



Building On The Past

by Stephanie Hunt

ACKERMAN RESIDENCE ON A COMFORTABLE EVENING
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We Southerners love our homes almost as much as we love our history, and here in the Lowcountry the two are often intertwined. Whether moss-draped plantation mansions or classic Charleston singles, historic homes are our trade and our trademark.

However, that does not mean contemporary design gets relegated to the back porch. In fact, a number of area architects are successfully giving a fresh twist to traditional Lowcountry architecture. Their designs retain the vocabulary and unmistakable sound of a pluff-mud brogue, but add some hip phrasing.

From a wooded sea island retreat, to a high-density urban development, to a not-so-old Old Village home, here is a nod to what is mod in Lowcountry living.

DESIGNING OUTSIDE IN

For Jane and Michael Frederick, principles of the architectural firm Frederick and Frederick in Beaufort, historic Lowcountry architectural

elements remain relevant. If not fundamental, for 21st-century design. The forms and materials found in traditional Lowcountry buildings were inspired by a sense of place, say the Fredericks, as are the homes they design today. "We borrow from the vernacular," says Michael Frederick, speaking of the Lowcountry's more rural, indigenous buildings.

While "fancy stuff," as Michael calls the grand antebellum Battery mansions, may get more post-card acclaim, these homes typically reflect imported styles, such as Palladian and Georgian architecture. It is the cultural buildings – the rice mills, the planters' cabins, the more typical homes – that are distinctively Lowcountry, designed and constructed in direct response to our climate and terrain. "South-facing porches, high ceilings, raised foundations, large operable windows, appropriate shading and design orientations that utilized prevailing winds and sun angles made the humidity and heat more bearable," explains Michael. "Such architectural acknowledgments of our unique climate also gave communities aesthetic identities that reflected the land and culture's vernacular circumstance." And in contemporary homes like the Ackerman residence on Brays Island, they still do.

"We had fun with this one," Michael says of the Brays Island project. "Our intent was to really engage the exterior space." Judging from the fact that the home won the 2002 Robert Mills Residential Honor

BRAY'S HOUSE DESIGNED BY FREDERICK AND FREDERICK



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Award for Vernacular Architecture, they were successful. The award, presented by the South Carolina chapter of the American Institute of Architects, recognizes the remarkable indoor/outdoor relationship that the home's design achieves. Situated on a restored rice pond, the home's axis is a tall chimney, reminiscent of the old steam-powered rice mill chimneys that still stand along Lowcountry riverbanks. An outdoor fireplace and outdoor kitchen, as well as interior hearths in the family room and on the sleeping porch, all feed into the central chimney. A soaring surround of windows offers incredible views of the pond and gives a large, lofty feel to this relatively small 2,000-square-foot retreat.

Through use of regional materials such as cypress and brick, site orientation and emphasis on exterior living spaces such as the outdoor kitchen and screened sleeping porch, this home's contemporary design celebrates South Carolina's rich architectural heritage. "We want to tie the structure to the land so it looks like it actually belongs here," Michael says. "The design may be contemporary, but we use materials that are local and forms that are recognized here. You have to do this so the house makes sense."

CITY SQUEEZE

Like the Ackerman residence, Charleston architect Neil Stevenson's latest project is also tied to the land – although the land is not an idyllic wooded island, but a compact corner in the midst of peninsular Charleston. On a mere 50- by 100-foot lot at Cannon and Felix Streets, Neil has jig-sawed four single-family homes that both fit in and stand out from the much older row houses surrounding them. Like

the ubiquitous Charleston Single, the living spaces here are only one room wide, but they are stacked three stories high and oriented with front porches rather than side piazzas.

NEIL STEVENSON



THRASH