Barely visible at the end of a stately yet rustic drive, this secluded home has a lot of presence. Upon seeing it, you are mysteriously beckoned to draw closer to marvel at its majesty. (But don’t—you’d be trespassing if you did.) This private home was owned by John Morgan, who became chairman of the board of Plum Creek Timber Company, and is now owned by one of Hollywood’s elite, Ben Affleck and his family have enjoyed privacy here over the past decade. This home has graced the covers of books and magazines with Savannah-based photographer Richard Leo Johnson capturing it in all its glory. It has also been in a movie or two, but more about that later.
La maison

CHAPTER ONE

All good stories go, the stage must be set and the lead roles introduced. I met James (Jim) L. Strickland, founder of Historical Concepts, in 2005 during a visit with his marketing team. We discussed a revolutionary idea to sell his firm’s predesigned house plans on the Internet to promote the growth of traditional towns and to beautify neighborhoods across the country (www.OurOwnPlans.com). The plan’s ultimate goal was to affect 25 percent of all new homes built across the country. This visionary idea was just one of many that this graduate of the University of Georgia and Yale Graduate School of Architecture has had throughout his illustrious career. Historical Concepts’ pedigree and influence in the world of high-quality and predesigned architecture is a rare find, and the company mandate is to create timeless homes that embody traditional Southern culture, enrolling and promoting the ideas of classical and traditional design. Since 1982, his firm has amassed an impressive body of excellent work.

In the thirty-five years since Historical Concepts was founded, Jim Strickland has met and worked with some incredible clients. “Many of my clients have been a great source of inspiration and support to the firm along the way,” says Jim. “However, I don’t think I’ve met a visionary quite like John, who entrusted us to design such an emblematic emblematic site of a historic ferry crossing along Georgia’s oldest river. It is visually tempered. It’s not until you ascend the stairs and stand beside the twenty-foot pilasters to the main floor columns to the four-foot-by-ten-foot windows—the scale of the building is visually tempered. It’s not until you ascend the stairs and stand beside the windows and doors that you realize how grand the house is. This effect carries on from the exterior, where eighteen-inch crown molding in the receiving room quiets the stenciled ceilings and makes the huge room feel intimate. “Details aside, I think the success of this design is that it truly feels like an antebellum-era estate,” Jim says. “There’s an air of authenticity that comes from the scale, the materials, the way it sits on the land, and the natural and not overly manicured landscape. These things lend a patina of age that has fooled visitors time and again into believing that they are experiencing a home of a historic era.”

While the main house represents the elegance of Southern classicism, the guest house is its countertop in rustic simplicity. It is appropriately named Oyster House in homage to its former life. “In our imagination, we repurposed an old post-and-beam oyster factory into a camp-style retreat for guests, an elegant but understated dwelling in a simple raised cottage form,” says Jim. “However, we soon learned that the home would need to be elevated more than ten feet due to the flood plain.” With a foundation of that height, the scale would no longer work, and Jim knew that he would have to design something of greater stature. “While it took some contemplation, we finally landed on the current design, which combines classical inspiration from the Greek Revival plantation houses of the Natchez Trace with the impeccable proportions of the mid-nineteenth-century raised cottages found in New Orleans,” Jim adds. Because all the elements are oversized—from the prominent square pilasters to the raised Doric columns to the four-foot-by-ten-foot windows—the scale of the building is visually tempered. It’s not until you ascend the stairs and stand beside the windows and doors that you realize how grand the house is. This effect carries on from the exterior, where eighteen-inch crown molding in the receiving room quiets the stenciled ceilings and makes the huge room feel intimate. “Details aside, I think the success of this design is that it truly feels like an antebellum-era estate,” Jim says. “There’s an air of authenticity that comes from the scale, the materials, the way it sits on the land, and the natural and not overly manicured landscape. These things lend a patina of age that has fooled visitors time and again into believing that they are experiencing a home of a historic era.”

Another charming but much more intimate home designed by Historical Concepts is about a mile from the Big House. “As the sentinel at the entry...”

Above: The late Robert Marvin, regarded as the father of Southern landscape architecture, designed the formal road. Opposite: Four rooms of the Big House’s outer veranda, including the father of Southern landscape architecture, designed the formal road. Curtains by Lee Jofa. Photos by Richard Leo Johnson.
Once you visit Hampton Island, it is hard not to be enthralled by her beauty. It is a place with Spanish moss, oak trees, and winding dirt roads in a surreally quiet rural setting. This privately owned island on Georgia’s Gold Coast is something to behold.

The Georgia Sports Hall of Fame named its course, designed by Davis Love III, and even wrote a synopsis for each of its eighteen holes. “It is a very challenging course on a picturesque piece of land,” says Barkowski. Love designed the 7,512-yard course, aptly named the Ricefields, using the indigenous setting to accentuate the area’s history. He shaped the course’s unique path amid ancient oak forests, wild marshes, ponds, and an equestrian center.

