

shopkeeping





The White WAY

*Vintage accessories,
an ocean breeze and lots of white
make this the de rigeur
romantic shopping destination*

BY REBECCA J. RAZO

TUCKED BETWEEN SEAL BEACH TO THE north and Huntington Beach to the south, Sunset Beach, a 100-year-old unincorporated community, defines the very essence of coastal living. Occupying a mere 1.1-mile stretch of California's Pacific Coast Highway, it's not unusual to see locals track sand with their flip-flops into the tiny post office where they pick up their mail, or watch as a parade of burley Harley-Davidson riders drop in for breakfast at the Harbor House Café on Sunday morning. But this is just a small part of the community's charm and appeal. In fact, a trip to Sunset Beach isn't really complete without a visit to Cottage White.

(Left and above) Passersby can't help but ogle the beautiful wares at Cottage White. Vintage china, crystal and silver-plate items are staples among the shop's offerings.

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UNLESS YOU'RE DRIVING THROUGH town in the dead of night, Cottage White is hard to miss. The c. 1923 residential cottage-turned-shop has a unique front deck facing the well-traveled highway. This is where the shop's owners John and Tamra Morrow display some of their best merchandise. At any given time, passersby can see Cottage White's signature white furniture, giant tin stars, crystal tealight chandeliers, ironware and other romantic home décor accents outside on display—just a small sampling of the shop's lovely offerings. Inside the pastel-hued cottage are two rooms brimming with appliquéd cabinets, tables and dressers; vintage china and silver; pretty chandeliers and sconces; and a host of other accessories—more than enough to satisfy the impulses of even the most romance-addicted shoppers.

John, Tamra, and John's daughter Shareen opened Cottage White in 1995, after a decade of developing their furniture's look and selling to a few well-known shops. "One day on my way home to Huntington Beach, I spotted a small beach cottage on Pacific Coast Highway that was for sale in Sunset Beach," says John, a retired underground utilities contractor since 1984. "I immediately knew that this cute little cottage would be perfect for our look. We scraped the money together with really only our dream and what we felt was a wonderful product line in hand."



Crystal knobs adorn many of the refinished furniture pieces in the shop.

VISITING SUNSET BEACH

WHERE TO DINE

Captain Jack's Seafood Restaurant

16812 Pacific Coast Hwy.

(562) 592-2514

Waterfront fine dining
in a casual atmosphere.

Harbor House Café

16341 Pacific Coast Hwy.

(562) 592-1425

harborhousecafe.com

A favorite spot among the locals.
Open 24 hours a day, 365 days a year.

Blackboard Bistro

1198 Pacific Coast Hwy.

Seal Beach

(562) 596-9556

blackboardbistro.com

Two minutes north of Sunset Beach.
Serves breakfast, lunch and
dinner made from scratch daily.

WHERE TO STAY

Sunset Beach Bed and Breakfast

16401 Pacific Coast Hwy.

(562) 592-1666

sunsetbeachbedandbreakfast.com

Comfortable B&B steps from beach.

For more information about
Sunset Beach, visit
beachcalifornia.com/sunset.html

While the Morrows knew that they had found their perfect little shop, they had no idea it would take so much work getting it established. "What I didn't know was how difficult it would be to change the zoning from residential to commercial," John recalls. "After much wrangling with the county and adding parking, front decks, fencing, a brick patio, architectural details and some other personal touches, we opened on July 4, 1995."

To find the shop's inventory, the Morrows scour flea markets, auctions, estate sales and other unique locations throughout the country. They also rely on a network of scouts to buy product. Handpicking vintage furniture, however, is just one of a number of painstaking details relative to producing the pieces for which Cottage White is known.

This romantic table setting in the center of the room sets the shop's dreamy atmosphere.





Cottage White's
ONE-OF-A-KIND WARES

Armoires

China cabinets

Craftsman-style cabinets

Dressers

Hall trees

Mantels

Mirrors

Nightstands

Victorian rose paintings

Vintage china and silver-plate items

Vintage china is a favorite among the shop's customers.





(Above) A vintage chandelier casts a soft glow over the bed and nightstand in the pink room.

(Opposite) 1. While not vintage, these keys are a fun decorating accessory. Here, they hang from an antique dentist's cabinet. **2.** This fountain would look fabulous in any garden. **3.** You never know what treasure you will find in the courtyard. **4.** These antique seltzer bottles are one of several unique finds at the store.



“We have a warehouse in Signal Hill. This is where the magic happens thanks to our warehouse foreman Miguel Pantaleon and his staff,” John says. “After we find a piece, it is sent to the warehouse where repairs are made and appliques are applied, if necessary. We use composite appliques that are period authentic. The furniture is fitted with glass knobs to add to the continuity of the look, and, of course, painted in our custom white.”

From there, the furniture is transported to its new, albeit temporary, location where it blends in seamlessly with the store’s atmosphere, created in part by Tamra and the shop’s manager, Stormy. “Even though Tamra has a full-time job, she has always found time to give her inspirational input and to help in design work and decorating,” John says with pride. “She and Stormy give it romantic ambience and always keep the shop fresh and inviting.”

Behind the store, a brick courtyard with a gate that opens out onto Pacific Coast Highway displays the shop’s special selection of wrought iron furniture and accessories, vintage garden items, concrete statuary, Adirondack-style furniture and other one-of-a-kind items. An open storeroom also displays several finished pieces of furniture that don’t fit inside the cottage.

While running the shop is a lot of work, the Morrrows ultimately feel that the experience is rewarding. And John is quick to give credit where credit is due. “Cottage White is and always has been a collaborative and team effort by each and every person who is now, or has been in the past, a part of the Cottage White family. We are deeply grateful for their contributions to our success and longevity.”

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 and Pacific Coast Hwy.
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 Sunset Beach, CA 90742
 (562) 592-4678
 cottagewhite.com

PHOTOGRAPHY BY JAIMEE ITAGAKI
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