

Architectural diversity

A COMPARATIVE LOOK AT SOUTH CAROLINA'S REGIONAL HOME STYLES

STORY BY SHEILA PAZ

South Carolina's diverse landscapes, stretching from the serene seaside to the rugged mountains, have given rise to a variety of distinctive home styles. Each style is crafted to accommodate the region's natural elements and rich cultural influences. We spoke with architects and builders from each region to gain deeper insight into what makes these home styles so distinctive. From the practical yet beautiful raised homes of the Lowcountry, designed to withstand tropical storms and marsh breezes, to the stately and formal homes of the Midlands and the versatile, modern interpretations of traditional styles in the Upstate, each region offers a glimpse into the architectural diversity that defines South Carolina.

THE LOWCOUNTRY: Architectural style shaped by history and nature

The Lowcountry's signature style is unmistakable: wrap-around porches with haint blue ceilings, large windows with shutters, symmetrical designs and homes raised above ground. These features were initially designed to meet the needs of early settlers and have persisted into the modern era.

"The sea and waterways largely contribute to the Lowcountry's aesthetic, including its architecture," says Mike Ruegamer, principal at Group 3 Design. "With the semi-tropical climate, extensive marshes and the threat of tropical storms, homes are designed to be raised above the flood plain and take advantage of breezes. Extensive use of wide porches and tall ceilings catch cooling marsh breezes for residents to enjoy the mild climate."

These features predominantly display European and Caribbean influences, brought to the Lowcountry after settlers visited the Caribbean.

"The colonists learned how to design with lighter colors, big side porches like in Charleston and formal street facades," says Sarah Kepple, project manager at Pearce Scott Architects. "It was a merging of British architectural style and Caribbean outdoor social lifestyle."

Lowcountry homes have a simple yet elegant style that remains unchanged.

"You would have this humble character to a lot of the Lowcountry architecture," says William Court, founding principal at Court Atkins. "It was born out of local vernacular styles and needs rather than a high-level sense of ornament detail. That was part of the charm of it; the simplicity has continued through today."

One distinctive feature is the haint blue ceiling on porches. This tradition dates back to the 19th century when, in Gullah culture, it was believed that ghosts or haints could not cross water. Therefore, they would create a paint-like mixture of milk, indigo dye, lime and other materials to paint porch ceilings to simulate water. Additionally, the citrus from the mixture acted as a natural insect repellent.

"It is an indicator of a Lowcountry house here," says Stephanie Lee, marketing director of Shoreline Construction. "You drive around and see that part of history is still true today. People still paint their Lowcountry porches that haint blue."

The Lowcountry continues to honor its architectural heritage while incorporating modern touches, preserving its charm and historical significance.



©COURT ATKINS / KATHRYN LOTT PITTMAN



©SHORELINE CONSTRUCTION / PIXEL FREEZ



©GROUP 3 DESIGNS / JOHN MCMANUS



©ALL PHOTOS PROVIDED BY DILLARD JONES

THE UPSTATE: European influences and Southern traditions

Upstate South Carolina showcases a blend of European influences, Southern traditions and modern designs, resulting in diverse architectural styles. The region's evolving styles and environmental elements make the Upstate a hub for various distinctly styled homes, such as mountain modern, Tudor style, farmhouse and Nantucket style. Each style has modernized over time while retaining elements of past designs.

"They have materiality, and the styles are timeless," says Stefan Young, principal architect for Doma Architecture, exclusive to Dillard-Jones. "They are appealing to a larger group of people and use different ways to incorporate design features that the client needs. You can get creative with the styles and articulate how you want the exterior and floorplan."



Typical features of Upstate homes include wide overhanging eaves, stone veneer, brick exteriors, timbering, significant glass use and neutral color palettes, such as white homes with black windows. Moving further upstate from the Greenville/Clemson area toward Travelers Rest and Cleveland, the homes feature more timbering, visible structural elements paired with big windows, and stone accents. Basements are a significant feature of homes in the Upstate.

"They are a side effect of the area being more of a hilly region," says Konrad Nyblom, owner of BLOM Design Studio in Greenville. "When designing homes around a lake, like Lake Keowee, typically lots are sloped towards the lake. To maximize the use of that square footage and bring the living level down closer to the backyard, basements are often utilized."

The Upstate has become a timeline of various home styles, showcasing their development over the years while staying true to the region's architectural roots, blending historical charm with contemporary design.



*THE MIDLANDS:
Traditional Southern elegance
meets practical design*

Homes in the Midlands reflect a blend of influences that set them apart from the Upstate and Lowcountry. Styles include Georgian, Colonial, Craftsman bungalows and ranch-style homes. Traditional Midlands homes are characterized by detailed columns in the front, a mix of brick and wood exteriors and often feature a rear porch. Front porches are less common due to the style's focus on structural and formal facades. The homes typically have low-gable roofs with wide eaves to provide shade and cooling during hot summers.

