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A Refuge Rewritten

WITH THE PAST AS ITS MUSE, A STATELY SECOND
HOME ON THE SOUTH CAROLINA COAST BECOMES
A RETREAT FOR CONTEMPORARY TIMES.

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Tucked behind a ramble of untamed Kiawah Island dunes and swept by salted Atlantic breezes, a stately residence stretches across a triple lot on the South Carolina coast—a site simultaneously grand, yet intimate. Cueing to the celebrated Shingle-style architecture of the Northeast—namely the illustrious Montauk and Southampton dwellings of McKim, Mead & White—architect Roger Seifter had authored the home’s original plans back in 1996, so he was already intimately familiar with the building when the new owners asked him to return for its recent renovation.

Hoping for a project with twin familiarities, the couple happily tapped Tammy Connor, their designer of more than 12 years, for the interiors. “Each time we have worked with Tammy, we’ve found the process enormously rewarding,” the wife expresses. “We have developed a shorthand in our process, and this comes from her knowing that we want our homes to be warm, welcoming and easy.”

Although the project marked Seifter’s first time working with the clients, he understood their needs just as innately. “They wanted a team with a historic knowledge of the house and an empathy for it,” explains the architect, who experienced quite a case of déjà vu upon touring it for the first time with its new owners. Because the home had been unaltered over the years, “it was a bit like a time warp,” he recounts. “I couldn’t help but look around with a critical eye; the residence had aged very well, but I noticed things I might have done differently. In my mind, this was a chance to make up for missed opportunities.”

Observing how well the original building materials had weathered, Seifter—along with senior associates Chris Dickson and Victoria Baran—opted to retain the home’s rich mahogany trim and cedar shingles, even returning to the same fabricator who fashioned its original windows to ensure a match in style and quality. Spearheading these improvements was general contractor Nicholas T. Grossman, who, though not a native Carolinian, brought seasoned knowledge of the subtropical climate and its oft-unforgiving conditions, suggesting treatments for the exterior that would

safeguard the residence from the elements. Indoors, Seifter says, “Nick provided a running commentary on how to best tailor the modern systems to combat the island’s frequently oppressive heat and humidity.”

Because lifestyles had changed since the first set of plans were drawn decades ago, the interior architecture needed tweaking to improve flow and set the stage for casual entertaining. So, too, did the design team answer the clients’ request for a dedicated pool room. “It was a sizable addition,” explains Seifter. “And since we didn’t want it to look like ‘the tail was wagging the dog,’ we placed it behind the pergola.”

While her collaborators continued to peel away dated elements, Connor and senior designer Lauren Jones worked closely on interior details. Since the designer counts the Shingle style among her favorite disciplines, the envelope of the house delighted her. “It’s exciting when the architecture falls in line with the history of a vernacular,” Connor notes. “If you understand where the home is coming from architecturally, it will tell you where it needs to go.”

To complement its Arts & Crafts classicism, Connor sourced furnishings she knew would feel soulful. “We brought in antiques to echo the timelessness we knew the rooms could express,” she says. “We were after serenity because the clients wanted a respite from city life in the Northeast. We took our cues from nature, letting the beach and the landscape drive interior design decisions.” Subtle coastal references range from grass-cloth wallcoverings and coral objets d’art to a hanging bed punctuating the spacious wraparound porch. Since the home is essentially one room deep, “every room has a unique view,” Seifter adds. Echoes the wife: “I never wanted to lose sight of the idea that the beach is calling you, no matter where you are in the house.”

Landscape architect Cindy Cline pinpointed ways to enhance these picturesque surroundings. “The renovated home sits beautifully on its site, so we created a plan that would better relate to its new proportions,” she explains. An allée of elm trees now leads to a formal drive court where potted lemon trees greet guests at the door. A generous lawn complements the residence’s improved sense of grandeur before rolling landforms planted with native grasses that direct the eye toward a protected dunescape.

