

# *DESIGNING*

FROM THE INSIDE OUT





*Spectacular views—and a couple’s  
lifestyle—inspire the distinctive  
character of this Kiawah Island Home*

By Patra Taylor | Photography by Attic Fire

It was the picture-perfect view of a magnificent stretch of salt marsh that inspired a couple to purchase this homesite, set within a nature preserve near the northeastern tip of Kiawah Island. Sharing their *magnum opus*—a home surrounded by the beauty of nature—with family and friends was a dream of the two golf aficionados, who were approaching their active retirement years.

The couple sought out architect Marc Camens to design a home befitting the pristine setting they’d selected. Camens, who moved his architectural firm to the area over a decade ago, was no stranger to the richness and variety of the scenic views found on some of the East Coast’s carefully preserved barrier islands. He has designed many custom homes on both Kiawah Island and neighboring Seabrook Island. But few he’d seen had this spectacular view—an intricate backdrop of color and texture animated by the movement of waterfowls across an expanse of marsh grass.

As Camens walked the site for the first time, he expected that folding a home seamlessly into the rhythm of this amazing environment would have its own particular set of challenges. But he also discovered something he didn’t expect: a second spectacular view of neighboring Folly Island. In the end, when all the pieces of his architectural plan came together, it was this additional view that gave his design its distinctive character.





“I like to design homes from the inside out,” states Camens, owner of Camens Architectural Group, headquartered on Johns Island. “Before we ever start the design work, I spend time just listening to my clients. I want to know how they are going to live in the house. I want to know how they cook, how they relax, how they recreate, how they entertain. I’ve learned that if I can wrap the walls around the way my clients live and around their activities, they will love their home.”

Once he grasped the essence of his clients’ dream for their new home, Camens began stepping-off the living spaces on the site, visualizing the marsh view as the structure’s northern boundary. Because the lot was so long and narrow, he saw the house being just one room deep, a concept inspired by the Charleston single house, which was designed to capture the cross-ventilation in the days before air-conditioning.

“I go through an exercise asking where

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certain rooms want to be on the site to capture the most significant views and the light,” explains Camens. “I do that before developing a plan. After I get the interior worked out, I wrap the outside of the house around that.”

The shingle-style house is reflective of the

decades Camens spent designing homes in the Adirondack Mountain region. There he perfected his skills at integrating the natural environment into his designs. The front entrance introduces the great room, along with the home’s signature marsh view, visible through an expanse of large windows. South-facing windows above the stairwell flood the space with natural light, creating the perfect environment for the couple to relax and watch a golf tournament together, or to invite the entire family in to watch the ‘big game’.

“They love to watch sports,” continues Camens. “Rather than a typical fireplace-in-the-great-room configuration, we built a great room with a cabinet for a big-screen TV at one end. The space meets their needs as a couple, as well as their needs when they have family or other guests in the house.”

Interior designer, Rebekah Carter of Red Element Design Studio, selected comfortable furnishings and accessories in warm, muted



tones to tie the interior of the great room with the view beyond—a style she carried throughout the main living area to enhance the sense of harmony between the inside and outside environments.

From the great room, the home's other living spaces unfold eastwardly, one by one, along the expansive view plane. "I'm all about how a house flows," continues Camens. "I really pay close attention to the transitions between rooms, particularly those that aren't necessarily doorways. I employ architectural elements such as beams, moldings, and columns throughout the ceiling and wall planes that intrinsically let you know something is happening without ever impinging on the flow. I believe that's what sets our architecture apart."

In addition to the great room's distinctive ceiling, which features elegant crown molding, Camens used a fireplace to "suggest" a transition between the great room and the kitchen. The fireplace became the focal point of a cozy setting where the couple can sit together after dinner to enjoy the view, along with a glass of one of their favorite wines.

The kitchen is clearly the heart of this home. The antique white cabinets contrast with the dark wood cabinetry of an island workspace, adding flavor and style to the kitchen, which was arranged specifically with entertaining in mind. The kitchen also features a walk-in, climate-controlled wine room—the envy of every wine connoisseur who sees it. The island serves as a transitional element between the

kitchen and dining room (which is capped with another distinctive ceiling) making it feel like a separate living space, only without walls to disrupt the flow of the house or the view.

Camens envisioned a large porch for entertaining, extending from the kitchen/dining space, but knew if he continued to follow the original view plane of the house, he would be unable to incorporate the second view into his design. He overcame the challenges of the homesite by angling the porch to capture the expansive view of Folly Island in the distance.

"We exposed the beams of the ceiling to exemplify the screened porch's hexagonal shape," points out Camens. "I think the porch feels like the prow of a great ship looking out across the water. When you're on the porch, you





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are completely surrounded by nature.”

For this couple, who expect guests in their home on a regular basis, Camens spent a lot of time on privacy planning. “I wanted to make sure that my clients’ privacy, as well as their guests’ privacy, was maintained. When someone needs to step back out of the activity for whatever reason, they need to be able to do

that easily.”

On the opposite end of the house from the porch, Camens tucked an intimate light-filled master suite, complete with a view, a luxurious master bath, and even a hidden office to conduct a bit of last-minute business via telephone or computer in complete quiet. Upstairs, he included two mirror-image guest

suites and a second master suite. “

I think one of the most interesting aspects of this house is the adult bunk room,” offers Camens. “It was specifically designed to house up to four people, such as a golf foursome. It features separate toilet and shower spaces, so more than one person can get ready in the morning at the same time. It will also make a great space for my clients’ future grandchildren.

“Working with my clients, along with R.M. Buck Builders and Red Element Design was a great experience...we were a great team,” notes Camens.

For this Kiawah Island couple, Camens created a masterpiece for living inside a living masterpiece. “This house really works for the couple,” he concludes. “In the end, that’s what really matters to me.” ➡

*Patra Taylor is a Charleston-based writer.*

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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