Midlands architecture differs from the Upstate and Lowcountry due to its historical role as an agricultural and trading hub. These homes blend traditional Southern touches with practicality, reflecting the region's formal elegance and historical continuity. As the capital of South Carolina, the Midlands' cultural and political importance is underscored through its architectural styles.



©PHOTO PROVIDED BY DILLARD JONES

Shared similarities

Despite the regional differences, several features are common across South Carolina's home styles to combat the heat that prevails for much of the year. These include:

- **Metal roofs** for their durability and reflective properties.
- **Double-hung large windows** to allow natural light and provide ventilation, bringing cool air through the bottom window and letting hot air out through the top.
- **Wood siding** for its natural insulating properties and availability in all regions.
- **Larger doors**, often including sliding doors, to facilitate airflow.
- **Transitional spaces** between outdoors and indoors, such as front and back porches.
- **High ceilings** to allow hot air to rise, keeping living spaces cooler.
- **Wide eaves and overhangs** to provide shade and protect from rain. LL

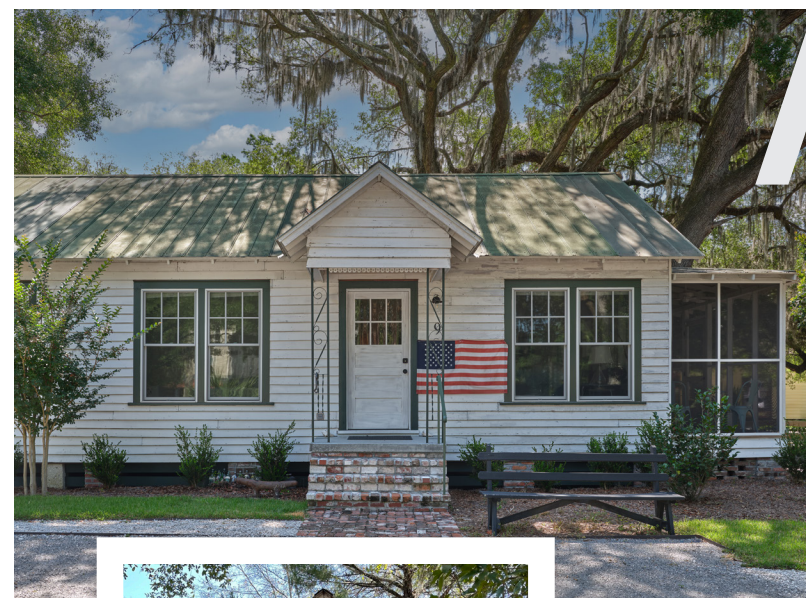


BEFORE & AFTER

At the corner of Main Street and Happy

GUIDED BY HISTORY, THE JOINER FAMILY HOMESTEAD BEGINS ITS NEXT CHAPTER.

STORY BY BARRY KAUFMAN + PHOTOGRAPHY BY J. SAVAGE GIBSON



History is never a straight line; finding the true story can sometimes be like trying to capture smoke with a fishing net. This is especially true in Bluffton, where the “official” story is sometimes just the one that’s more interesting to tell, where much of the history is locked away in the memories of long-time locals, and record-keeping can often be as casual as a sandbar Sunday.

But if anyone can cut through the haze of Bluffton’s history, it’s Eugene and Melanie Marks. As owner of CT House Histories, Melanie has made it her life’s work to delve into the morass of scattered papers and artifacts that make up the official record, piecing together the truth one scrap at a time.

Her seasoned approach shed light on the history of the Garvin-Garvey house, then a dilapidated storage shed at Oyster Factory Park, with only the oral history of a family line that had been long extinguished.

Her efforts informed a full restoration effort that saved the historic site from demolition. She was also responsible for solving the long-running mystery of Burnt Church Road’s name, her findings informing the front hall at Burnt Church Distillery.

When the Marks purchased the Joiner Homestead in 2022, the scrub-brushed lot on Bluffton’s famous four-way stop, priority one was unearthing as much as possible about the home’s story.

“We didn’t know exactly what the overall lot could look like,” said Eugene. “But we did know that we could bring the structure of the house back to life – the siding, the roof, the bricks – and that would bring back the history, the people and the stories.”

What’s known about the property’s past is this. On May 16, 1881, Joseph Joiner purchased the one-acre lot “bounded on the south by the north May River Road (now Bruin Road) and on the west by the new road.” That new road, now Bluffton Road, has gone by names ranging from Fashionable Street to East Happy Street in its lifetime. The lot cost him \$25.

Generations of Joseph’s descendants would call that corner lot home, establishing the Buffalo Nickle Shop and selling, according to one advertisement that survives, “milkshakes, snowballs, bottle drinks, select candies, etc.” On the side that fronted Bluffton Road, a small barbecue pit sold smoked chicken and pork raised right on the property, well into the 1960s.

