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Family Values

An island house in South Carolina is remodeled for the way parents and kids really live and play

By Barbara Karth



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Comfortably furnished, the octagonal porch (above, left, and right) was added by architect Stephen Herlong to the 1980s house and now serves as an outdoor family room and entertaining space.

Don Johnson (no relation to the actor) has lived in this house on the Isle of Palms just north of Charleston, South Carolina, for 16 years, first as a bach-

elor and, for past the seven years, married to Kim. It was the arrival of the couple's third child two years ago that finally prompted the renovation of the 1980s home on the Intracoastal Waterway. "We always felt the house was cut up with small-

Architecture: Stephen Herlong, AIA, Stephen Herlong & Associates, Architects, Isle of Palms, South Carolina

Interior Design: Carolyn S. Griffith, Carolyn S. Griffith Interior Design, Charleston, South Carolina





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er rooms and it didn't take full advantage of the view, so we wanted the downstairs opened up—and we needed the bedroom upstairs for the third child," explains Kim Johnson.

Enter Isle of Palms architect Stephen Herlong. "I wanted to be sure that renovations and additions didn't change the very appealing character of the house," says Herlong. "Most people don't know the house from the street, but everyone knows it from the water. It has a coastal character on that point of land." The architect simply reconfigured the existing space while adding an octagonal screened porch that takes in the ever-changing interplay of light across water and wetlands. Large enough for entertaining, the new structure shades a portion of

the patio for a respite from the sun and relates beautifully to the pool, which is original to the house.

A tour through the home reveals a practical design tailored to this young family: a playroom instead of a family room, and a living room for watching television and entertaining. Charleston interior designer Carolyn Griffith worked with Kim Johnson in the selection of furnishings and materials for a consistent flow through the opened spaces. Drawing from the water view, she incorporated the blues of sky and water with the tans of dry grasses covering the wetlands in colder months.

On the main level, the living room essentially remained the same size, two steps down from the sur-

In the sunken living room (above), the armchairs, sofa and sea grass rug complement the colors of water and plants outside the tall windows. In the adjacent dining room (opposite), upholstery on the antique chairs and textured shades continues the theme established for the living room. Interior designer Carolyn Griffith created the custom walnut dining table.



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White finishes dominate the kitchen (right), which is designed to maximize convenience. French doors next to the range open to a playroom (above) with built-in cabinetry for toys and television.

rounding spaces. Sky blue upholstery lends up-to-date pizzazz to the traditional armchairs and sofa. Combined with a sea grass rug, the décor blends into the hues of the landscape visible outside the room's long expanse of tall windows.

Opposite from this glass wall is a fireplace with a plasma television hidden behind paneled doors. Built as a stand-alone unit while appearing to be a wall, it houses electronic equipment in one side—and in the other side, a laundry chute. "They told me there was just no way, no good place to put the laundry chute. And I said, 'Well, find a bad place to put it, because we have to have one,'" laughs Johnson. She found this to be a workable, yet unorthodox, compromise, one outside the proverbial box.

A small porch at one end of the living room was enclosed to create a







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The new octagonal porch shades a portion of the patio next to the swimming pool (opposite). A firepit (above) provides a handy place for roasting marshmallows and enjoying cool evenings outdoors.

formal dining room. The converted porch opens to the expansive, nearly all-white kitchen, created from square footage co-opted from the former dining room. Here, the space is packed with ingenious storage solutions: The toaster is housed in a drawer with a plug so it never takes up counter space, even when it is being used. Shelves in a cabinet to the side of the range are designed for spices and a foot pedal operates the sink faucets. Johnson was enamored with her sister's pot filler over her range, so she incorporated that feature, too.

Next to the range, French doors open to the children's playroom, which is fashioned, once again, from a narrow porch. An abundance of floor space remains for tumbling with bean-bag chairs, along with storage for toys in generously sized closets and cabinetry. Previously, the kids' space had been

on the opposite side of the house, away from their mother's ever attentive ear. Now, the two young boys and a girl play next to the kitchen in a room that will grow and change as they do.

Of course, the driving force of the renovation was an additional child's bedroom. Herlong reconfigured most of the second floor, leaving only the master bedroom as it was. By reworking the roofline on the street side of the house, he enlarged small, gabled dormers to create three bedrooms where there once were two. For the Johnson children, these are cozy spaces to tuck into after swimming and roasting marshmallows in the backyard fire pit with the water shimmering in the setting sun. ☺

Writer Barbara Karth resides in Chevy Chase, Maryland.

