

HOME DESIGN / ART / GARDENING / WINE / CUISINE

CHARLESTON STYLE & DESIGN

WINTER 2020



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VOLUME 12 / NO. 4

WINTER 2020



CREEKSIDE PARADISE

*An expert team creates a contemporary
paradise on James Island Creek*

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In the open kitchen, oversized pendant lights from Restoration Hardware define the space. The room also features a serving window by Loewen that opens to a screened porch, a breakfast table for two and a bar that seats four. The Italian-inspired mosaic backsplash blends seamlessly.

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The two-story, 4,000-square-foot main house is perfectly nestled under the live oaks; in places, only a few inches separate the massive trees and the house. As requested, there is a view of the marsh from every room. The property also features a detached guesthouse.



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T'S 2010, KATHRYN AND MARK RICHARDSON are riding up the James Island Creek in their friend's boat when they pass a neglected 1950s ranch house on Lawton Bluff. The house is vacant, but it sits on an important piece of land. There was once a dairy here that supplied the peninsula with milk, and the property is dotted with ancient live oaks that were old when the Battle of Dills Bluff was fought nearby in 1782.

Instantly, Mark Richardson knows this is the perfect location for the home he'd always wanted to build. When his friend mentions the house is about to go into foreclosure, Richardson begins to stalk it on the foreclosure website. It takes two years to come up for auction, but at last, the Richardsons own their dream property.

Good things come to those who wait, so let's fast-forward five years. The couple has had plenty of time to figure out precisely what they want to build. "We wanted to design a house that would be similar to what might have been there when it was farmland," Mark Richardson says. "Our goal was to build a contemporary Lowcountry farmhouse that would take advantage of the views and the beautiful trees."

They take another two years to choose just the right architect and builder to bring their dream to life. "We wanted somebody local, and someone familiar with designing and building in the Lowcountry," Richardson says. "Steve Herlong and I had a natural connection." Herlong, of Herlong Architects, gave the Richardsons a list of builders to consider. They chose Steve Kendrick of Structures Building Company.

Including Herlong and Kendrick, the formidable team included project architect Bronwyn Lurkin, interior designer Heather Allison and interior architect Elizabeth

Jakubowski for Herlong Architects; and design manager Deborah Way, project manager Dave Hargis and designer Mandy Shealy for Structures. Glen Gardner was the landscape architect.

The Richardsons had a wish list that included marsh views from every room, a detached guesthouse, bookshelves in the master bedroom, his-and-her offices, an outdoor shower, a pool and a wine room. They also wanted to save as much of the existing landscaping as possible.

"The property was so pretty with so many wonderful specimens," Lurkin says. "We

After years of planning, the house only took 14 months to complete and came in under time and on budget. The finished product is, quite honestly, extraordinary.

designed the house so that it's nestled into the trees, and then we relocated camellias and every other viable plant we could."

After years of planning, the house only took 14 months to complete and came in under time and on budget. The finished product is, quite honestly, extraordinary.

Here is a friendly-looking cottage-style home that looks like it's been there forever. The two-story main house is white brick with three dormers and wide, generous windows and doors that face the marsh and the creek. It is so perfectly nestled under the live oaks that, in places, there are only a few inches between the house and a massive live oak. As requested, there is a view of the marsh from every room in the house.

The screened porch and the master suite



The dining room was designed to take advantage of creek views. Unique folding doors encourage summer breezes off the marsh.



are accessed via connector hyphens, which imply the house has been added onto over time. The detached guesthouse is perfectly angled to capture indulgent views of the pool and marsh. Its size and shape suggest it may have once been a farm outbuilding that has been luxuriously renovated.

Together, these elements register on a subconscious level, giving you the feeling that you are looking at a historical farmhouse that has been given a contemporary makeover. The house is everything it should be, nothing it shouldn't be, and looks as if it belongs exactly where it is.

Inside it functions perfectly for the empty nesters. The main house is more than 4,000 square feet, but thanks to the way the rooms flow, it never threatens to overwhelm when it's just the two of them. Two enormous pendant lights, one of Allison's many bold and brilliant touches, define the bright kitchen. There is a serving window that opens to the screened porch, a bar that seats four and a breakfast table for two that is one of the coziest spots in the house.

A dining table separates the kitchen

and living room. It's right-sized for the couple when they're on their own but can comfortably seat their extended family. In the living room, the focal point is a live-edge coffee table made from a diseased oak that had to be removed during construction.