The island has held many iterations over the years, but the story of a promise and a dream created in 2003, when it first bore the name Hampton Island Preserve, was one in which movies are made. Rich in history and beauty, this place is unlike any other. “It’s a captivating place with Spanish moss, oak trees, and winding dirt roads in a unusually quiet rural setting,” said real estate mogul John Williams, founder and chairman of Atlanta-based Post Properties (APTS: NYSE). Williams, one of the initial investors of Hampton Island, sold his shares to his long-time friend Leventhal more than a decade ago, but his fondness for her is still there. “Hampton Island is a natural beauty, and this privately owned island on Georgia’s Gold Coast is something to behold.”

I was one of the fortunate ones to be there near the beginning, so I can tell you firsthand how dreamlike this island is. She has gifted me many precious memories.
since 2006: luxuriously appointed club membership homes with amenities to match; exhilarating rides in an old-fashioned six-person open carriage drawn by two magnificent white Percherons in full black dress harnesses; private chef dinners for a family so large that they felt like banquets; a true outdoorsman’s mecca with golfing, fishing, hunting, and equestrianism; private and couples massages in a treehouse spa; exploring the island farm for fresh vegetables, fruits, and herbs for family meals; and nightly fireside talks with family and friendly neighbors under ancient oak tree canopies and star-filled, pitch-black skies.

The cataclysmic recession of 2008 put a damper on that dream, but somehow it lived on. Though not quite back to her former glory, Hampton Island has withstood the test of time. My family is still in possession of our parcel on the island, and Ron Leventhal invited me back after a long hiatus to get reacquainted with her charm and to discuss her future. One of the club membership homes, Settler’s Rest—designed by architect Bill Foley—was our meeting venue. Returning to this splendid, charmingly rustic home made my heart flutter. Throughout lunch, and then dinner, Ron and I reminisced about the good times had by all on the island and discussed his renewed passion for the property. “It’s become my mission to protect Hampton Island and to right the original vision and intent, as well as to ensure that it does not foreclose,” Ron says fervently. “This will be my final legacy.”
HER SOUL
By Laurie Crowley

Our souls were joined so long ago
Young and immature
We needed time to learn and grow
Just so we could be sure

And so the years quickly passed
As they always do
Life crept in to cause confusion
Out with the old and in with the new

Caught up with worldly treasures
We drifted far apart
I never lost that piece of her buried in my heart

So when by chance our paths have crossed
I feel my soul rejoice
I thank the Spirit of the river
And the power of the Oak
For one more chance at life and love and hope

I stand alone tall and strong
On my own two feet
My soul cries out for my other soul
To make one soul complete

Hampton Island
Where it all begins... again.

La maison

Her Story

Set on four-thousand acres on the Georgia coast thirty-five minutes south of Savannah, Hampton Island Preserve is one of the few underdeveloped islands along the South’s Atlantic coast. A total of four hundred homesites, ranging from hundred-acre horse farms to one-acre lots, and a private membership club for five hundred that includes golf, equestrian, boating and fishing, culinary services, an unrivaled organic farm, a treehouse spa, and horse stables, are all part of her story. Being able to stand the test of time through tough times is usually more relevant to an unbridled resolve. The dozen or so homeowners, membership owners, and past investors that I interviewed for this piece all had high praise for what Ron has both endured and accomplished with the island during an immensely difficult economic climate. His stewardship over preserving her and his vision so that she would be ready to walk into the next chapter of her evolution is outstanding. “His tenacity to hold this together with an unrelenting ability, enabling Hampton Island to now reach her potential to become something special, is a testament to Ron’s legacy,” says Frank Flautt, cofounder of Sandcastle Resorts and one of the original investors of the island.

Homeowner Steve Cole who owns Morning Glory—a hundred-acre farm with sixty acres under conservancy—launched the Davis Love III-designed golf course. “It is as good as it could be, and one of the finest I’ve ever played,” he says. “The bones and infrastructure are still there today,” he says of...
“I foresee today’s Hampton Island children returning one day with children of their own to continue a new tradition—becoming one with the flow of the saltwater marsh tide.”

Hampton Island, “and it could be one of the nicest family-owned resorts in the world.” As an avid golfer who has played many courses in his lifetime, Steve revealed that a recent issue of Golf Georgia places Ricefields as one of four courses in the category of “The Greatest Course that Never Was.” Though the publication may not have the facts right, Steve didn’t feel that the categorization was necessarily a negative, but rather put an exclamation mark on how great the course’s design is. In actuality, Ricefields officially opened in September 2008 and, not only has it remained open while many other golf courses closed, but has also played host to numerous charity tournaments over the years. Like the rest of the island, it could easily be brought back to its former glory, now that the economy is in a much better place and Ron has kept it out of receivership.

Steve and I recounted the many fond memories our respective families have had on Hampton Island over the years, and like many, we have continued hope for brighter days ahead.

Another homeowner James Freeman chimes in, “As a principal of Strategic Group of Companies, it was logical for us to look at coastal Georgia for building our home away from home here in Atlanta. Since that acquisition, my family and I have grown to love all the island has to offer and are appreciative of Lehnthal’s vision and management of this beautiful place.”

