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SHOPPING WITH MAUREEN FOOTER

Putting the Riviera in the Rental

Creating an environment that lets you focus on what's really important: relaxing.

By SUZANNE SLESIN

FOR many people, moving into a summer rental means throwing a sheet over the lumpy sofa or rushing out to the hardware store and stocking up on plastic tumblers and paper plates.

But there is a better way. Maureen Footer, a New York decorator, is no stranger to the challenges of renting less-than-perfect summer places, and she has come a long way from the time she spent a month with only 25-watt bulbs in a 1910 house on an island in Lake Champlain.

Even in temporary homes, she aims for elegance, a quality that was much on display in a model apartment she decorated at Manhattan House, 200 East 66th Street. It is still on view for prospective buyers.

But "that does not mean you have to have organdy cocktail napkins," said Ms. Footer, who grew up in San Francisco in a 1920s Italianate villa with nine bedrooms, a ballroom and a flower-arranging room. Elegance means creating "a certain ease and efficiency that allows you to focus on what's really important," she said.

Folding card tables, broken chairs, poor reading lights and shabby towels are simply not relaxing, she said.

That may explain Ms. Footer's approach to fixing up a summer rental with the peppy precision of a five-star general in a uniform of a pleated skirt and Manolos.

Some of her ideas for making a temporary perch a real home are inexpensive, but others are not, and are meant to be saved.

"I believe in investing in things with an eye to bringing them back to one's city life at the end of

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MICHAEL FALCO FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

POTENTIAL Maureen Footer at the CB2 store in SoHo, with the \$3.95 Libertini glass.

Riviera in the Rental

For Summer Living, Easy Elegance



GOOD LIGHT

Maureen Footer liked several lamps at Georgin Tapert Living in SoHo: one of leaf-shaped papier-mâché, and this one, shaped like an artichoke, for \$585, at 456 Broome Street, (212) 334-7969.

ABOVE AND TENTED PAVILION, PHOTOGRAPHS BY MICHAEL FALCO FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

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the season," she said.

Focusing on a French theme for her theoretical vacation rental (in deference to the time she spent in graduate school at the Louvre in Paris), Ms. Footer chose a blue and white color scheme. "In the country those colors are versatile and fresh, and in the city they become neutrals and look great with terra cotta, peach, beige, green or yellow," she said.

Doing up the bedroom topped her list. "No matter what people leave you, it will not be fit for a princess," Ms. Footer said. "I can only sleep on white percale sheets," she added.

She chose Egyptian cotton bedding, known for its softness, from a Web site that benefits the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation. "That's even more important than the thread count," she said. The line is mostly white with a lovely sprinkling of blue flowers. "Doesn't it look a little like Porthault?" she said, referring to the fancier and more princess-priced linens.

And because nothing is more annoying than not being able to see well enough to read in bed, Ms. Footer felt that a leaf-shaped papier-mâché table lamp from Georgia Tapert Living in SoHo would be wonderfully worthwhile, not only because it accommodated a 75-watt bulb but because some of the proceeds from its sale benefit the Haitian artisans who made it. One by the same artisan, with a base shaped like an artichoke, was good for the living room.

A trip to Broadway Panhandler in Greenwich Village produced a six-inch Wüsthof Classic knife and white fluted soufflé dishes. "They're also great for serving salads," she said. She also had to have the souvenir of Paris dish towels with the Eiffel Tower. "Adorable," she said. "And you save on paper towels."

But what's a vacation if you can't entertain

in style? Or as Ms. Footer put it: "Doesn't summer living revolve around cocktails?"

At CB2, on lower Broadway, she made a bee-line for the large Libertinis. The cone-shaped glasses were, she thought, just right for a one-martini-per-guest party, but also for serving sorbet, berries or even cereal.

On the Web she came across a folding bar tray. "It shouts summer on the Riviera with Cole Porter," Ms. Footer said. And when the season ends, it will fit into any décor.

As for the china, if it is chipped, mismatched or inadequate for guests, steps must be taken, and the choices need not be costly.

Ms. Footer has always loved the basic blue-and-white-striped dishes from Pearl River, on Broadway in SoHo, which come in more than two dozen shapes and sizes and range in price from \$4.50 for a small bowl to \$30.50 for a teapot (212-431-4770, pearlriver.com). She thinks the Jasper Conran Chinoiserie bone china plates are the basis for a memorable summer dinner and will look great at Thanksgiving too.

If the garden is neglected, Ms. Footer says, why not invest in a fabulous tented pavilion that can be disassembled at summer's end? Add a few solar-powered jars and you'll be all set for drop-ins, rain or shine. After lunch, the decorator suggests, gather the group for a lively game of pétanque, a Provençal version of lawn bowling.

To add to your French vocabulary over the weekend, she found just the right thing: a shower curtain from Target that translates some of the words that come in handy on trips. As soon as you arrive, épuisé (exhausted), of course, put your feet up on the canapé (couch), grab a few bonbons (candy) or a plate of fromage (cheese) and enjoy your week-end (weekend).