



South Carolina

Evoking the Past on Kiawah

THE ISLAND'S LOW COUNTRY TRADITIONS INFORM A COUPLE'S GRACIOUS, SHINGLED RESIDENCE AMID THE TREES

Architecture by Shope Reno Wharton/Interior Design by Jacquelynne P. Lanham
Landscape Architecture by Oehme, van Sweden & Associates
Text by Therese Bissell/Photography by Ken Hayden

Bernard Wharton is in a reflective mood. "As architects," he says, "we like to put our stamp on everything, but I've found over time that what produces a better building is letting go of the ego a bit.

"I never want something to look like it dropped out of the sky onto the landscape," he continues. "Good architecture is about respect—placing the traditions and conditions and all the intangibles of the site above sheer creative impulse."

Displaying no lack of artistry, the house he designed for South Carolina's Kiawah Island indeed incorporates local building customs to accommodate and embrace the natural environment. The owners, an American businessman and his wife who live most of the year in London, appreciated Connecticut-based Shope Reno Wharton's established architectural presence on the island: a private club and a residence (see *Architectural Digest*, May 1997). They wanted their family retreat to take full advantage of the semitropical site but to not, as Wharton says, "tread on it in a hard way," a critical balance they saw in the firm's earlier work.

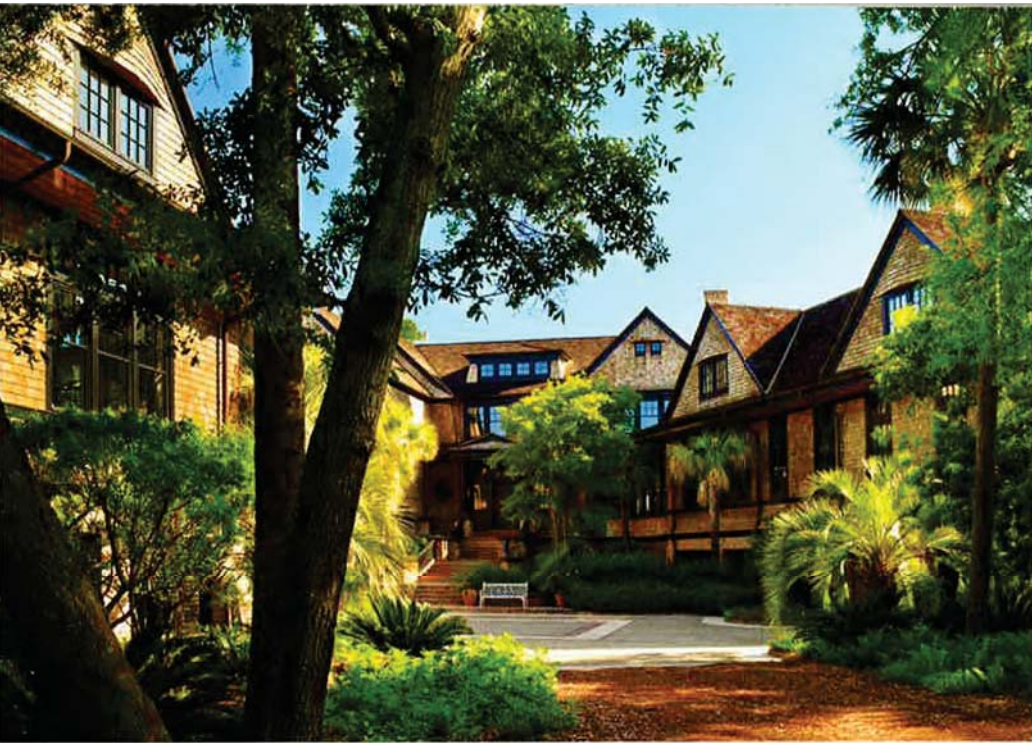
Kiawah is a barrier island just south of Charleston; the site is tidal marshland at the confluence of three rivers, an expanse studded with palms and live oaks and of-

fering far-ranging vistas. In accordance with the Low Country vernacular, the house nestles among the trees as it sits on a series of brick piers. Wharton and project architect Jerry Hupy spent considerable time gauging the cycles and moods of the property, which at some point in the day is surrounded by water. Kiawah Island's flood zones dictate that living areas be no lower than 14 feet aboveground, a "forced verticality" to the architecture, says Hupy, who with Wharton utilized intermediate devices—porches, terraces, planters, steps—to avoid "that odd house-on-sticks look."

