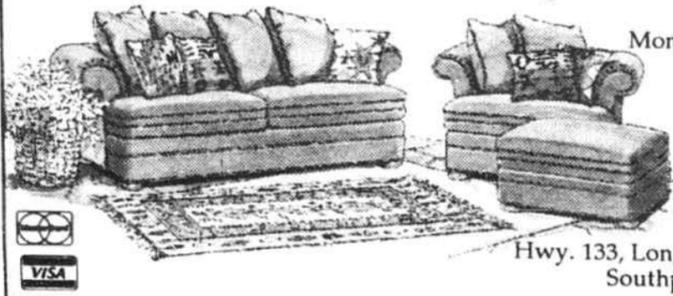


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A KITCHEN, dining room and living area all open to each other is the center of interest in this two-story duplex Gay Atkins shares with family, friends and tenants.

Photo by Marjorie Megivern

Beach Home Provides The Perfect Retreat From Atkins' Busy Social And Business Life

(Continued From Page 32)

there is also a natural, "undecorated" beauty about it. Even the little coffee tables, paint peeling from their legs, are just right. Two guest bedrooms with baths, securely locked for occasional tenants, adjoin this downstairs area, along with a half-bath.

Atkins' own hideaway is upstairs, over the living room. Here her offbeat artistry is evident in a wall of paintings and the mix of furniture. "I'm still working on this," she said, "trying to decide how I want it." A doorway opens into her bath, almost as large as the bedroom and every bit as liveable. There's a dark green, claw-footed bathtub from another era, a dresser, table and a big wicker rocker, unraveling in places. "We call it character," Atkins' chuckled.

That word aptly describes the whole place, as do words like artsy, beachy and homey....all of them are appropriate for this four-bedroom, four-bath, two-half-bath, multi-faceted house inside a most attractive facade. The two-story, white-frame, green-shuttered exterior gets your attention as you cruise down Ocean Blvd., especially the spires of fiery canna that march down the front walk. Despite the large living space contained inside, it's efficient and compactly designed.

The Virginia-born Atkins confesses to a life-long interest in art

"But I do love having dinner parties, and my son brings home friends at Christmas."

and design. "In New Jersey," she said, "I shared an art studio with a friend and used to do some painting. Then, in 1971, I worked for a Greensboro builder and did most everything about building houses, including decorating for buyers."

It was a Greensboro builder who is responsible for her current Holden Beach address. "He showed me a couple of his houses here," she explained, "and since I grew up on a beach in Virginia, I've always been attracted to living on the beach so I made the move."

Atkins recalled with amazement the ticket prices on houses and lots in the early 80s. "I bought my first lot, with ownership of half the duplex on it, all for \$62,000," she said, "and oceanfront homes then were selling for about \$120,000."

Whether sharing her duplex with tenants, relatives, or simply with her charcoal gray cat Samantha,

Atkins is almost too busy to enjoy it in leisurely fashion. "I get out on the beach maybe twice a year," she laughed. "But I do love having dinner parties, and my son brings home friends at Christmas...that's another good use of separate apartments. They have their own quarters and they make casseroles for me, too. I like that kind of guest."

Son Kent lives nearby in Wilmington, while another, Scott, is a Floridian and gets home once a year.

Atkins is kept busy, not only by her real estate work, but by community service. Since 1985, she has served on the Holden Beach Board of Commissioners, a job she said she treasures, despite its difficulties. She is also presently co-chairperson with Pat Sandifer of this year's Festival by the Sea and is about to take her place on the Hospice Advisory Board. "I'm also helping with Day at the Docks that's being planned for sometime next March," she said. This event involves ferrying participants in boats from dock to dock, where they are treated to entertainment and food.

These projects explain Atkins' interrupted bedroom decoration and her spectator role on the beach. Fortunately, at the end of busy days, she has one of Holden's most comfortable, appealing places to kick off her shoes and enjoy "home, sweet home."

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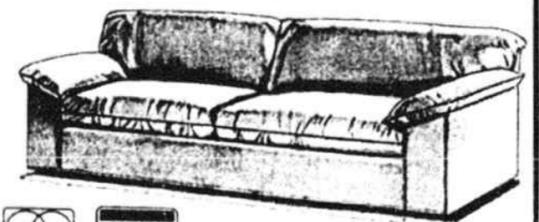
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