In the end, the venture achieved precisely what Seifter had hoped for: a home that will endure for decades more. Connor believes the project’s tranquil countenance comes from design professionals who checked their egos at the door, as well as owners who were passionate about creating an extraordinary refuge. For Connor’s longtime clients, the success of the residence came as no surprise. “Tammy has a way of gently guiding me to try something I couldn’t have imagined, and I never regret those choices,” says the wife. “She and Roger created beautiful and relaxed spaces throughout the house, and it’s always amazing to me how you can look around and find that no detail is left undone—without being overdone.” Done and done, indeed. ■

“THE RESIDENCE
APPEARS TO HAVE
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ITS SETTING.”

—NICHOLAS T. GROSSMAN

The entryway of this Kiawah Island, South Carolina, vacation home was designed to emulate the “living halls” of iconic Shingle-style houses.

One of numerous architectural details original to the residence, the inglenook “gives the entry hall a purpose beyond walking through it,” says architect Roger Seifter. Here, a glass bell jar lantern by Formations hangs above a circa-1830 English mahogany table, both from 1stdibs.





Boasting views of the Atlantic Ocean and the pool, the family room is anchored by a custom Urban I Ález coffee table clad in a Phillip Jeffries grass cloth. Designer Tammy Connor surrounded it with four A. Rudin English Arm club chairs purchased at Paul Plus in Atlanta and a 1stdibs-sourced Danish modern oak-and-rattan bench by Erhard Rasmussen for Børge Mogensen. In the kitchen beyond, Coordination Berlin stools from Stillfried Wien in New York side up to an oak-topped island by Benzenberg Cabinets Corp.

Opposite: Oly's Ray bench sits beneath a decorative oval window in the living room, meeting a braided abaca rug from Eve and Staron in Atlanta. Beyond, Soane's Simplified Boyd chairs, upholstered in Moore & Giles's Bohème leather in Lava, surround a custom Fiberstone game table by Stone Yard, Inc. Tucked into a bay window, one of many restored or replaced by Reilly Architectural, the clients' own caned chair wears Rose Tarlow's striated Riptide textile in Sand Pebbles.

Below: Flanking the living room fireplace, a pair of 19th-century Italian commodes from Newel in New York supports Christopher Spitzmiller's Patricia lamps in bronze. Two groupings of Gregor Turk ceramic artworks Connor commissioned through Spalding Nix Fine Art in Atlanta, Bourgeois Bohème Atelier's Avron Branch plaster chandelier and Articolo's Float wall sconces, fitted with Drunken Emerald glass shades, add layers of complexity.



“IT WAS IMPORTANT TO USE RESTRAINT SO
AS NOT TO OVERPOWER THE LANDSCAPE
BEYOND THE WINDOWS.”

—TAMMY CONNOR





A hallmark of Shingle-style architecture, this guest bathroom's oval window was fitted with a Roman shade made from Fabricut's Tella Birch linen. Schumacher's cornflower Haruki Sisal wallcovering and a circa-1960 Eero Aarnio wicker Juttu stool, purchased at Bloomberry in the Netherlands, impart texture and warmth. The polished nickel Vendome Single sconces are by Visual Comfort & Co.



In an upstairs guest bedroom, a bed fabricated by Willard Pitt Curtain Makers in Atlanta—wearing Mila Blake's Tienen Belgian linen in Pacific—and a table from Jacqueline Adams Antiques in Atlanta mimic the ocean's array of hues. The bench cushion dons Zak+Fox's Sahara textile in Tinariwen, plus pillows made of Les Indiennes and Peter Dunham Textiles. Above, a Kiwi fan in Patina Iron by the Woolen Mill Fan Company moves the subtropical air.



Left: A deep porch—or piazza, in Shingle-style vernacular—wraps around the house before descending into a great lawn planted with Zoysia and pink Muhly grasses by landscape architect Cindy Cline. Beyond, a weathered boardwalk snakes its way to the ocean, framed by fountain grass, native shrubs and even more swaying sweetgrass. An indigenous loblolly pine surveys the scene.

Opposite: Nestled into a hallway off a third-floor guest suite and overlooking a private covered porch, a bay window beckons for quiet moments of beach-gazing. Millwork painted in Farrow & Ball's Light Blue pairs beautifully with the lively coral fabric—Cornwall in Sorbet by Peter Fasano—Connor chose for the bench cushion, while pillows in Penny Morrison's Rumeli floral linen and Noir's Hotaru side table inject modern notes.