The Shingle Style residence, with its generous use of painted wood detailing and columns, is a sprawling amalgam of elements: 30 rooms in 15,000 square feet. It is villagelike in its massing—meandering, meant to be sequentially experienced—its scale broken down and never wholly apparent from a single vantage point (though most evident from the entrance court, which is flanked by the two wings that splay from the main volume). "It's a house you have to explore," explains Wharton, "in order to really understand its scope and patterns."

Weaving together the interiors, Atlanta designer Jacquelynne Lanham evoked the "beautifully decaying plantations" of the Low Country: "I like the faded formality of

Architect Bernard Wharton, of Shope Reno Wharton, and his partner Jerry Hupy drew on vernacular buildings of South Carolina's Low Country for their clients' Kiawah Island retreat. "Our houses hark back to history but don't re-create it," says Wharton. The rear façade opens to grounds planned by landscape architect Lisa Delplace, of the firm Oehme, van Sweden & Associates. Lounge chairs, Kingsley-Bate.



ABOVE: Two wings—one of several means employed to give the large residence an intimate feel—partially enclose the entrance courtyard. “It’s very introverted and embracing, with a generous stair up to the front door,” Wharton explains. For her part, Delplace says, “We wanted to have the house feel as if it were built around the existing landscape.” All exterior doors and windows, Tischler und Sohn.



ABOVE: Interior designer Jacquelynn Lanham “took the traditional and knocked it down a little,” she says. In the living room, that meant the mostly Georgian furnishings and formal architectural details were tempered by a pale palette and soft textures. RIGHT: A breakfast room off the kitchen provides dining space and a comfortable seating area. Sofa and lounge chair fabric, Rogers & Goffigon.





what once was, the aged paneling and the sun-bleached colors.” Her palette imports the hues of the island itself—driftwood gray, sea-glass green, grassy olive green, full-bloom lavender, pale blues—all mediated by the intense regional light. Fabrics are primarily washed linen and cottons, “just a little bit off,” she says, “not so perfect and serious.”

Lanham and the owners together selected the antiques, specific to each room and heavily Georgian, at London auctions and fairs. To offset them, and in response to the stately architecture, she had the wood floors throughout ebonized “like the sooty oak floors of the old smokehouses” and brought in oak reclaimed from nearby swamps and waterways. The interior designer found the master bedroom, one of seven bedrooms on the second floor, the most challenging. Bold architectural detailing (the millwork amplifying and telegraphing size), alcoves and a soaring ceiling with a prominent dormer defined the one room that needed to be a nest. Lanham’s solution: draperies on the four-poster, “just large-scale enough” furniture, a pouffy high-pile rug and sky-blue walls with ivory trim.

Essentially a summer residence, the house was nonetheless designed to be used

year-round. A feature of the program was that the orientation had to be sympathetic to the sun’s arc. In a first for them, the architects designed a “sunrise porch” on the salt marsh side and, opposite, a “sunset porch” (with a stone fireplace) looking out to the river. (“It was an exciting prospect,” Wharton says, “to be able to mass the building in a way that determines where you might be at a specific time of day.”) Several other rooms bring in the outside through their positioning and fenestration. The curved, conical-roofed breakfast room pushes off the side of the main building for multidirectional views. A glazed bridge leads from the rotunda at the east side of the entrance vestibule (there is a second rotunda to the west) to the library, the passageway becoming, with its wash of natural light, an especially delicate connector between the two wings.

