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LOW COUNTRY *living*

ARCHITECT MICHAEL FRANCK CALLS ON THE SPIRIT OF TRADITIONAL SOUTH CAROLINA DESIGN FOR A NEW HOME IN PALMETTO BLUFF.

BY MARY GRAUERHOLZ | PHOTOS BY GORDON BEALL

Although the Palmetto Bluff cottage's details are formal, architect Michael Franck's site placement creates a casual and romantic feel. The English-inspired garden can be enjoyed from ground level as well as from the porch above.

An abundance of natural light illuminates the highly detailed architecture that features overscaled windows on three sides of the main living area.

In the middle of a hushed Low Country day, architect Michael Franck sat on the porch of his clients' elegant home; the dappled blue sky was framed by a rolling green expanse leading to the inland waterway and a wildlife preserve. Franck, principal of his namesake firm in Washington, D.C., was sketching ideas for a pair of walled gardens flanking the sides of the house, a beauty evocative of British West Indies style with a whisper of Bahamian spirit.

If it sounds like a dreamscape, in a way it was: While this was part of Franck's professional practice—he frequently revisits homes to check for tweaks to the architecture and grounds—he was exulting in the creativity that the visit afforded him. For Franck and his frequent collaborator, designer William Miller, marrying the grounds with the new home's quiet architecture required a deft balance of pure architectural principles and dreamy creativity.

The house, Waterfowl, is the much-loved home of LaCreasa and Richard Allen, set in the Montage development in Palmetto Bluff, South Carolina. "It's a work in progress," says

Above A series of arches are found in the house's main stair hall. ***Below*** Architect Michael Franck is a master at creating classically detailed spaces.

Opposite An antique, Regency–style writing desk is paired with antique prints. ***Bottom Right*** A daybed sits in the entry hall. The house has an upside-down configuration—sleeping quarters are found on the first floor and living quarters are found on the second floor. ***Right*** The main living area is open. A dining table occupies the center of this space.

Franck, formerly with Franck & Lohsen Architects in Washington. "The Allens have been very involved. Along the way, they've become good friends of ours."

Following traditional upside-down house plans, the main living floor is the upper level, holding a living room and a kitchen with a butlery (for cocktail making) and scullery (for coffee making and dishwashing). Downstairs are the entry hall and bedrooms, including two guest suites and a primary suite with a custom marble tub, by Bruno Leonardt of Architectural Supply, Inc.

Particularly from the upper level, views are lush and comforting, and include a picturesque garden of herbs and olive trees, off the kitchen. Large windows throughout afford a glimpse of more gardens, one with a fountain and trees loaded with lemons and oranges. The rooms, and the views, are at once intimate and spacious, flowing freely through the windows front and back. Architectural details abound, and include pilasters and a pair of double-story bay windows.

Authenticity was key, Franck says, so presenting the home properly meant carefully scaling the rooms. As he explains: "Traditionally, houses had a variety of scale in the overall massing; larger portions indicated more importance. In contemporary architecture, there is little or no breakdown—and almost everything is overscaled. The breakdown of the scale in Waterfowl makes it more workable and also more authentic. The same thing applies to gardens, where you want to have certain specimen plants 'win' and others to serve as background plants."

Throughout the house, special interior touches draw the eye. On the main level, next to the staircase, a wall of cabinetry displays various bourbons; adjacent to

The two-story porch overlooks the waterway. A set of stairs leads to the water's edge.

Franck credits homeowner LaCreasa Allen: "It is her taste that infuses everything."

Left A deep, custom-made marble soaking tub sits center stage in the master bath under a two-over-two window. Built-in cabinetry and honed brass fixtures and hardware are present throughout the room. ***Opposite*** (bottom) The covered porch, off the living room, has an octagonal patterned floor in greenish blue, created by Michael Franck and LaCreasa Allen.

the display case is a wall of books. Tucked nearby is a "snug," an English term for a den—perfectly apt for this cozy space—featuring a New Orleans–style painting above the sofa, as well as a TV.

The touch of high-style British décor has a special presence in the living room. With a significant hand from LaCreasa Allen and interior designers Bill Brockschmidt and Courtney Coleman of Brockschmidt & Coleman in New Orleans and New York City, muted tones merge with distinctive architectural details under soft lighting drifting in from tall windows. Originally, the walls were monochromatic, but the architectural details sank into the background. Franck encouraged a darker shade, and today the reddish-beige-toned walls, Elephant's Breath by Farrow & Ball, strike the perfect chord.

On a covered porch off the living room, an octagonal patterned floor in greenish-blue shades was created by Franck and LaCreasa Allen. "Literally: we put on old clothes and wielded paintbrushes," Franck says, smiling. "A lot of what you see here is LaCreasa." In Franck's eyes, she is a tastemaker.

The kitchen, with a beauty of a range by the French company Lacanche, has similar architectural details and a gray-and-white floor of salvaged antique marble, from Paris Ceramics. "A lot of what you see in the house is her taste, which infuses everything," Franck says.

During their visit, Franck and Miller sketched what eventually became a kitchen garden and a tropical garden. Miller suggested an espalier effect, training plants to grow flat against a wall. Today, pear trees present yet another beautiful detail—artistry displayed against the garden walls. It is one of the many things that LaCreasa Allen loves about the house. "Every day," she says, "Richard and I catch a glimpse of our gardens from a variety of viewpoints, and our hearts skip a beat."

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Left The kitchen range is made by Lacanche, the paper is "Anna French" by Thibaut, and the flooring is by Paris Ceramics. ***Above*** A breakfast alcove sits in the kitchen, the perfect spot for coffee and reading the paper. ***Below*** The pantry off the kitchen is painted a cheery yellow with custom built-in cabinetry reminiscent of historical butler's pantries. A door leads to the second-story porch.