



# ONE TO GROW IN

Touring this modernized river house at Palmetto Bluff, *Nancy Bader* discovers that a well-planned home makes for a sturdy family tree.

PHOTOGRAPHY BY RICHARD LEO JOHNSON

“A FLOOR FOR EACH generation,” says the wife, an aviation consultant and half of a Washington, D.C., power couple whose three-tiered second home in Palmetto Bluff reflects their growing family. She and her husband, a former U.S. senator and now political consultant and author, needed a sanctuary in which their clan—three adult children and six grandchildren—could flourish.

A solution presented itself the first time they visited friends in Palmetto Bluff, South Carolina. “We weren’t familiar with the area,” says the wife, “but we fell in love with the river and the live oaks and the Spanish moss. We both grew up in the Midwest, and none of our states had trees.” Right then and there, they purchased a lot of land to begin building memories.

## RIVER HOUSE STATS

**Year built:** 2015

**Year lot purchased:** 2014

**Accommodations:** Main house—5 bedrooms, 6 full and 2 half baths; guest cottage—1 bedroom, 1 bath

**Time to complete:** 16 months



**PLAY TO STRENGTHS.** The kitchen is the former senator's domain. The grays and taupes reflect the first floor's color palette, and materials play up the nature theme—a stained, white oak table; marble countertops; wood and leather stools, and chisel-edged travertine flooring. The husband handles the cooking, but the wife steps in occasionally for her in-demand cupcake decorating contests. Floors are custom-stained to look well-traveled. "I didn't want to worry about the grandchildren's little footprints as they ran in and out," says the wife.

### THICKER THAN WATER

While the homeowners are quartered on the first, primary story, the second floor hosts the adult children, along with the former senator's office, which affords elevated views of the May River.

That leaves the third-story bunk quarters, playroom and bathroom with double water closets, sinks and showers for the six grandkids. The children, spanning several months to 13 years old, identify their own bunks by monogrammed pillows; one bears only a question mark, intended for the grandchild who wasn't yet born when the pillows were embroidered.

Interior designer Marc Janecki wanted to create a relaxed retreat atmosphere on the third floor that would reinforce the idea of family unity. "My own values determine my design," he says.

For the same reason, he didn't put a morning station in the master bedroom suite, even

though there's a private porch perfect for sipping coffee just steps away. "I don't make any one place self-sufficient," says Janecki, explaining the missing amenity. "Otherwise, people wouldn't use the shared rooms. That's not the way to live."

---

*"I love how it feels to open the doors to the natural landscaping." The riverside hammock is a coveted spot.*

---



**GET TWIGGY WITH IT.** The entry foyer sets the tone for integrating the house into the landscape. The color and iron twig-rimmed mirror blend the elements of a river house with an unfussy, modernized design approach. "It's calm and quiet," says Janecki, "just like the Lowcountry."

**COMPROMISE ELEGANTLY.** The dining room was a rare point of contention between the wife, who didn't feel one was needed, and the husband. He won. The iron fixture and sconces' branch design inject a bit of nature into the room, and the mullioned mirror wall reflects the outside landscape, giving diners the illusion that they are surrounded by the outdoors.





## ENTERTAINING OPTIONS

The couple had worked with Janecki on several D.C. projects, dating back to 2001, long enough, says the wife, that “he knows what we like and when to push us into something we wouldn’t have chosen, whether it’s furniture or a piece of art.”

For this project, their Palmetto Bluff friends referred the couple to Erik Puljung, residential designer at Hansen Architects. Puljung says the biggest challenge in

designing the house was comfortably accommodating various sorts of visits—for the couple alone, with the extended family and other guests. Puljung’s comment that the couple is “frequently inviting friends” is a clear understatement. The wife says the first year’s overnight guest book lists 70 names.

Janecki was given a nearly clean design slate, except for one oil abstract painted by the former senator that hangs in the dining room, and one requirement he doesn’t usually

**MARRY FORM AND FUNCTION.** The living room is multifunctional, with a corner banquette for intimate conversation, a game table primarily for the grandchildren and the requisite television, disguised by an oversized mirror. The Tom Kirby oil painting reinforces the home’s modern intent, while the embroidered fabric and subtle branches in the curtains evoke the surroundings. The detailed ceiling pattern grounds the house with the river view, but with a clean edge.



heed: a television in the living room. He compromised by housing it behind a large, rotating mirror.

The exterior architectural design is that of a large, traditional Carolina river house with meandering porches and tall windows and doors placed to maximize light, ventilation and views. Puljung describes the basic form of the house as “very symmetrical, which was a design goal from the beginning.” Great attention was paid to detail, with substantial columns on the main floor giving way to lighter-weight versions as they rise. Inside, lines are crisp and clean, reflecting the couple’s desire for a more modern design. The color palette is subdued, to reflect the Spanish moss, haze and filtered light. Colors, fabrics and furniture are restful, calm and comfortable.

**SET THE SCENERY.** The main screened patio directly off the kitchen is in constant use. With an outdoor fireplace, defined areas for dining and gathering, and views of the May River, it’s no wonder why.







Particular attention was paid to ceiling design. All ceiling trims are clear poplar, though some look like plaster, and range from a vaulted, wood-siding treatment in the bunk room to a custom tongue-and-groove layered design in the master bedroom.

**NATURAL RETREAT**

The many patios and porches are one of the wife’s favorite features. “I love how it feels to open the doors to the natural landscaping.” The family uses the backyard extensively, for casual romps and formal Easter egg hunts, and the riverside hammock is a coveted spot.

She still marvels at the Lowcountry lifestyle, so different from that in D.C., especially being able to enjoy the views of the river and its

---

*Their only regret about the home is that they don’t get here more than one or two weekends a month. Well, that—and the pollen and sand gnats. “But,” she says, “they’re absolutely worth the price.”*

---



**RIVER HOUSE REFERRALS**

- Architects/planners:** Erik Puljung, Hansen Architects
- Interior designer:** Marc Janecki, Marc Janecki Design
- Builder:** JT Turner Construction Co. Inc.
- Tile/flooring:** Prestige Stone
- Paint/wallpaper:** Paint Pros of the Lowcountry
- Windows/doors:** Coastal Sash and Door
- Kitchen design:** Erik Puljung and Marc Janecki
- Bath design:** Marc Janecki
- Lighting design:** Marc Janecki
- Landscape design:** Dan Keefer, Witmer-Jones-Keefer
- Electrician:** Crout Electric
- Audio/visual:** Custom Audio Video
- Carpenter:** Interior trim and cabinetry, Brian Webb of Webb Construction
- Plumber:** Hutson Plumbing
- Landscaper:** The Greenery
- Kitchen and bath:** Design, Marc Janecki; fabrication and installation, Webb Construction
- Accessories:** Marc Janecki Design
- Art:** Marc Janecki Design



varied tides throughout the day. The family takes advantage of Palmetto Bluff’s boat rental program, although she concedes it’s disconcerting that “one minute, we’re in 12 feet of water and the next minute, we’re stuck.” For the kids, there’s biking and golf carts and viewing river animals and alligators safely from the boat, none of which they can do back in D.C.

Their only regret about the home is that they don’t get here more than one or two weekends a month. Well, that—and the pollen and sand gnats. “But,” she says, “they’re absolutely worth the price.” ■