



ARTICLE BY BARRY KAUFMAN
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CALHOUN

Street Stories

THERE'S A NEW VIBE IN OLD TOWN BLUFFTON. PERHAPS NOWHERE IS THIS MORE EVIDENT THAN IN TWO BUILDINGS BURSTING WITH SOUTHERN CHARM.

If the corner of Bridge and Calhoun could talk, you can bet it would have stories to tell. As the confluence of two streets that stretch through more than a century of Bluffton history, this intersection has seen Bluffton evolve from a sleepy river town to an active war zone to a quirky artists' enclave to an upscale Southern destination in its time.

The buildings that occupy this corner, however, have just started collecting stories, even if they look like they've been a part of the street since Bluffton's days as a sleepy river town. On the corner, a two-story building houses Moonlit Lullaby amid sweeping porches that frame a building that wouldn't look out of place in Bluffton's distant past. Further from the intersection, a low-slung barn-style building houses May River Excursions and evokes the fishing cottages around Alljoy.

In essence, they look like they belong. And that's very much by design.

"It just fits in so well with all the other stuff that's down there," said Chris Shoemaker, who owns both buildings on the lot, running his business May River Excursions out of the smaller one. "The size of it, the look of it... They look brand new, but people think they've been around forever."

Strict adherence to the Old Town sense of style wasn't just a requirement of the town's Unified Development Ordinance, although that certainly played a part in it. More so, it was a self-imposed mandate by architect Pearce Scott and project manager Amanda Denmark.



The Shoemaker Buildings are situated at the intersection of Calhoun and Bridge in Old Town Bluffton.

PHOTOGRAPY BY M.KAT



- ▲ On the second floor, above Moonlit Lullaby, are two short-term rental units enjoyed by visitors to the Lowcountry.
- ▲ May River Excursions houses the bottom floor of the smaller building. Day-trippers to Daufuskie Island and fishing enthusiasts ready for a day on the water check-in here before their day of fun begins.

“That corner is significant in Old Town Bluffton, so it was really important to get that look and feel right,” Scott said.

“I’ve been very involved with the town and the community, so I just listen and watch and keep the context of how the historic district is, in general, in mind, knowing the guidelines and the scale of that building and what they wanted to do with it,” said Denmark, who earned the nickname “Old Town” from former town manager Marc Orlando. “I was the president of the Historic Bluffton Foundation and chair of the planning commission, so it’s very important to me that we keep everything correct. ‘Keep it Bluffton,’ we say.”

In Keeping it Bluffton, they turned to a builder who has played a huge role in defining what Bluffton looks like. David Abney, principal of DH Abney Company, builds with an eye toward historic preservation, with commercial projects like Calhoun Street Tavern and FARM setting the stage for Old Town’s recent rebirth.

“Bluffton is my home,” Abney said. “Seeing the community

have that renaissance, we’re honored to be a part of it.”

The first building to go up was the smaller outbuilding. With its board and batten siding and low, sloping roof lines, it borrows heavily from the cottage aesthetic found throughout Old Town.

“It’s about scale and proportion,” Scott said. “That building is supposed to look like a barn ... like it could have been a river cottage for a family.”

Of course, it’s one thing to build a commercial structure. It’s another to build a commercial structure in the middle of a growing town’s busiest district. “It’s always a challenge working in a tight spot like that,” Abney said. “And then every Thursday we’d have the farmers market, so we’re trying to navigate through the crowd with a forklift. Challenges abounded.”

Abney became involved in this project six years ago on the recommendation of Josh Cooke at Corner Perk. Having grown up in the construction industry, Abney splits his time between custom homes and iconic commercial projects. When the time



 Space above May River Excursions, which is currently for rent. Contact Shoemaker at 843.304.2878 if you are looking for a charming office space overlooking Old Town Bluffton.

came to put in the second building, he had a chance to do both.

Now home to Moonlit Lullaby, the second building’s wide porch echoes classic Southern architecture, while its second story houses a pair of apartments. Originally intended for Shoemaker’s personal residence, they were wisely adapted for use on the vacation rental market.

“We wanted to make sure the upstairs was appealing to someone coming in for a long week,” Abney said. The materials found in the two apartments present a motif of new Lowcountry elegance, with circle-sawn oak flooring running throughout, Moroccan tile in the bathrooms, and soaring beams in the great room, reclaimed from a mill in Georgia and aged outdoors.

Like its neighbor, the larger building evokes a sense of timelessness, of having long been a part of Bluffton’s fabric. “You could almost imagine this having been an old-time grocery store where the owner lived upstairs,” Denmark said. “It’s such a quintessential Southern building. It really stands the test of time.”

Of course, only time can tell if that is true. But as an example of Bluffton’s renaissance in recent years, these two buildings present a vision of the town’s next step: respectful of its history, but fearless in pushing forward.

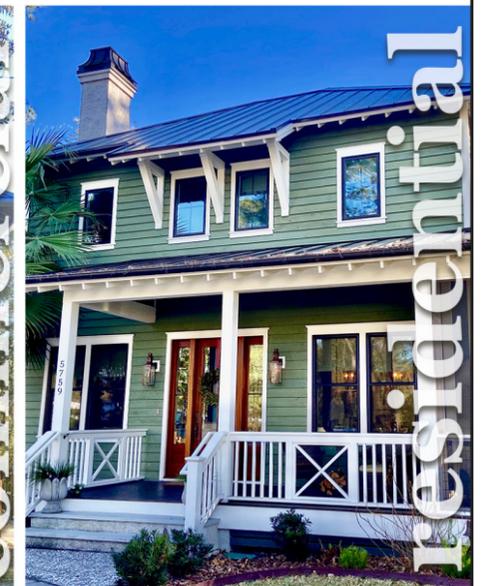
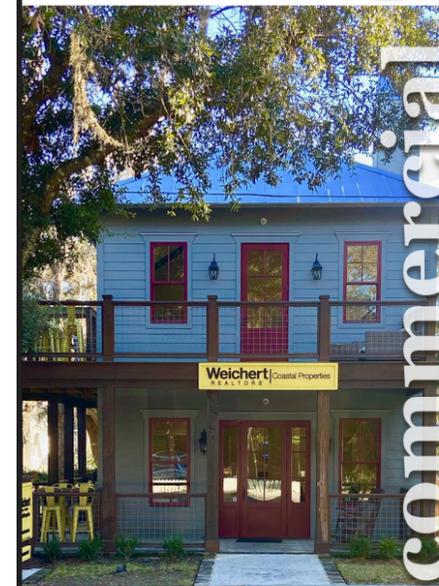
“The whole street has come so far in such a short time. My little building was the first project on that side of Bridge Street, but since then, The Heyward House was redone, then they did the park. Across the street, the Fripp Lowden House was redone. Now across from me they’re about to redo the bridge,” Shoemaker said. “Just from 2016 to 2021 the amount of people walking by has quadrupled. You can just tell how much it’s grown in the short period of time we’ve been there.”

Thankfully, that growth is tempered by a sense that each building will eventually tell its own stories as part of Old Town Bluffton’s history. Everyone approaching this project did so with the utmost reverence for Bluffton and with a mission to create something that would add to its future.

“I think with this one we achieved it,” Denmark said. “We’re all proud of it.”

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