



Travels in Scandinavia inspired homeowner Carol Estes to cover the once-peach exterior with charcoal paint. "I remembered seeing those black cabins stark against the white snow in Sweden and Norway. I thought it was so striking," she says. The dark shell contrasts with an all-white interior. "Even though we're in the mountains, and it's kind of rustic, it still has my signature clean look."

INTO THE WOODS

In search of a peaceful haven, a Southern California designer returns to the forests of her youth.

WRITTEN BY KELSEY LEPPERD PHOTOGRAPHED BY EDMUND BARR PRODUCED BY KAREN REINECKE

RIGHT Tongue-and-groove natural pine ceilings and new wood floors from Duchateau join woven textiles to lend the small cabin texture and an organic aesthetic. "Using natural materials has always been important to me," Carol says. "That's my style." **OPPOSITE** Though the place is cozy even with two, Carol has housed up to six when her daughter and grandchildren come to visit. "The window seat is actually the exact size of a twin bed," she says. "My grandkids sleep there—it's the favorite sleeping spot."



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AS A CHILD, CAROL ESTES often went with her parents to Idyllwild, a mile-high California town in the San Jacinto Mountains engulfed by acres and acres of national forest. Carol spent the summers of her childhood there, roaming the forest and riding horses. Fast-forward to 2014. When Carol's mother passed, the San Diego-based interior designer had the desire to be surrounded by the forest once again. She convinced her husband, Lee, to take the two-hour drive up the long and winding highway, her first visit since her teenage years. The car wheels had barely rolled to a stop when Carol announced she wanted to buy a cabin.

When Lee heard the announcement, he told her to hold off and wait a year, then they could go back and see. But a year was way too long a stretch for Carol. "I'm a rogue wild card," she says. She went back alone the very next

week and, after exploring properties deeper in the woods, she entered the cabin she would buy by day's end. "My jaw just dropped," she says. "It was so perfect."

The 820-square-foot cabin was actually less than half a mile from the center of downtown Idyllwild, a town of about 3,000 permanent residents that's loved perhaps as much for its famous art scene as for its stunning natural backdrop. This little shingled house offered the best of both—towering pines sheltering it, Strawberry Creek trickling through the forest floor, and art galleries and world-class restaurants a short walk away.

Though the exterior needed a fresh coat of paint and the interior walls were coated in a retro orange, the cabin's simple charms still lured her in. "When I'm looking at a new home purchase, I never pay attention to the color of the walls," she says. "I look at the bones. I look at the light."



ABOVE Nearly every room in the cabin has been remodeled to reflect Carol's natural, modern-rustic style, but she started with the kitchen. "I wanted that room to be really special," she says. "That's where you walk in, where you do most of your living, so I wanted that magnificent room to look even better." White subway tile, white Carrara marble counters, and a skylight brighten the once outdated space. **OPPOSITE TOP** This grouping just inside the front door announces Carol's fondness for minimalism. **OPPOSITE BOTTOM** After picking up reclaimed wood from local Vintage Timberworks for her floating shelves, Carol spent a day or more sanding and staining, "so I could show my contractor exactly the look I wanted. It was a lot of work." The Bertazzoni range adds just a touch of utilitarian style.

Even the cabin's small size was a virtue. "I bought the cabin to be my personal getaway," says Carol, owner of her firm. Before long, Lee saw the beauty of the purchase too. The quaint, Scandinavian-inspired cabin quickly became an introvert's wonderland for her husband to unwind and explore his newfound love of pottery. "He gets to spend more time there now than I do," she says.

For Carol, her time at the cabin provides a sense of freedom. "You're not answering to anybody. I can hike when I want, eat when I want, and create when I want," she says. But the two-bedroom cabin's limited space didn't allow for that same freedom when it came to decorating—at least in the beginning.

Eventually, the space constraints themselves became a positive force. "You have to try everything you can," Carol says. "You keep drawing until you get it right, and it pushes you to be even more creative." Smaller appliances like a compact refrigerator were an easy fix. The small bathroom, however, required a do-over. Carol replaced the fixtures,



opting for a small, freestanding bathtub and a wall-mounted sink to create the illusion of a bigger space.

Other changes were straightforward. "Right away, I painted everything white," Carol says. "I wanted that stark contrast of a bright, open interior and the dark exteriors I'd seen on my travels in Sweden." She also removed the uppers on the kitchen cabinetry to create a lighter feeling, and she found just the right antique pine dining table that contributes to creating distinct spaces in the open floor plan. Minimalistic dining chairs that nearly vanish complete the look.

After five years of ownership, the cabin has become a true getaway for the creative spirit. From using century-old doors as a headboard to showcasing her husband's personal pottery collection, Carol realized her primary goal for designing and remodeling this artist's haven: "I wanted to fill the space with as many handcrafted, vintage, and natural materials as I could," she says, "and maybe a little IKEA." □

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ABOVE "A freestanding bathtub is just a real treat," Carol says of the streamlined Fleurco tub in her remodeled bathroom. To create a spacious feeling, the ceiling was raised to match that of the roof's angle, and a larger window was added to let in more of the morning light.

RIGHT A vanity would have created a visual roadblock in this small space, so Carol opted for a chic custom wall-mounted sink crafted by Stanley Artisan Concrete.



THIS PHOTO Purchased in an antiques store in San Diego's Little Italy district, century-old doors were stripped, sanded, and painted to create this custom headboard. "I had those doors for eight years before I figured out how to use them," Carol says of her handiwork.



"SORT OF ON A WHIM, I FELT LIKE I NEEDED TO BE IN A FOREST. MY MOTHER LOVED THE FOREST AND INSTILLED THE SAME PASSION IN ME."

—CAROL ESTES



ABOVE The couple added a deck that would give them a front seat to the exquisite natural surroundings. Strawberry Creek runs just below the property. "After the winter, it roars down there," Carol says. "You can hear it inside, even with the doors shut. You have everything you want: the water, the close trees, and then the tree-covered mountain off in the distance."
OPPOSITE TOP Inspired by the strewn-about look of the forest floor itself, a casual arrangement of natural items serves up color and texture on the outdoor table. **OPPOSITE, BOTTOM LEFT** Painting the taxidermy plaque the same color as the home's exterior creates drama by allowing the trophy to stand out. **OPPOSITE, BOTTOM RIGHT** Carol and Lee's fence might appear to be split rail, but it's made of complete logs from the cedar and pine trees found in their backyard.