

# FRESH START

*Chef Emeril Lagasse and his family trade the hustle and bustle of Manhattan for the easygoing charm of Florida's Gulf Coast.*

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Antique French chairs and glittering chandeliers give the dining room a foundation of old-world elegance. Side chairs in a Fabricut fabric, armchair, and chandeliers, all Tara Shaw Antiques. OPPOSITE: A 19th-century Italian buffet; candelabra, Tara Shaw Antiques.



An oversize living room accommodates an eclectic mix of furnishings. Demilune table, Formations; sofa, Raymond Waites through Lovelace Interiors; secretary, David Sutherland Showroom; walls in Ballet White, Benjamin Moore. OPPOSITE: Table, Kreiss Collection; chandelier, Maitland-Smith through Lovelace Interiors.



**BAM! KICK IT UP A NOTCH! FEEL THE LOVE!** Such are the indelible catchphrases that helped make chef Emeril Lagasse one of the Food Network's brightest stars. These days, he's a perpetual-motion machine as well. The owner of 13 far-flung restaurants, he also has 18 cookbooks, an empire of licensed kitchen and food products, and new TV programming in the works. If he's not boarding a plane or disembarking from one, he's usually racing to keep up with a wild calendar.

In his case, home is not only where the heart is, it's where his sanity lies. So whenever he can, the über-chef flies home to this elegant house near Destin, Florida, to bask in its soft coastal aura. "It's my sanctuary, where we catch up, cook, and do fun things," he says of the spacious refuge he shares with his wife, Alden, and their two children.

Built in 1998 by Florida architect Thomas Christ, the beachy mansion has been the Lagasses' home base for the past four years, ever since they left Manhattan in the aftermath of a particularly brutal winter. Destin, a former fishing village on the Gulf of Mexico that has grown into a posh resort community, is still quiet. And it's just the right speed for Emeril's grocery-shopping jaunts in a golf cart.

He and Alden acquired the house in a family barter. The Destin-based decorator Susan Lovelace, who happens to be Alden's cousin and design idol, owned it but wanted to downsize. Lovelace and her husband swapped it for the Lagasses' smaller Destin house. Then Lovelace got on board as their decorator. "It was unbelievable," she says. "I got to do all the things I'd always dreamed of doing to this house, for people I just adore."

For an updated old-world feeling with undertones of Palm Beach style, she began by painting every room a color called Ballet White. The shade reminds Alden, who grew up on a Mississippi beach, of the beautiful

*“It’s my sanctuary,”* WHERE WE CATCH UP, COOK, AND DO FUN THINGS,” CHEF EMERIL LAGASSE SAYS OF HIS FAMILY’S FLORIDA REFUGE.



Countertops of Azul Bahia granite nod to the seaside setting. Refrigerator, Sub-Zero; stools, Bulthaup; island fittings, Elkay. OPPOSITE: Sofas in a Pollack fabric, Donghia; pillows in a Fabricut fabric; ottomans, Christopher Maier; cowhide, Lovelace Interiors; art, Jean Geraci.

creamy grays of oyster shells. Softly glowing travertine floors were original to the house; they still offer sand-colored richness and ease.

As for furnishings, Lovelace edited down the contents of two large houses that the Lagasses had moved out of—the New York place and a home in New Orleans—and pulled everything together into a relaxed yet glamorous statement. She re-covered nearly every upholstered item and added snap with custom-made furniture and contemporary pieces from her own design shop.

Each room holds the story of Emeril and Alden's romance. The painted French and Italian antiques, bejeweled Empire chandeliers, and old china and silver are simply things they love and have collected together. Accessories, such as the great white vellum books that have been pressed into service as pedestals and side tables, are emblems charting the course of a whirlwind courtship (she'd been his landlord) and 15-year marriage.

Those who consider the formal American dining room to be a moribund convention might want to listen up: Bam! This one's alive and kicking. "We entertain constantly," Alden says. "Besides meals for family and friends, we sell a lot of dinners at charity auctions. Emeril will cook here for six or more couples: elaborate seven-course meals with wine pairings. I'm the tabletop dresser and dishwasher. It's a lot of work, but we have a great time." □



**LEFT:** Beachy neutral tones dictate the sunroom's serene palette. Floor lamps, Oly Studio; antique chairs in a Pindler fabric and chandelier, Tara Shaw Antiques; coffee table, Studio A through Lovelace Interiors; Roman shades from Conrad. **ABOVE:** Antique German commode; mirror, Bella Beach. **OPPOSITE:** Custom bed, David Sutherland Showroom; monogrammed pillows, Leontine Linens; sunburst mirror, Tara Shaw Antiques; pendant, Fortuny through Lovelace Interiors. For more details, see Sourcebook.

