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# ART + DESIGN

CREATIVE LIFESTYLES

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# FAMILY *Affair*

*Deborah Forrest designs a lush Southern retreat for her nature-loving cousins.*



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here's a reason the town of Bluffton in South Carolina's Lowcountry is often at the top of "must-visit" lists in major magazines and newspapers. Could it be because of the historic architecture? The artisanal shops? Peaceful waterways with dolphins swimming by? Try all of the above! For Pam and Jim Porter, the draw included two riverside golf courses and pristine natural surroundings. So, when the couple decided to build a retreat of their own in this idyllic location, they entrusted ForrestPerkins for the interior design.

ForrestPerkins, headquartered in Dallas with offices nationwide and in Dubai, was a natural choice for this project because the firm's president, Deborah Forrest, is also Jim's cousin. "I was somewhat reluctant to take on this project at first, because we are so close that I didn't want any possible disagreement to affect our relationship," she says. As it turned out, however, "the three of us were in perfect agreement on virtually everything!"

Wissmach Architects was tapped to build the perfect house for the Porters' needs. That meant a 20-room modern interpretation of rustic-on-the-bottom, formal-on-the-top Lowcountry style and a grown-up tree house connected via a copper-roofed outdoor walkway, all built in a way that takes great care to respect three mighty, centuries-old live oaks dotting the property. "The trees are very much a part of the home," says Pam.

Before and during construction, Forrest visited the property several times to develop her own sense of familiarity with the land. Elements directly inspired by the Colleton River and salt marshes on one side, and beautiful trees strung with Spanish moss on the other, are found in each and every room. Take the carefully crafted millwork, including the standout American black walnut foyer staircase, intricately hand-carved and constructed by a local craftsman over a four-month period. In the library, walnut floorboards were hand-planed and complemented by a cerused ceiling. Cypress boards lining the tree house's interior walls were discovered in a barn after being stored there for 70 years. The focus on wood also ties in on another level for the clients: the Porters own timberland nearby, where they grow loblolly pine and support wildlife.

The master bedroom is a take on the waterways, with gentle blues in varying tones and textures accented by a Nero Marquina corridor floor and Calacatta marble doorway. In its luxurious bathroom a large tub in front of a grand eyebrow

window allows for total privacy but unlimited treetop views. One guest room is outfitted in similar colors, featuring imagery like framed sailboat art above the bed. Another pulls from the land, featuring variations on creamy neutrals and artwork of birds and botanicals, as well as drapery with embroidered vines. To elevate the focus on nature into something more luxe, Forrest took great care to ensure that every detail was finely crafted and complementary, from the traditional oyster shell plaster on the barrel-vaulted ceiling of the wine room down to the fine china and tableware. "Not a single thing in the home feels disconnected to the vision," Forrest says. "That's unusual—it's typical when I design hotels, but not residences."

Diane Kliebenstein, Forrest's sister and fellow designer at the firm, worked alongside her on this project designing all the window coverings and bedroom drapery. She originally designed the patterned toile depicting Monticello, featured in the junior master bedroom, for the firm's Jefferson Hotel transformation in Washington, D.C. Upon a stay there, the Porters were taken with the hotel's décor, leading Forrest to incorporate similar elements into this project. The toile was done in a fresh colorway to match the room's warm gray palette and the house's cozy wine room was directly inspired by one found at the hotel.

The great room is the heart of the home. For its living area, artist Cynthia Knott painted two works on-site in the tree house, looking out through its floor-to-ceiling window wall and pulling from the beauty of the landscape to create personal and treasured works. (She also painted the grand canvas wall covering in the home's main stairway.) In the attached kitchen, a five-seater island lets the couple's grandkids gather for delicious pancake breakfasts. The soothing veranda offers a tranquil spot for guests to unwind after dinner.

Other features of the home include separate his-and-hers master dressing rooms, a three-car garage, an elevator, a covered boat deck, and pool-adjacent outdoor kitchen and dining.

Together, ForrestPerkins and the Porters have created a warm and welcoming family gathering place, as evidenced by their own reunion shortly after the project was completed in

2013. The cousins, along with their parents, siblings, kids, and grandkids, sat down for a Thanksgiving meal together. "The level of teamwork brought to this project really elevated the outcome into something that was far better than any one of us could have done alone," says Jim. "It's not just beautiful, it's truly representative of the many hearts and souls put into the work on this home." ■





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