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right at home

Mediterranean flavor plus Sea Island tradition add up to a new house that blends seamlessly with its established neighbors

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Architect Thad Truett had all of the black ironwork in this Sea Island, Georgia, home—including the front gates (opposite) and the entry balustrade—custom-made by a craftsman in Atlanta.







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an one imbue a new house with an old soul? That was the issue confronting Thad Truett, a St. Simons Island-based architect, three years ago as he prepared to design an oceanfront home on Sea Island, Georgia, that would reflect what he calls the “Old Sea Island Mediterranean” architecture of the surrounding community.

His clients had lived in a series of period homes, including a South Georgia plantation house and an Atlanta townhome. The couple hired Thad to create a brand-new beachfront haven, but one that would fit seamlessly among the island’s stock of Mediterranean-style houses—understatedly referred to as “cottages”—many of which date to the 1920s. “The clients,” Thad says, “wanted it to feel like their home had always been there.” More specifically, they wanted a residence that would echo the brickwork and terra-cotta roofs of Casa Genotta, the 1932 home built by playwright Eugene O’Neill (who wrote his only comedy, *Ah, Wilderness!*, as well as *Days Without End* in an upstairs office overlooking the beach), which sits just two blocks away. This is not the high-style Spanish of Palm Beach, 360 miles to the south, but is instead a more rustic version that marks the northern reach of Spain’s colonization along the Eastern Seaboard.

Before Thad’s clients could build their home, they had to get rid of the existing one. Standing unwanted on their nearly one-acre beachfront lot was the sort of weather-worn rental layered with renovations found in practically every beach

A sisal rug by Stark Carpet anchors a coffee table from A. Tyner Antiques and tight-back upholstered sofas from South of Market, both in Atlanta. The walls are painted Benjamin Moore’s China White.



community. At Thad's invitation, Habitat for Humanity scavenged doors, hardware, kitchen appliances, and other reusable parts before demolition. A short time later, work began for a 6,800-square-foot, six-bedroom house with rooms that are bright with textured white plaster and arched casement windows that allow in ocean light. The completed house rises above the dunes, with an asymmetrical blend of round and angular shapes composing a welcoming

Pillows on the loggia and by the pool (top and above, right) are by Schumacher. Above, left: The kitchen countertops are granite, with shells and sea life embedded in the stone. The terra-cotta tiles were aged with dark wax.

facade. Like many of its neighbors, it has the pleasing texture of local Georgia brick, which Thad lime-washed to give it a light color.

For all its careful attention to history, the house is not a museum. On the contrary, the clients sought to mix their home's traditional architecture with some subtle modern touches. The design contains a convenient open living area anchored with comfortable upholstered pieces and light sisal rugs, rather than the Oriental carpets topped with heavy, wood-framed settees that are more often associated with strict Mediterranean Revival style.

Atlanta-based interior designer Susan Lapelle, who worked with the couple on two previous homes, found ways to incorporate antique pieces but update them for a fresh feel. For example, she had an 18th-century chest bleached to give it a 21st-century look, and then topped it with a pair of vintage French table lamps and a mirror made from an old wood grate.

In the same spirit, she chose stairwell tiles with bold geometric designs instead of the classic Tuscan versions. "They would have looked too dated," Susan says. "We went with an unexpected pattern. It's a nod forward, a nod to fun." She also softened the tiled hallways with Oushak runners, which are hand-spun

Carved 18th-century Spanish chairs flank a wood chest of the same vintage. Blue-gray steel casement windows, made in England by Crittall, match those of the island's original Mediterranean-style homes.



wool rugs that are vegetable-dyed with ancient Turkish tribal patterns. In the bedrooms, Susan chose slightly off-white bed linens that are soft to the touch and organic natural window sheers that filter the sun's glare.

Meanwhile, Thad went to great lengths to produce the kind of crafted details that confer a sense of authenticity, with help from photographs the homeowners had taken of doors, gates, iron lanterns, and other old-world details while on a trip to Spain. The black ironwork of the front gates, chandeliers, and balustrade was custom-made in the traditional manner by

A regal headboard from Mrs. Howard and an Oushak rug establish a rich atmosphere in the master bedroom (right). Below: Hand-painted tiles and a marble basin are hallmarks of Mediterranean Revival style. The geometric tiles are from Ann Sacks.



Charles Calhoun, an Atlanta metalworker. He forged and hammered pieces of iron to match the patterns that Thad had sketched. The home's steel window frames were fabricated in England with the same bluish-gray tint found in Sea Island's original houses. A lattice pattern on the interior doors is typical of the Mediterranean Revival style. And to further emphasize the home's Spanish-American roots, an oil painting of Cortés meeting Montezuma II, purchased at the Scott Antique Market in Atlanta, hangs above the entrance stairwell.

The faithful attention to tradition extends to the grounds, where landscape designers Alex Smith and Carson McElheney of Atlanta created a formal entry garden enclosed by clipped box-wood hedges and Meyer lemon trees in aged Italian terra-cotta pots. A limestone fountain stands centered on a long view from the house, framed by a windswept cypress tree.

On late-summer evenings, the family gathers with drinks on the poolside back porch. They look out through the lime-washed brick columns and a stand of palm trees to views of the moon suspended over the ocean. Formations of pelicans patrol the beachfront, and an occasional pod of dolphins passes by the island in the distance. In the hush of dusk, the setting is indistinguishable from gatherings on the same stretch of beach 80 years earlier, just as the family had intended. 🌿

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In the master bedroom, a pair of vintage French club chairs is upholstered in pale green fabric by Cowtan & Tout.

