

Architect
Marc Camens
wraps livability in
seaside style

WHEN FORM FOLLOWS FUNCTION

by ROBIN HOWARD / photography by HOLGER OBENAU



An outdoor living area takes advantage of expansive marsh views and functions as a year-round family gathering space.

previous: The 5,000-square-foot, seaside shingle-style home on Kiawah Island maximizes island views and a casual family lifestyle.


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LENTY OF THINGS ABOUT THIS HOME are going to catch your eye: the intricate tile and trimwork, the unique lighting, the stunning marsh views as you walk in the front door. However, architect Marc Camens designed this house around what you won't see: a family gathered on the big sofa watching the game, coffee on quiet mornings in the porch nook, a rowdy sleepover in the bunk room or a productive workday in the tucked-away home office. Camens is known for his philosophy of designing homes from the inside out, resulting in residences that are as functional as they are beautiful.

This is a 5,000-square-foot, seaside shingle-style home on Kiawah Island. The clients asked the architect for a family home that would take advantage of the expansive marsh views and accommodate large gatherings. They also wanted everyone to have their own space and privacy.

It must be said about Camens that he isn't just a good listener; he's a proactive observer. Recently, he designed a home that, at the client's specific request, "hugged" the ocean view. He has even been known to camp out with clients on an empty site to get to know them—and the land.

For this project, he spent a weekend at the family's

A wide-angle photograph of a modern, bright kitchen. The room features a large, light-colored stone countertop island with a curved end, surrounded by nine wooden bar stools with light blue upholstered seats. The kitchen cabinets are white with glass-fronted upper cabinets. A large window with a black frame looks out onto a green landscape. The ceiling is white with a vaulted design and exposed wooden beams. A modern pendant light with three glass shades hangs over the island. In the background, a dining area with a blue wall and an arched doorway is visible. The floor is made of large, light-colored rectangular tiles.

The extensive kitchen island seats nine. The kitchen also features a breakfast nook and conversation area, as well as a glossy turquoise wet bar and built-in wine and cold storage.

existing home in Maryland to see how they live in their current home. “I always ask my clients to be very introspective about how they live,” Camens says. The family loves to cook, so a large kitchen was essential. They love to entertain and watch sports together, so gathering spaces were also important.

Once he established how the space should function for the family, only then did he start designing the home to fit the land. “I find out how people live and what they need, then I assess the site, and only then do we wrap it in a style,” Camens says. “If you judge one of our houses from the street, you’ll entirely miss what we do. A house can be architecturally pleasing from the outside, but the real question is—how does it live?”

The vast outdoor living area wraps around the marsh view. It features a massive stone fireplace,

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hot tub, firepit, bar, saltwater pool, outdoor kitchen, entertaining areas and a cozy seating nook. Camens says everything the homeowners do is family-oriented, so he designed their home to reflect their love of being together.

Inside, the generous kitchen is designed to suit one of the homeowners, who loves to cook for a crowd. The island has seating for nine, while a light-filled breakfast nook and conversation area provide entertaining options and extra seating. The kitchen also features a swoon-worthy wet bar with glossy turquoise cabinetry and built-in wine and cold storage.

The circular dining room has arched doors that echo the old-world influence in Camens’ work. There are substantial entertainment areas with TVs so the family can watch sports and movies together. The stair tower, a signature Camens element, leads to the bedrooms upstairs. “The purpose of the stair tower is to create a circulation space,” Camens says. “It becomes a light shaft, and the light is constantly changing.”

At the top of the stairs, a wide landing is home to a seating area with a love seat, four chairs, a large TV,



The open dining room features arched doors that echo the old-world influence in Camens' work. Elaborate ceiling details and trimwork add a touch of formality to this comfortable home.

Bedrooms are situated to take in postcard-perfect views. The home's bedrooms are right-sized to feel cozy instead of cavernous.





The living room provides ample space for family and friends to gather for movies and sports events. An elongated gas fireplace takes the chill off of cool evenings.



The pool was renovated and now features a kids' pool and an adult pool with a sunken bar. The bar has kitchen cabinetry made of composite materials, an ice maker and a beer fridge.

built-in cabinets and drawers, and a coffee station. Built-in bookcases, cabinets and shoe cubbies line the halls. This floor has guest rooms and a bunk room with three beds and a kid-friendly living room. Here are more thoughtful details: Custom stairs leading to the top bunk have pullout storage, and wall niches have built-in lights for late-night reading.

A hallmark of Camens' design, bedrooms are right-sized and do not try to be everything all at once. Neither cavernous nor too snug, the size feels cozy and comfortable. One of the most impressive features of the home is the master suite. Camens designed the main room as an octagon, then the bedroom, dressing rooms, bathing areas and a home office branch out from there.

As they say, teamwork makes the dream work, and Camens' team included builder Jedd McLuen of Bennett-McLuen Homes, Margaret Donaldson of Margaret Donaldson Interiors and trimwork by Charleston Interiors. The three have partnered before with remarkable synergistic results.

"The client wanted a comfortable family home that truly functioned for the way they live," Donaldson says. "When the designer, builder and architect can work together from the start, the result is always better. It was great to be part of this team again."

"Any time we get the chance to work alongside Marc, Margaret and their teams, the client's vision is clearly laid out for us, as the builder, to implement," McLuen says. "Fortunately, the homeowners had an extremely exciting vision that the entire team was able to bring to life. The details and craftsmanship in every room make this a home that we will always be proud of, but more importantly, we know that this home has been a refuge for a great family to make many memories."

Camens always has the best clients, and he's quick to acknowledge them as part of the team. "They were awesome clients to work with, just the best," Camens says. "That energy is critical to the success of a project. The house is beautiful on the outside, but inside it will blow your socks off. That's what we do." *

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