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Natural Approach

A SOUTH CAROLINA ARCHITECT MAKES THE MOST OF A PICTURESQUE BUT PROBLEMATIC SITE.

Writer **Jason Miller** Photographer **Tria Giovan** Field editor **Sandra L. Mohlmann**

A meandering creek caused architect Wayne Windham to take a deep breath when he saw the site for his client's home in Kiawah Island, South Carolina. It wasn't the kind of pause that comes from taking in natural beauty, though the site did offer plenty of that. Rather, it was the harsh reality of trying to fit a 5,000-square-foot home, plus a pool, on the narrow one-third-acre lot that followed the creek's uneven course toward a salt marsh. "They say form follows function," Windham says. "Well, form also follows requirements—in this case, state-mandated setbacks, lot coverages, and minimum first-floor heights." (The property, near the Atlantic shore, lay within the coastal flood plain, requiring that the home's main level be raised.)

Charged with designing a home that would conform to all the regulations yet allow the natural world to be part of the owners' everyday experience, Windham tackled the challenge with aplomb. He conceived an angular floor plan that

EXTERIOR BUILDUP An elegantly curved stairway climbs from a parking area to the home's elevated main level. The pierced brick foundation allows potential storm waters to rise and recede, flooding only the garage and a storage area beneath the home.

The salt marsh setting inspired the **natural palette** of browns and greens used inside and outside the home.



flows with the meandering creek and is aligned with south-westerly sight lines over the marsh. Then he punctuated the home's many angles with view-gathering windows.

Builders Dan and Cathy Buffington shored up the design with a pierced brick foundation and impact-resistant windows and doors designed to withstand gale-force hurricane winds. "We have to make these homes beautiful—and also ready for battle because of the environment," Cathy says. The tightly sealed home uses mechanical air exchangers to maintain proper levels of indoor humidity, preventing moisture buildup in walls. Pressure-treated exterior trim and fascia boards, along with ipe decking, were selected to ward off the region's ever-present termites. Windham clad the exterior in shingle siding and dubbed the resulting architecture "Shingle Style River House."

From the moment one climbs the front steps and opens the door, the architect's design fulfills its promise of embracing the natural surroundings. The first of many unobstructed sight lines draws the eye—and body—straight

ELEGANTLY ARCHED A hallway punctuated with arched doorways expands the great-room, *left*. **MATERIAL MIX** A bold limestone and stained oak floor graces the entry, *above*. "It stands up to the dramatic archways and makes a great statement as you walk in the door," interior designer Mollie Johnson says.



An exterior lantern brings an outdoorsy sensibility and casualness to the classic Southern kitchen.



IN TOUCH WITH THE OUTDOORS

The home connects to nature via more than just its undulating floor plan. Architect Wayne Windham's strategy: "Glass, glass, and more glass." Tall windows and glass doors are strategically placed to capture views. Other nods to nature play out in materials, such as ipe decking and cedar shakes. Windham's favorite back-to-nature feature is the negative-edge pool. "I can see myself relaxing there, looking out toward the marsh, thinking life doesn't get any better than this," he says.



through the entry and great-room to a porch and deck overlooking the marsh. Because the home's unique shape dances in perfect time with the shoreline, virtually every room has a view over the creek or marsh. Even the den at the front of the home is angled so its French doors take in nature.

Similar to the blending between indoors and out, the home is a sort of hybrid of styles. It has a strong traditional look, evinced by classic arches and elegant millwork throughout the interior. And then it has an ever-so-slightly relaxed vacation-living feel, due in part to finishing details such as simple outdoor-style lanterns instead of fussy chandeliers. Natural elements—stone, poplar trim, and stained oak floors—reflect the home's setting.

A well-conceived traffic pattern allows easy flow through the primary living areas, a loop encompassing the kitchen, bar, great-room, and dining room. Points of

OPEN KITCHEN Ceiling-height cabinets, *opposite*, compensate for storage lost to two sets of view-capturing windows. Granite countertops pick up the butternut tone of the cabinets. **WELL-CONNECTED** Kitchen designer Bryan Reiss designed the range hood with carved corbels, *above*, to blend into the cabinetry. "It's elegant but not overstated," he says.

