



# *The Design of Romance*

*A grand home in which to truly live, rather than merely exist*

Home Design – Peter Granata / Architect – Merrill Pascoe  
Builder – Rick DeLong / Text and Photography – Nan Mac.

**O**n the northern tip of Hilton Head, South Carolina is another small island. Ribaut Island is not always marked on maps and it isn't as glamorous as its nearby cousins, instead it has a quiet charm. It's a very private enclave of beautiful homes connected to the main island by a small picturesque bridge. Nestled there is a home of historical inspiration, tropical style, and stately charisma. Scarlet O'Hara could have lived there, yet, a ship's captain could have also happily returned here after sailing the Caribbean.

It's fitting because the designer of the house, Peter Granata, is the country's foremost boat designer. Being that it's also one of his own personal homes, the house is awash in the details that are usually lost in the mass produced homes that corner today's market. This home, like his smaller home in Telluride, Colorado, is one of a kind.





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The elder son of larger than life Chicago Senator, Peter C. Granata Sr., was expected to continue the family political tradition, but opted instead, to forge a new path. His day job is working with boating manufacturers creating award winning marine vessels. He's widely known as the Legendary Navel Architect or the Marine Guru of Boat design, but his hobby, an ongoing romance with houses, began back in the 80's. For Granata, designing houses is deeply personal and stems from his passionate response to hearth and home when the day's work is done. When he set forth on the idea of building this house,

he found there were no architectural benchmarks for the British West Indies Style. The history of the spice trade and the dash and derring-do of the era had long tickled his fancy but the design and style of those homes was sketchy. Granata, who occasionally lectures at the Savannah School of Art and Design, was helped with his research by a class of industrial design students. They found that many early plantation homes of the British West Indies were constructed from the wood and fittings from the ships that sailed there during the heyday of the Spice Trade. From that tradition, nostalgic romance was born in





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**Above:**

With the fireplace flickering in winter, chilly weather is no match for a design that thought about the many roles our bedrooms play in our lives.

**Opposite Above:**

By day, the Master Suite sweetly offers a choice of relaxation opportunities but at dusk the dramatic night sky transforms the room into a space that beckons with a come hither wink.







*The staircase opens directly into the living room as a nod to the classic style of the Grand Hotel*

every detail of the home: from the staircase that opens directly into the living room as a nod to the classic style of the Grand Hotel, to the wide verandas topped with matching balconies, and to the extensive mahogany wood work.

The finished home on Ribaut Island has since become an architectural standard for the British West Indies Revival style and the home itself is an ode to the days when homes were built for grace and value as opposed to tossing things together for appearances.

Two years in the planning stages, the home is astounding in its detail. The wood work throughout the house was, for example, mostly hand-carved. The many crown moldings are each made in one piece and not joined with several smaller wood strips.



Every piece of mahogany for the walls, kitchen cabinets, and doors started as hand selected raw lumber. A master wood worker, local to the low country, Eldon Westby, was hired for over a year to produce the paneling, cabinets, and most of the library. The hurricane-strength French doors are a product constructed specifically for this home.

The design focused on the idea that this home is versatile and can be a

home meant for luxurious entertainments, or one for family and friends. The office space, which perches over the three car garage, is outfitted to become a children's bedroom and play area, or maybe, a mother-in-law suite.

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The natural setting and placement of the environment was part of the overall design. The home's powerful presence begins with its perfect alignment that makes use of existing road dividers.

A brick driveway introduces four massive columns that are made from the same material as boats – durable hand laid fiberglass - yet with a core reinforced by I-beams of solid steel. The exterior railings echo the basket weave design that was historically made of palm leaves. The stone steps and veranda flooring are slabs of cross-cut coral with fossilized marine life embedded within.

Once through the massive double doors with their charming brass fittings, the entry is the first indication that this house is unique. The hall is dressed in the warmth and welcome of amber jewel tones sparkling from two chandeliers set in a recessed and gilded dome. The floor is patterned after another grand hotel with a weave that doesn't insist one rush through the room. Three tones of granite and marble were selected to blend but still create contrast with the wood paneling. Here, lingering in the moment, a choice must be made: The powder room to the left to

freshen up? Or the small, elegant elevator on the right to whisk a visitor's baggage up to the inside guest suite? Perhaps the private sea captain's library? A prize rich in mahogany, hidden behind doors of leaded glass. Or lastly, an open doorway that beckons with a wall of French doors bringing the sweep of the sea inside to offer a welcome. At the rear of the house, the home's placement creates privacy yet also provides a magnificent vista. Of all the houses on Ribaut Island, these grounds have the most open view of Port Royal Sound and Pinckney Island Nature Preserve.



Watching dolphins from the upper balcony provides a unique opportunity to observe the dolphins engage in an activity rarely found in other parts of the world. The Bottlenose Dolphins of South Carolina and Georgia are the only dolphins known to participate in Strand Feeding daily.

In a world of romance, privacy is important to keep the world at bay. In the Master Bath, seclusion sets the stage for daydreaming. Designed as a “His and Her’s” with a spa-oriented feel, the bath offers an impact of soft serenity. Filled with natural light from the double-glassed doors, the Barrel ceiling reflects and gentles the brightness to create a sense of airy lightness and tranquility. Opening the doors brings in the scent and sounds of the outdoors, so it’s easily possible to imagine a mermaid relaxing in the deep whirlpool bath while watching the play of the ocean’s light. The design sought to strike a balance in the masculine feel of dark wood combined with the more feminine light and open feeling of the house. This was accomplished with the use of natural light and careful positioning of the wood. Skylights send in flags of natural light unexpectedly illuminating many parts of the home. Natural light in the dressing rooms for example, is unique but important to balance frocks, fabrics, and footwear correctly.

Balance is another feature of the living area. Arched on either end, the expansive living room still feels cozy, as if it’s a broad alcove designed to foster the spinning of tall tales or deep conversations. The kitchen, designed for large scale entertaining or family togetherness, marshals itself cleanly for double duty. Mahogany pocket doors slide closed for catered events but disappear neatly into the arched doorway to connect the living spaces.



All in all, the romantic house on Ribaut is a tribute to a softer time when people gathered close, romance was a daily part of life, and nature wasn’t pre-packaged in careful habitats. This is a grand home in which

to truly live, rather than merely exist. Here, one can almost hear the misty, faraway clang of the ship’s bells, or the faint whispers and soft sighs of a woman in love.





*41 Ribaut*

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