

DREAM WEAVER

Architect Marc Camens turns his clients' dreams into spectacular homes

By Christy Heady | Photography by Attic Fire

When Marc Camens received his clients' request to design their Kiawah Island vacation home, the Johns Island-based architect faced a creative challenge: conceiving a plan allowing the homeowners to live on the second floor rather than the first.

Camens, who designed grand living spaces in the Adirondacks for almost two decades before he arrived in Charleston ten years ago, fancied the challenge.

"Our services are based on advising clients to 'listen to your dreams and we'll listen to you,'" explains Camens, who could be described as equal parts artist and architect. "That meant putting the kitchen, dining room and living area on the second floor, not the first, and having most of the bedrooms downstairs."

Second-story living is not a strange phenomenon for Kiawah residents or for Camens, since he was already familiar with the island's zoning laws. The restrictions require that all homes be built a specific height above sea level. With this particular home, since the clients wanted their living space to begin on the second story, Camens also needed to pay special attention to the space inside the house by the front door. He had to design the home so the owners and their guests would not walk into a downstairs bedroom area.

The front entry sequence is flanked by four Lowcountry porches. Note how the siding has a slight flare, giving the tall home graceful lines. The green hue of the stained cedar shakes is punctuated by the bold red color of the custom clad windows and doors.





ABOVE: The North Carolina fieldstone fireplace has an antique reclaimed heart pine beam mantle, lending a rustic cozy air to the porch. The traditional columns surrounding each screen frame the views of the marsh and trees beyond. RIGHT: Handcrafted artisan copper and bronze sconces cast a warm glow on the great room fireplace mantle. Another feature of the grand fireplace is the television, which is masterfully hidden behind the paneled doors, directly below the 27-paned mirror. Flanking the fireplace are French doors leading to the sun-drenched private reading room.

After much reflection and sketching, Camens realized that, in order to complete the dream, he must place special emphasis on the transition areas within and outside of the home, especially outside the front door and inside the foyer.

"I thought largely about how the homeowners would feel when they pulled into their driveway and got out of their car," notes Camens, explaining his design concept was built around "an ascension of energy."

It worked. The 4800-square-foot house has a commanding presence. The home inspires anyone pulling into the driveway to look up at

the exterior façade of the second-story living space.

With his synthesizing nature, Camens created smooth architectural transitions. A wide outdoor staircase leads to an attractive, covered portico just outside the front door. Once inside, the entryway offers an immediate view of the second floor great room, its cathedral ceiling and adjoining dining area.

Camens thinks his beliefs about human behavior made the design process easier than he originally anticipated. He feels that, when most people walk into a room, their instinct is to look up. He, therefore, created a high-ceilinged foyer

that offers views of the second-story great room (which has an even higher ceiling than the downstairs). By visually integrating most of the rooms in the home, the sum became greater than all the parts.

One step he took to encourage anyone walking into the house to look up was the use of dormers that allow sunlight inside. Complementing the dormers are three brightly colored paintings of the Lowcountry marsh landscape painted by the homeowner. Camens placed them on a wall that each floor shares, one on top of the other, so a person entering the foyer will naturally look upstairs.





ABOVE: The detailed columns and arches frame the two-story entrance and the owner's artwork. The curve of the arches is mimicked in the curves of the transom and window above the entry door, thus creating visual fluidity. RIGHT: The entrance hall, with its grand mahogany door and detailed millwork, is open and visible from the second story. The wrought iron candelabrum is paired with a wrought iron exterior lantern, giving seamless transition between inside and out.

Camens maximized the downstairs view by keeping the entryway simple. The two guest rooms, their bathrooms, and the “bunk rooms”—dormitory-style rooms with built-in beds and a shared bathroom with bright primary colors—are tucked neatly out of sight. Homeowners and their guests are greeted with the view of a cozy den, a place for children and guests to play board games, watch television, or contemplate the Lowcountry's sensational marsh views, visible through French doors opening onto an outside porch.

But it's the second-story living spaces that define the style and ambience of the entire

home. The great room's 24-foot ceilings, accented with crisscrossed wooden beams, create a feeling of strength and support. Natural light beams in from windows that open up the room to views of the tall trees surrounding the house.

And, yet, even with sturdy beams and a 24-foot ceiling, this room is far from intimidating. The warmth, openness and intimacy of the room, with its golden-yellow walls and large fireplace, communicate the coziness of a family-style home—something Camens felt was important to his clients.

A whimsical feature that is shared between

the great room and the third floor is an opera-style balcony. “It keeps things interesting,” adds Camens. “And it provides another view of the great room when you are upstairs.”

A master bedroom painted a gentle blue-green, a tiled bath, his-and-her closets and a handsome wood-paneled office finish off the third floor. Also noteworthy is the use of a substantial amount of trim millwork that combines strong traditional lines with occasional soft curves.

Connecting the interior spaces with the outdoors was accomplished, in part, by adding as many porches as possible to the home. Off of the great room's dining area, for example, are







LEFT: The uniquely styled truss beams integrate and give scale to the great room. They bring rhythm to the dormers, and each beam and bracket is positioned in sync with the French doors. The white-washed ceiling is soft yet bright, as it is illuminated with natural light throughout the day. ABOVE: The children's bunk room is cheery and bright. The unique nautical light fixtures and bold colors invite play. Drawers are integrated into the bunk beds to provide extra storage space.

two French doors leading to one of the home's many porches. This porch, which overlooks the adjacent marsh, has a fireplace, a living-room-style area, and a narrower space with several rocking chairs for vacation-style relaxing.

Also featured on the second-floor is a special sitting room for reading or simply relaxing.

Nestled behind the hearth, it's a snug, comfortable room that captures some of the great room's warmth.

Camens, the homeowners and dozens of Charlestonians celebrated the home's completion after nearly two years of work. It was honored, as one of six homes showcased,

during the Charleston Symphony Orchestra League's Tenth Annual Island House Tour last November. ➤

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