

LEAH BAILEY
BRINGS
CREATIVE
DESIGN
TOUCHES TO
BLUFFTON

Cultivating A LOWCOUNTRY LIFESTYLE

BY VICKIE MCINTYRE | PHOTOS BY RUTHE RITTERBECK



Looking for someone who's got an eye for blending and building upon classic Lowcountry elements? Look no further than interior designer Leah Bailey of Savannah. Her boutique design firm can handle everything from curating the look of a new home to refurbishing an old apartment or updating a worn-out bungalow.

"There's no one word to describe my style," she laughs. "It's timeless, beautiful and coastal—but not kitschy. I've honed my taste into having a little European influence with a Southern twist."

More importantly, it's livable.

"All of my interiors are very light, bright, and neutral, and most of my fabrics are indoor-outdoor materials. Everything can be cleaned," she said. "I want my clients to look at their husbands when they come back from a day of hunting in their camouflage and say, 'Sit down, have a bourbon, and enjoy the day.'"

Bailey's eye for style extends to the Lowcountry. In July 2020, she opened The Shop on May River Road in Old Town Bluffton, a boutique that also houses a small design studio.

Her path to the Lowcountry started in Michigan, where she was born, but Bailey moved to Savannah at an early age and calls herself a "Southern Yankee." By 4 she was spending a lot of time with her aunt and her aunt's husband, a man who renovated houses.

"We'd go into these dilapidated houses, furniture auctions, and antique stores. I was exposed to things most kids aren't at a very young age," she says. "I understood it and loved it."

After attending The Women's College of Brenau University in Gainesville, Georgia, for 2 1/2 years, Bailey transferred to the Savannah College of Art & Design.

"I was able to get this strict interior design education at Brenau and then more of the art history and decorative arts from SCAAD. Plus, I was back in Savannah," she says. "It's where my roots were."

Growing up around magnificent old architecture, playing in landscaped parks and even living in an old beach house for a while on Tybee Island, Bailey says she didn't truly understand how beautiful and charming the area was until she left.

Now she draws upon that inspiration as she guides clients to choose palettes, textures, and accessories to design their homes.

Twenty-two years ago she started Leah Bailey Interiors and quickly became the go-to designer for homes in Palmetto Bluff in Bluffton as well as The Landings on Skidaway Island and neighborhoods in Savannah.

Her creative touches have been featured in magazines like Better Homes and Gardens, Country French, Savannah Homes, and The Cottage Journal.



"I'm all about mixing finishes," she notes about her unique style. "Just because you have a polished nickel faucet doesn't mean the lights or the cabinet handles have to be the same material. If it's done right, it makes sense."

Insisting that she never wants to become a massive design firm, Bailey takes pride in her "hands-on" approach to doing business. Always confident about her ability to pull together everything from colors to lighting to the scale of furniture, Bailey understands it can be terrifying for clients.

"You go from that part of promising it's going to look great," she says of those first meetings, "to the end of the project, the reveal, when the client walks in and says, 'Oh my God! You were right – it works.'"

Bailey said her clients had urged her to open her boutique shop in Bluffton.

"People always want to add things to their house," she says. "Because I've curated the shop the same way I curated their houses, they can come in and buy something knowing it's going to look great."

If opening a new business during COVID wasn't challenging enough, five months later she was diagnosed with stage 3 breast cancer.

"It was definitely a year of growth and change, but also struggle. If I made it through that, I can survive anything," she reflects, describing her year-long stint of treatments and working from a distance as her team handled the day-to-day operations.

Now cancer-free, she hopes locals and tourists alike will stop by her Bluffton shop and introduce themselves.

"There's something for everyone, whether it's for your dog, your grandmother, a hostess gift or for your own home," she emphasizes, adding that prices range from \$10 to \$3,500 for the most expensive artwork.

After hosting several popular pop-ups, she's also added apparel to her boutique.

"So now it's not just an interior shop; it's a lifestyle," she says. "It's been fun." 