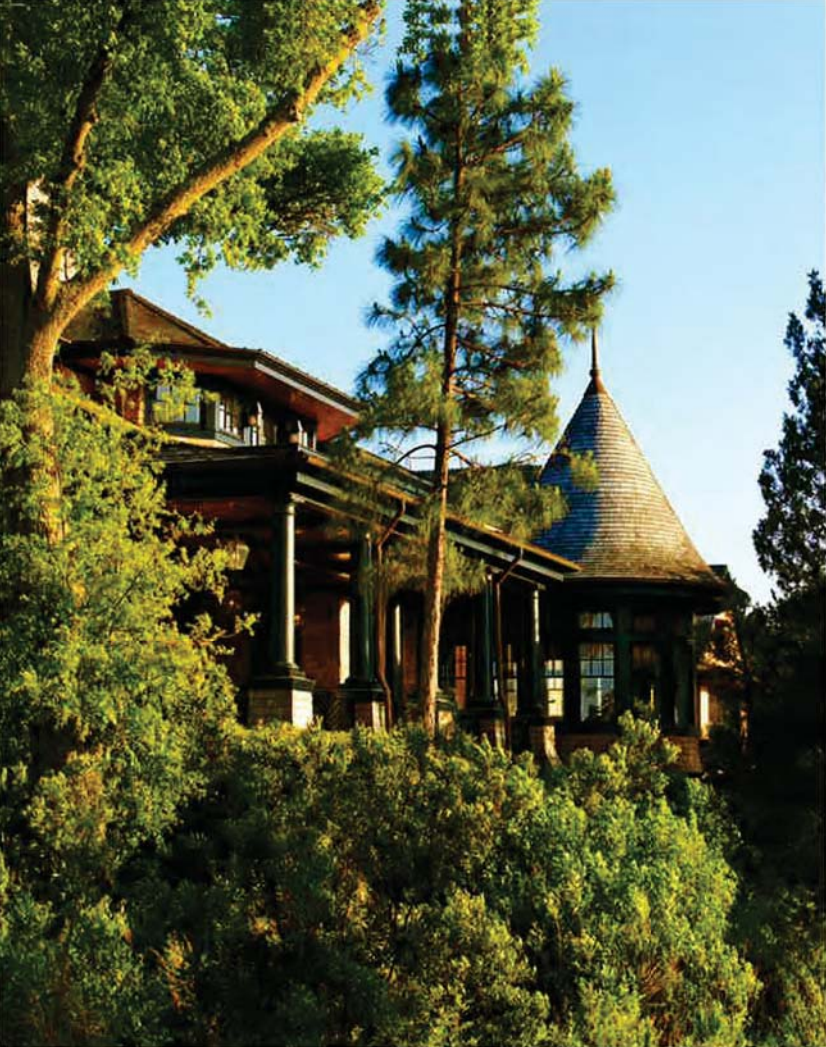
“With every building we do, good things occur, beyond what we’d planned for,” says Wharton. “And while the architect has to be a couple chapters ahead of everyone else in the story line, we also get to experience little surprises as the project gets built. A lasting and meaningful piece of architecture happens,” he adds, “because of our vision—but never if our own gratification is the driving force.” □



LEFT: “The scale of the master bedroom is amplified through its use of millwork,” notes Wharton. Generous windows were intended to bring the outside in and offer expansive vistas. Bed hanging fabric, Rogers & Goffigon. ABOVE: Lanham made the master bath “feel feminine and elegant, like something out of an English manor house,” she remarks. Waterworks tub and faucet.

Wharton and Hupy sited the house to take advantage of the water views on either side. A "sunset" porch, with a stone fire-place serving as a focal point, becomes a favorite place to gather and entertain in the evenings (the opposite side of the house has a "sunrise" porch). Sunbrella cushion fabric.





"The dark trim helps the house blend into the trees," says Hupy. ABOVE: Peeking out from the live oak—"the iconic tree of South Carolina," says Delplace—and wax myrtle are the sunset porch and the conical-roofed breakfast pavilion. BELOW: Delplace planted another southern standby, palmettos, around the pool terrace. Sutherland lounge chairs and side table.



RIGHT: Covering 11 acres, the property has riverfront access, though, says Delplace, "to reach the open water, it was necessary to build a boardwalk." The bridge, constructed of *ipe* and stainless steel, "sits very lightly so that we wouldn't disturb the wetland itself. It's the natural progression from the more manicured grounds into the native landscape," she says.



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