitreous glass.

I'm also excited about working on drawings of some of my houseplants inspired by Jim Dine's plant art. They're rough and loose, but also botanical. He switched from pop art back to drawing toward the end of his career. I've always drawn and have the itch to hold some charcoal again.

I'll also continue painting with acrylics this summer. Paths are a recurring theme in my work; I plan to do a series of beach paths. I have a beach bike with a large basket on the front. I love to take it into the different beach accesses and photograph the paths. I like to go at different times of the day to catch the changing light. Some have flowing grasses, others sea-grape trees, some stored boats waiting for a sail. Paths have so many possibilities.

No room is complete without... art on the walls and an unusual accessory or two or three....and a comfy place to sit. **CHM**



Siesta High, acrylic on canvas, 16" x 20"



Siesta Mist, acrylic on canvas, 16" x 20", won honorable mention in a competition at the Art Center of Sarasota.

Right: Camilla's latest project is creating a sea-inspired mosaic mailbox column, incorporating recycled material such as broken pots, broken wine bottles and tiles.



Below: In their Annapolis home, Camilla created a mosaic "rug" for the front entrance.

