



# Rustic Elegance

A modern barn with international style  
beckons travelers to the May River

*Written by* MARGARET DANIEL // *Photography by* ELLIS CREEK PHOTOGRAPHY





#### BEING ASKED IF YOU WERE RAISED IN A BARN

is seldom a compliment. However, what detractors mean for ill can be good and, in the case of this Palmetto Bluff barn designed by Pearce Scott Architects, really good. Set back from the banks of the May River, beyond the tidy rows of a fruiting orchard, the stately black structure enchants passersby, calling to mind that one would be all the better for growing up in such a picturesque setting.

The fortunate owners are Chris and Sebrina Leigh-Jones, founders of Luxury Simplified, a real estate investment, vacation rental management and construction firm based in Charleston, South Carolina. The duo began scheming the barn in 2020 as a third luxury vacation rental on their family estate. Also designed by Pearce Scott, their primary home and carriage house — inspired by the historic Seven Oaks home in Old Town Palmetto Bluff — are the other two rentals, enabling parties of 30-plus to take over the compound for weddings and summer vacations while the Leigh-Jones are abroad.

“Twenty years ago, we converted an 1850s barn in West Sussex, U.K. I always liked the vast ceilings and monolithic color slabs that came with agricultural construction, but somehow it never translated for residential homes,” says Sebrina. “The challenge was converting this [idea] to a concept the architect could design and approve. I mean, who puts windows at knee level or stressed steel tie bars across the living spaces?”





Programmatically, Chris wanted to treat the structure's layout as if the barn had existed for years and only recently found new life as a home. The ground, or threshing, floor would become an open living space with yellow pine beams and steel trusses spanning the structure's footprint. Upstairs, the second-floor loft space would house a series of bedrooms and bathrooms joined to the main floor by a contemporary, steel floating stair.

"It was an interesting thought process — really treating the barn like a found object and what you do with it creatively," says architect Evan Goodwin (Pearce Scott Architects).

Once the idea took hold, Chris and his son, Kris Miller (president, Simplified Construction), got to work employing construction techniques and material combinations uniquely suited to the site and features of the barn. "We used a lot of heavy timber for most of the physical construction instead of stick frame," says Goodwin. "And we used structural insulated panels for the walls and the roofs so it's really airtight."

For the home's shell, Chris and Sebrina took cues from *shou sugi ban*, or Japanese *yakisugi* siding. An ancient technique that has resurged as a trend in recent years, *yakisugi* is the process of charring cedar

wooden planks and submerging them in water, rendering them impervious to fungus, pests and rot for years, while also achieving an attractive black finish.

"We briefly thought about creating the *shou sugi ban* ourselves, but decided using a flame thrower onsite was not the best of ideas," says Sebrina. Rather, the homeowners sourced the wood from a manufacturer, Nakamoto Forestry, which was imported through the port of Seattle and trucked to the site for application.

For some added English flair, Chris charged the architects with designing a lychgate at the entrance to the travertine-topped plunge pool deck











and a timber-framed screened porch inspired by cloisters found at churches across England.

To wow her family and future renters, Sebrina wanted the interiors to marry the architecture's ruggedly upscale look while capitalizing on the waterfront setting. "I knew from the beginning that I wanted the interiors to convey a sense of rustic elegance," says Sebrina. "A space that you enter and find yourself unexpectedly surprised by the bright colors of the soft furnishings, antique glass floating behind rustic skip-planed cabinetry, and modern lighting all nestled under massive 16-inch Southern yellow pine beams."

Continuing the material ingenuity, Sebrina gave each bathroom a unique tile treatment, utilizing white Zellige squares, colorful tiles laid in herringbone and vertical runs, an earthy mix of blue and green fish scale-shaped tiles, and black and white graphic ceramic tiles.

To further infuse the moody interiors with color, Sebrina turned to wall art. A series of Bryan Benson's Lowcountry landscape paintings can be found throughout the house. "He's my favorite Charleston painter," notes Sebrina.

Running up the staircase, a handsome set of architectural renderings is on display. A gift from Goodwin, the framed work further highlights the home's unique design features, including the lychgate, cloister and timber-framed, open-air garage.

"The Pearce Scott team was tenacious in their desire to bring to life this crazy idea Chris and I had for a West Sussex barn in Palmetto Bluff," says Sebrina. "They were true partners throughout the process, and we certainly could not have done it without them."

The partnership with Pearce Scott Architects and Goodwin was so successful, Chris and Sebrina commissioned two more properties from the architecture firm. A 1,000-square-foot cottage and detached boathouse will wrap construction soon, welcoming renters before







“This one is my magnum opus! Everything came together just as I envisioned.”

— *Sebrina Leigh-Jones,*  
*homeowner*

summer fades into fall.

“It does take a special client with guts to do something off the beaten path,” says Scott, principal of Pearce Scott Architects. “And it is always great to have repeat clients, too.”

Until the cottage and boathouse punch lists are done and dusted, Chris and Sebrina are happily relishing the magnificent barn from the comfort of their back porch.

“This one is my magnum opus!” Sebrina says of the barn. “Everything came together just as I envisioned.” **S**



## Details

**Homeowners:** Chris and Sebrina Leigh-Jones, Luxury Simplified

**Neighborhood:** Palmetto Bluff

**Year built:** 2022

**Square footage:** 3,700

**Number of bedrooms and bathrooms:** 5 beds, 4.5 baths

**Architect:** Evan Goodwin, Pearce Scott Architects

**Builder:** Kris Miller, Simplified Construction

**Interior Designer:** Sebrina Leigh-Jones, Luxury Simplified

**Tile:** Melcer Tile

**Paint:** Ecofoam Insulation & Coatings of Bluffton

**Wallpaper:** Phillip Jeffries

**Windows/doors:** Coastal Sash & Door

**Landscape/hardscape design:**

Michael Small and The Kayan Group

**Electrician:** Superior Services

**HVAC:** Superior Services

**Furniture:** Mitchell Gold + Bob Williams, Gabby Home, GDC Home, Steven Shell Living, Restoration Hardware

**Appliances:** Billy Wood Appliances

**Home accessories/Lighting:** GDC Home, Steven Shell Living, Restoration Hardware, Visual Comfort & Co., Zuma Imports

**Art:** Bryan Benson

For rental inquiries, book online at [luxurysimplifiedretreats.com](https://luxurysimplifiedretreats.com) or email Sebrina at [SebrinaLJ@luxurysimplified.com](mailto:SebrinaLJ@luxurysimplified.com)



*All details supplied by the homeowner.*



Left to right: Tanner and Meghan Reed, Tonya and Todd Reed



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