But at the heart of the family plot, the one piece of physical evidence that still told the Joiner family story was their home. When Eugene and Melanie Marks purchased this piece of history, they were determined to preserve at least that one chapter.



BUILDING ON LEGACY
The renovation of the Joiner Homestead artfully preserved its historical essence by reusing many original materials. Salvaged siding, roof panels, brickwork and wrought-iron columns were carefully integrated into the new structure.



ALL IN THE FAMILY Bertie Joiner (suspenders) and his wife Bessie (far left) are shown at the front of the house with family members. The couple married in 1901 and had 11 children — four daughters and seven sons.



Raw materials

Before they could preserve the spirit of the house, Eugene and Melanie had to know how much of the structure could be saved. Working alongside **Element Construction** and **Pearce Scott Architects**, they approached this project with an eye on keeping the past alive. It wasn't easy.

"We were able to tour the property with some of the family members, and you'd have to walk from one side of the hallway to the other because the floor joists were gone," said Andrea Eldred with Element Construction. "Basically, the carpet was the only thing holding the floor system together."

Extensive damage from termites and a small fire in the attic added to this. As much as everyone involved with the project had been hoping to preserve the structure, it was clear there was little left to preserve. Realizing that the home's interior was beyond saving, the question became — what could they save?



Before



Before



A new look inside

Amanda Denmark with Pearce Scott Architects was tasked with reimagining the inside of the home. Fortunately, she had been given a little leeway in determining the home's unique historic importance. As with many structures in Bluffton that had been built, changed, and added onto over generations, only part of the Joiner house was considered "historic."

"Going through the process with the Historical Preservation Commission, we learned that the front half of the home, the oldest part, had to remain as far as all the siding and windows and doors," she said. "The stuff toward the back, which was the 'newer' part, could change a little bit because it wasn't part of the contributing structure. But I still wanted to keep it as close as possible."

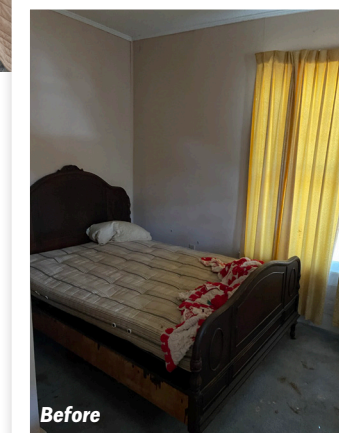
Using the puzzle-solving strategies she's used on several similar historic homes, Denmark was able to add livability to the home, turning two bedrooms and a bath into two beds, three baths and a bunk space while opening up the main living spaces. All she had to do to the "newer" old part of the home was remove an exterior door that would have opened into a bedroom.

"In the historic district there are a lot of rules about keeping the original contributing structure in one piece," said Brandon Edwards with Element Construction. "We had a few factors working against us — one was the structure, or lack thereof. The second was present-day building codes."

Essentially, they were stuck between a rock and a hard place. The rules governing historic structures said they couldn't do anything, but the rules governing whether a building can be habitable demanded something be done.

"Melanie and Eugene were able to find a statute in the U.S. Department of the Interior rules that allowed for historical reconstruction," said Edwards. "That allowed us to remove the exterior siding, metal roof panels and brick, demolish the structure as a whole, then rebuild using the exterior and interior components fit for modern-day construction."

In layman's terms, they kept everything that had made the home what it was from the street — right down to the wrought-iron columns on the old porch — and rebuilt everything else.



Before



Before

And where the front bedroom had been, she could open the space up to create a beautifully modern living area.

"We were really just putting the house back together for our time and how people live now," she said. "Opening the kitchen and dining room helped it seem larger, and with the ceiling being vaulted, we were able to work with the engineers to give it that volume."

The results have helped this old house tell a brand-new but familiar story. "We're able to see that same sense of scale. We didn't overdo it," she said. "We wanted to be cognizant of salvaging everything that could be saved. But if you can prolong things through different construction techniques, let's at least try."



TRANSFORMING TRADITION The bedrooms were thoughtfully reimagined to blend historical charm with modern comfort. By reconfiguring the space to add an additional bathroom and a bunk area, the renovation preserved the home's legacy while creating a functional and inviting environment for contemporary living.

Better yet, the teamwork that brought this home to life might spark a change in Old Town, helping bring these crumbling reminders of the town's history back to life.

"Since doing this project, we've looked at other homes in the historic district that are in the same shape," said Edwards. "Being able to educate owners on the options they have; hopefully, it will take off."

For the homeowners, that means just as much as having a beautiful new home in the heart of Old Town.

"For Melanie and me, legacies and proper design and thoughtful development are important," said Eugene. "This shows that you can accomplish all those things, and we were all very proud we came up with a good end product." //