

NORTH BY SOUTH

Shingles meet screened porches in a creekside cottage that spans two cultures—and sparkles with light. *Judy Bean* follows two transplants through their luminous layout.

PHOTOGRAPHY BY RICHARD LEO JOHNSON

IT'S A LONG WAY from Rumson, New Jersey, to the South Carolina Lowcountry, but transplants Eric and Susan Schwelke don't feel the distance. Their custom-built Bluffton home harmonizes Northeastern “shingle style” cottage design with the breezy elements of the Southeastern vernacular.

The home sits along a creek on a wooded lot in the May River Forest neighborhood—the province of bobcats, deer and an alligator nicknamed Frederika. Inside is the more refined realm of Susan, Eric and Luna, their Australian shepherd mix. Daughter Mara and her fiancé, frequent visitors, have a guest suite over the garage.

A CHARMED LIFE

In a way, Mara led the way down South. As a high school student, she toured the College of Charleston, stopping halfway through the tour to say, “Mom, write the check!” as Susan recalls. “This is where I want to go to school!”

“Then my husband began falling in love with the Lowcountry, finding every excuse to come visit. He started saying he wanted to move to South Carolina when he retired.”

THE SCHWELKE STATS

Owners: Eric and Susan Schwelke
Year built: 2015 main house
Lot purchased: 2013
Square footage: 2,154 heated, 1,111 unheated
Accommodations: 3 bedrooms, 3 baths
Time to complete: 16 months

NORTHERN EXPOSURE. With cedar shingles, a slate-like roof and multiple levels, the three-story Schwelke home reflects a “Nantucket cottage” influence, according to architect Pearce Scott. Raised above ground to avoid flooding from the creek behind the property, wrapped in hog fencing and sporting multiple porches, it also reflects a Lowcountry aesthetic—and meets Palmetto Bluff architectural requirements.



Though Susan says Eric's retirement "never really happened" (he still works as director of orthotic and prosthetic services for the Kessler Institute for Rehabilitation, where actor Christopher Reeve was treated), the couple did indeed move in 2013, shortly after purchasing the lot their home now occupies. Two years of renting ensued, along with planning and construction.

A SWEET SETTING

Architects Pearce Scott and Allison Bonner

designed the home to honor the Schwelke's tastes, meet Palmetto Bluff building requirements and—perhaps most notably—celebrate the dazzling, peculiar location it inhabits.

"It's a funny-shaped lot in a floodplain," Pearce notes. "So the house had to be raised up, like many Lowcountry homes."

Also per local tradition: the front porch is wide, the ceilings are high, and there's plenty of screened-in living space.

Of course, the Schwelkes also had to bring some Northern influence from home. It's

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STEPPING OUT. (Left) The screened living and dining area was "an important part of the vision of the house," according to Pearce. "They wanted this to be their primary dining room," he recalls, "but, knowing our summer humidity, we recommended a dining space inside, too. Still, Susan reports she and Eric ate dinner outside all last summer. A teak table, bamboo chairs, wood beams and slate chimney celebrate the natural setting.



visible in the shingled, rather than sided, exterior; the slate-like composite roof; and the multilevel, multimass exterior.

A SHINING VISION

Inside, the architecture is all about the view—and the light.

"When we hired Pearce and Allison, I said, 'I have to have light!'" Susan recalls. "I've lived in dark homes and hated them."

She and Eric also provided the architects

with plenty of photos they found inspiring.

Pearce and Allison responded, as they often do, with plenty of hand-drawn sketches.

"We like to start our process with drawing," Pearce reveals. "It's becoming rare—but it's warm, it's easy to understand, and it gives clients something to fall in love with."

With the building in good hands, Susan was keen to choose the fixtures and finishes.

"I thought that I would design the interior, but, six months into the project, I told my

BRIGHT IDEAS. "I love my kitchen!" declares Susan, an accomplished cook. "It's the most comfortable one I've ever had. It's easy to work in with just little pivot turns, and it's easy to clean." Abundant windows overlook the back yard and creek. A built-in, custom-upholstered banquette and red chandelier from Currey and Co. brighten the pale gray, hand-cut tile backsplash and marble counters.

husband, 'I can't get this house together the way I envision it.' I was very worried about the raw space."

INSIDE VOICES

Susan and Eric found interior designer Anne Hagerty on a day trip to Savannah, when they wandered past her Broughton Street studio.

"I walked in and got a really good feeling," Susan says. "I can't say enough good things about Anne. She really gets me, and she was essential in keeping the process on schedule."

Susan was clear about her preferences.

"I didn't want a typical beachy look. I'm very attracted to gray. Anne worked the grays very nicely. She drew pops of yellow and red

from two of our favorite pieces of art, by Howard Behrens and Federica Ravizza. It's all very warm and friendly."

Anne agrees, "It's a thoughtful, well-designed space, which clients nowadays want more of, in contrast to oversized houses."

"There's not one room in this house that we don't use," adds Susan, who spends a lot of time with Eric on the porch—even in summer. "Neither one of us is much of an air conditioning person."

Instead, Pearce notes that the porch was designed to capture cross-breezes. He's proudest of "the pure efficiency of the layout."

"The whole house is light and bright," he concludes. Just as Susan wanted. ■

NATURAL HIGH. (Below) Appearing to float in the trees, the main living space features reclaimed, unstained heart pine floors. Treated with a water-based coating, they maintain their natural color—and help Susan, who has respiratory issues, breathe easy. Low-VOC paints also were used throughout the house.

BATHE IN LIGHT. (Opposite) In the master bath, a marble-topped vanity used to be an old cabinet from Bluffton's Habitat for Humanity ReStore, where Susan volunteers. Anne suggested changing its dark brown to creamy yellow. Serena and Lily mirror, Restoration Hardware sconces and art by Linda Donahue via Anne Hagerty Interiors.



THE SCHWELKE REFERRALS

Architects/planners: Pearce Scott and Allison Bonner, Pearce Scott Architects

Interior designer: Anne Hagerty

Contractor/builder: CS Thomas Construction

Tile: Garden State Tile

Wood flooring: Rick Bent Flooring

Paint: Benjamin Moore, Paint Pros of the Lowcountry

Windows and doors: Marvin Integrity, Coastal Sash and Door

Custom cabinetry: Advanced Kitchen Design

Landscape and hardscape design: Dan Keefer, ASLA, Witmer Jones Keefer

Electrician: Quality Electrical Systems

Carpenter: Interior Trim, Atlantic Coast Construction

Fireplace: James Moore, Decor Cast Stone

Plumber: Jenkins Plumbing

Landscaper: The Kayan Group

HVAC: Northpoint Heating and Air

Roofing material: EnviroSlate

Siding: Cedar Valley shake; color by Matt McDowell, Custom Home

Specialists of Belton, South Carolina

Appliances: Ferguson Showroom

Art: Federica Ravizza, Howard Behrens