A new look at the lantern

Lanterns can make beautiful statements indoors. For more on the fixture in this kitchen, *opposite*, see page 120. Here are other lantern interpretations that caught our editors' eyes.



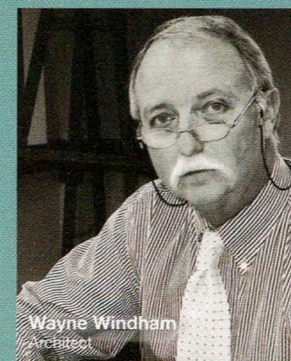
Designer cachet \$7,658. Thomas Pheasant through Baker, 800/392-2537, www.bakerfurniture.com



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Classic choice \$1,800–\$2,350. Richard Scofield Historic Lighting, 860/767-7032, www.scofieldhistoriclighting.com



DIFFICULT SITE Architect Wayne Windham had to get creative to make this house work for its owners as well as the surroundings. He offers insight into turning site challenges into design positives.

Q On a scale of one to 10, where did this site rank in difficulty?

A Seven or eight. It was tight, a small lot—and there are no small rooms.

Q You must be a glass-half-full kind of guy.

A A difficult site forces you to think outside the box. It can be inspiring. It also tends to make the design process go faster because you remove possibilities.

Q So boundaries can be good?

A Unlike a 5-acre field with endless opportunities, when you're shoehorned into a smaller site with trees and other things, it starts to dictate some things in the design.

Q Speaking of trees, you worked around the old oaks and pines.

A I say work around them to the point that it hurts! Trees give a house a sense of presence and belonging.

Q Challenges or not, doesn't the site always dictate what you build?

A The property is the canvas. It's really the starting point for our painting.



privacy radiate off this open center. A small office off the kitchen has pocket doors to make the most of the cozy space. On the opposite side of the house, an "elbow hallway" creates a graceful entry to the master bedroom and bath, essentially in its own wing. "We were able to stretch the house out and put the master suite on the first floor," Windham says.

Stretching also took place at the back of the house, where Windham took advantage of the irregular lot to add a screen porch and pool with spa. "The idea for a rounded pool came from the way the property created a finger of land that juts out," he says. "We tucked the pool into that finger, then did the negative edge on the pool to maximize the view and the connection to the environment."

PANORAMIC DINING Windows wrap a corner of the dining area, *above*, for expanded views. Topped with thick molding, the wainscoting stands up to the beefy ceiling trim.

No matter the twist, the home's **Southern style** remains elegantly evident in such features as arches and fine millwork.



Interior designer Mollie Johnson took a similar harmonious approach with the decor, favoring blues, taupes, creams, and greens. "Kiawah Island has a gracefulness in the landscape like very few places I've seen, and I wanted the rooms to reflect that," she says. The aesthetic encompasses her two requirements: "A mix of formality and comfort. I think you can have both." It's this dedication to comfort and connection to the environment, Windham says, that sets the home apart. "There are other Shingle style houses around, but this one is truly unique," he says. "Even though it has a strong presence, it fits the setting extremely well."

Architect **Wayne Windham** Interior designer **Mollie Johnson**
Kitchen designer **Bryan Reiss, CKD** Contractor **Buffington Homes**

RESOURCES ON PAGE 120

EXQUISITE DETAIL Framed by an arch and flanked by built-ins, the master bedroom seating area, *above*, is like a little library.

MULTITASKING VANITY The double-sink vanity in the master bath, *right*, steps down in the center, creating a sitting-height makeup table. Celeste blue granite countertops create a sense of tranquility.



GRACEFUL ENTRY An oval window draws the eye toward the private entry of the main-level master suite. The short hallway turns right, leading to the spacious bedroom.