

Out the Screened-in Porch



A
Seaside
RETREAT

By Nancy McGregor. Photography by Nancy McGregor.



When Washington, D.C., area residents Richard Amatucci and Maryann Battnagel first bought their Sea Pines home 12 years ago, it quickly became a getaway from their busy urban lives. When they recently decided to move to Hilton Head permanently, they knew they wanted to tear down the 1970s-style house and build a home with a more contemporary Lowcountry feel.

The couple began the process by interviewing local professionals—eight architects and five builders. In the end, they chose Bob Johnson of Johnson & Associates/Architects Inc., an award-winning architectural firm with a strong belief in custom designs suited to the clients' individual tastes and lifestyles. For the builder, they hired Esposito Construction Inc., a company with the tagline "the difference is in the details"—a message owners Brian and Leslie Esposito make sure is a fact, not just a nicely worded slogan.

Johnson, a member of the South Carolina chapter of the American Institute of Architects, has been designing homes on the island since the late '70s, when he worked as an intern and then project manager for other firms. In 1987, he opened his own company.



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His office in Bluffton—stacked with trade magazines, architectural journals and other publications in a specially designed wall hidden behind a classroom-sized blackboard—attests to his credo of keeping abreast of new technologies and innovative design elements, while remaining true to traditional qualities. Building on barrier islands like Hilton Head also means he must remain aware of the special needs required by the Federal Emergency Management Act (FEMA) and the South Carolina Beach Management Act. His skill at maintaining that balancing act has won him both honor and merit awards in several styles and areas, including Palmetto Bluff, Balsam Mountain Preserve and Spring Island, to name but a few.

For many people, after having a family, building a custom home is the next most important process in their lives. Johnson’s signature in each home is that he always remains aware of this importance. He can’t let his job become routine because it’s never routine to his clients. “A custom home is almost as personal

and meaningful as a child’s arrival,” Johnson says. “The choice to build a home becomes a landmark within most families.”

As with all his projects, for the house at Sea Pines, he listened closely to the owners and reflected their ideas into the design of the home, pairing traditional Lowcountry elements outside with a fresh, contemporary appeal inside. The charcoal exterior with hints of craftsman styling is an unexpected discovery that sets it apart from many coastal homes.

Walking in the front door, one’s eyes are immediately drawn to the magnificent view through the open and dynamic interior. There also is an oriental aspect in the interior ceiling. Jenn Foster, the architectural project manager, likened the building to a large form of origami with the many angles of the roofline.

The kitchen, with its gray-patterned backsplash and white cabinetry, is centered to provide access to the screened-in porch that fronts the beach and the





pool on one side, and the cozy nook of a dining room, with its display of the owners' art collection, on the other.

Meanwhile, the master bedroom is home to yet another aspect of the origami influence. For that, Brian Esposito's construction team was charged with aligning the woodwork's convergence to the whitewashed ceiling. It's a difficult and time-consuming detail to accomplish, and many builders will simply cover any mismatch with trim work.

Off the master bedroom, a split master bath hosts a large, glass spa shower that bisects the room, offering "His" and "Hers" dressing areas and closets (complete with a second laundry room) on either side of the enclosure. On the floors above, Johnson designed a separate guesthouse and a grouping of guest rooms, plus an office space—all offering the same warmth as the ground floor, while maintaining the tranquility and contemporary styling.

All these details result in a contemporary Lowcountry retreat, where tranquility, beauty and comfort—not to mention great views of the Atlantic—soothe the soul.

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