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## Cool on the Coast

New England designer Kristina Crestin dishes on her starting place for a palette, dressing bare walls with style, and the decorating mistake you can't afford to make.

**Kristina Crestin** didn't intend to become a vintage-glass fanatic, a lighting evangelist, or a go-to guru for gallery walls. But when you have an undeniable knack for something, it's generally best to let your strengths lead you to success. And that's exactly what Crestin did after graduating from Massachusetts' Endicott College. She spent several years on the more technical side of design, working at a firm outside of Boston on small- and large-scale projects before starting a decorating department within the company.

Clearly at home in the world of decor, Crestin quickly found herself fielding friends' and associates' requests for help designing and decorating their homes, and in 2009, she struck out on her own. Now based in a breezily decorated former train station in the coastal town of Manchester-by-the-Sea, [Kristina Crestin Designs](#) tackles residential projects from Boston to Maine and beyond, and the founder's clean,

coastal-tinged style has quickly amassed fans. Intrigued by Crestin's fresh take on family spaces and how she intertwines clients' tastes with her own, we went one-on-one to learn more. Read on for the Q&A.



***As a New England-based designer, it's clear you're influenced by the coast. What's your take on using ocean-inspired materials and colors without going into theme territory?***

I'll admit I have a problem with vintage glass and turquoise...I use them everywhere! I recently had a client who joked, "Okay, Kristina, what are we going to do that's not turquoise?" It's all over in my own home. But really, when I'm designing for a client it's not about me. It's about them and their intentions. We don't usually start with a color or object, but what mood the client wants to create. On a recent project, my client told me "we want it to feel casual but elegant at the same time," so that was the starting place for our designs. Of course, when you happen to be working at a seaside home the mood is often influenced by the coastal surroundings. But we go through the same process if it's a city house, a camp in the woods, or anywhere.

***Once you've settled on a mood, what's a common starting place for choosing products?***

We often start with a statement wallpaper, a textile, or a rug—we start so many rooms with the rug. It can be much harder to find what you're looking for in a rug than other elements of a room. There are many more options for paint colors, upholstery fabrics, et cetera. A client's rug choice can also tell me a lot about their style: Traditional or modern? Casual or formal? I often start a project with a joint rug-shopping trip. We flip through piles as a fact-finding mission. As I point out the details and nuances of each, I like to



see how they react.



***What was the starting place for this aqua and blue living room?***

The client and I found an amazing Martyn Lawrence Bullard printed fabric, but the budget didn't allow us to put it everywhere. We decided to incorporate it via the Roman shades on the windows and build the rest of the room's palette from there. It's all about finding something that really speaks to the homeowner and then building on it.

***Speaking of building one item into a complete look, gallery walls have definitely become an expertise of yours. How do you approach putting one together?***

I've done so many gallery walls over the years, and each one is different. When I first started doing them, I'd map everything out very precisely, laying out the design on the computer first. These days, my team and I are more likely to buy loads of frames and figure it out on-site. We may sketch it out to scale first, focusing on a few core pieces, but we always buy some extra frames and just start building it out from the center for a really natural, collected look.

***Any advice for a gallery-wall novice?***

First, think about the concept. What's the intent of the wall? What's the mood of the space? A formal space might call for a lot of coordinated frames and professional photos, while a more casual space can

use a little more whimsy and more candid shots. In personal spaces, I like to incorporate old family photos, letters, and other one-of-a-kind objects. That's not to say everything has to be an heirloom, however. I did a wall where I mixed old family photographs with vintage postcards I found at a local shop. They're not as meaningful, but they fit the theme and the concept and still look great.

When you're ready to put it together, buy a bunch of empty frames—more than you think you'll need. Remember that for every big item, you'll need a bunch of small items to balance it out. You may end up with a stack of frames to use somewhere else in the house, but that's good—everything will feel pulled-together.



*We're always hearing about using "pops of color," but getting those pops right can be harder than it sounds. How do you play with color around a room?*

Repetition is key—just repeating a color once in a room can make it make sense. One time, I had a client who really loved the color salmon but didn't tell me, because she didn't think it fit into the palette we were working on. When I found out, I said *Great! Let's add it to the powder room!* We commissioned this little modern piece of art—I found an artist, gave her a paint swatch, and had it made—and then we used the same color on the shades of the wall sconces. Since we used it twice, it didn't look arbitrary.

*What's your favorite aspect of designing a room?*

I love layering textures, even more than I like layering patterns. Whether I'm working more modern or

coastal, it's really important to consider the texture of the carpet, the sofa, the pillows, and the woods, and aim for a cohesive mix.

***And what do most non-designers overlook?***

A lot of people skip over lighting. I, on the other hand, find myself layering in more decorative lighting every year! It's the jewelry of a room, and it adds a level of finish or polish to a space. And I can't say enough about hanging artwork and doing all those other "small" things that really finish up a space. if you're going to go to the trouble of designing a room, try not to give up or get distracted before it's actually done, or you won't be able to sit back and enjoy the results of your hard work. Keep your projects small, and don't take something on if you can't finish it. I want all of my clients to really enjoy their finished spaces.



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