To the right, a special room houses the Richardsons' wine collection. Here, the couple had a design request for Hargis and the Structures expert trim carpenter: panel the room in wine crates collected on their trips to Napa Valley, California. Hargis carefully disassembled the boxes and expertly created paneling, adding another sweet touch of personality.

Through the light-filled hyphen, the master suite features stunning views of the marsh, a sitting porch and quite possibly the most beautifully designed master bathroom you'll ever see. The scene-stealer here is the outdoor shower, accessible only through the indoor shower. The exterior door had to be rated for hurricanes, and it had to lock and blend seamlessly with the indoor shower so that the outdoor shower was simply a visual extension. That the team pulled it off

is worthy of a slow clap. "This is my favorite room in the house," Kathryn Richardson says. "It's exactly what I envisioned."

In the master bathroom, as throughout the house, it's clear that the Structures team's attention to detail bordered on devotion. For example, the built-in shelves that hold bath linens appear to be carved out of the space between walls. The walls are shiplap, so the spacing and placement of the boards had to be preplanned to the millimeter and executed with laser precision.

"To get this level of detail, we have to coordinate with the architect during the planning stage of a project," Kendrick says.

From light switches to towel racks, the fact that everything in this house is exactly where you'd want it to be, both functionally and visually, is not a lucky accident. It's what happens when you assemble a team of people who love to give their best, and you let them give it. Everyone becomes a part of the creation, and the creation itself becomes a remarkable medley of skill and talent.

"When you walk through this house,

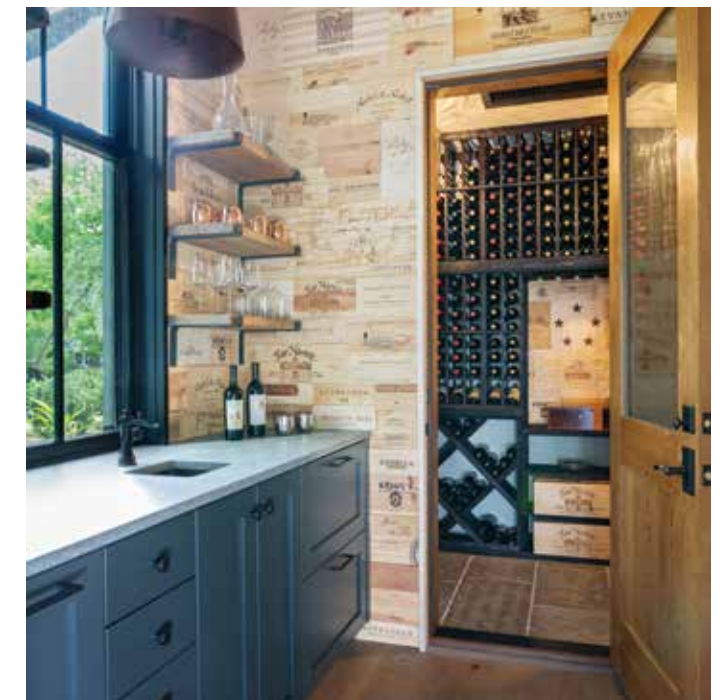
The master suite features stunning views of the marsh and a sitting porch.

opposite:
The private outdoor shower is located through a pass-through door in the master bathroom's indoor shower.





In the living room, the focal point is the coffee table. It was made from a section of a diseased live oak that had to be removed during construction. **right:** The homeowners requested a special room be designed to house their wine collection. They wanted the room paneled with wine crates collected from their trips to Napa Valley, California.



whether it's architect, builder or interior designer, you don't know where one professional starts and where one stops," Herlong says.

"Everyone brought their expertise to the table," Way says. "You can see the sense of pride everyone has. We were so happy to work on another project with the Herlong team."

Outside, the home is constructed of brick painted white. The hyphen connectors are clad in board-and-batten, and the low-maintenance standing-seam Galvalume roof has no exposed fasteners. You may not notice at first, but the chimney is tabby shell; just one more detail that helps this house register as historical.

"The house came out even better than we hoped for," Kendrick says. "Continuing our relationship with the Herlong team and building a relationship with the Richardsons was fulfilling. It's so great to work with people who trust and appreciate the craftsmanship."

After nearly nine years of waiting, the Richardsons couldn't be happier with the finished project.

"We had such a great team," Mark Richardson says. "Herlong and Structures worked so well together. We had a smooth and positive relationship with zero issues. This is the house we'd always hoped for." *

Robin Howard is a freelance writer in Charleston. See more of her work at robinhowardwrites.com.

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