I commiserated with Ron about the age-old adage in real estate that he knows all too well: Never become emotionally attached to a piece of property. Of the litigation concerning the island that he has been encumbered with over the past decade, Ron says, “That is what actually broke me to fall in love with the island and to lead the charge to protect and preserve her. It’s my mission.” With renewed energy and passion behind him, Ron is more determined
than ever to breathe life back into the vision of this enchantress. Steve Bartkowski, for one, would love to see Ron succeed. “There is something ethereal about it that I can’t put into words, but it makes me feel as though I belong there,” says Bartkowski. “I would love to see the club become all that it can be.” As one who has personally experienced Hampton Island, I couldn’t agree more. In speaking of his legacy for the island, Ron says, “I foresee today’s Hampton Island children returning one day with children of their own to continue a new tradition—becoming one with the flow of the saltwater marsh tide.”

The following is a pictorial of the island in all her glory. Everyone that was interviewed for this story echoed high praise for Hampton Island manager Bianca Croft as well as equestrian manager Jennifer Williams, the caretaker of the most beautiful horses, which have been a centerpiece to so many families’ memories.

**La maison**

Alpine bonfires under the stars are better when shared with family and friends outside the Old Shed on Hampton Island.

Photos courtesy of Hampton Island Preserve

**Right:** The Treehouse Spa offers massages, soaks, and other services in this whimsical reclaimed-wood retreat among the surrounding tidal marshes.

**The Show**

By JORDAN STAGGS

**CHAPTER THREE**

The parts of Live by Night that take place in the Ybor City neighborhood of Tampa, Florida, were filmed on Hampton Island Preserve with Affleck’s home, the nearby Atlantic coast, and other parts of the island used as the story’s backdrop.

**Live by Night (2016)**

Ben Affleck wrote, produced, and starred in this feature film adaptation of Dennis Lehane’s 2012 crime novel set in Prohibition-era Boston, Florida, and Cuba. Joe Coughlin (Affleck) is the prodigal son of the Boston police chief who falls for the wife of a gangster and begins a not-so-slow descent to the dark side.

The film also stars Zoe Saldana, Sienna Miller, Elle Fanning, Brendan Gleeson, Chris Messina, and Chris Cooper.

This enabled Leventhal to reinvent the island yet once again as she embraced the casts and crews of feature films and television series of various types.

**Ben and Ara (2015)**

Nnogor Likké directed this star-crossed romance about an African Muslim PhD candidate (Ara, played by Constance Ejuma) who falls for her agnostic classmate (Ben, played by Joseph Baird). Their budding relationship causes strains on their studies and explores the expectations and difficulties of interracial and intercultural relationships in today’s society. Ejuma and Baird wrote the screenplay and scouted along the Georgia coast for locations. Many scenes were filmed at Hampton Island and in surrounding Liberty County, where Ejuma said, “I must go on”}

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**Right:** The Treehouse Spa offers massages, soaks, and other services in this whimsical reclaimed-wood retreat among the surrounding tidal marshes.

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Photos courtesy of Hampton Island Preserve

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Contestants battle it out to see who has guts and who can't handle the heat as 106  |  OCTOBER 2017
La maison

Anglers & Appetites (2017)

David Zolicki and former University of South Carolina offensive lineman Phil Proctor host this five-episode travel and cooking series airing on FOX Sports South, FOX Sports Sun, and Domination America, a Discovery-owned channel. They visited Hampton Island in spring of 2015 for a day of fishing with the island’s resident fly-fishing and shooting expert, Roger Burge, then headed inside for a feast with executive chef Paddi Rossiter of Taste Liberated. The episode will air this November as part of Anglers & Appetites fourth season.

“IT WAS PROBABLY ONE OF THE BEST DAYS OF FISHING I’VE HAD. IT’S PEACEFUL AND RELAXING, BUT YOU CAN ALSO MAKE IT AS ADVENTUROUS AS YOU WANT.”

“It was probably one of the best days of fishing I’ve had,” says Zolicki. When scouting filming locations with the help of Leah Poole at the Liberty County Chamber and CUB, Zolicki and Proctor saw the glorious marshes, oak trees, and Spanish moss and knew the island was special. “It’s peaceful and relaxing, but you can also make it as adventurous as you want. You can rent a kayak or go fishing or hunting, but if you want to relax, you can prop up in an Adirondack chair and just hang out for a while.”

American Grit, Season Two (2017)
This reality competition show, which recently completed its second season on FOX, is hosted by WWE superstar John Cena as he and four military mentors train contestants to compete as “Camp Grit” on Hampton Island Preserve. Contestants battle it out to see who has guns and who can’t handle the heat as they endure both individual and team challenges that test mental and physical strength. Cena, along with some of the Season Two cast, revisited nearby Savannah in June for a Grit Cares charity event benefitting CUBIE Childhood Cancer.

The Town (2010)
Affleck’s second directorial endeavor, The Town is a fast-paced, violent look at Boston’s Charlestown neighborhood and its criminal underbelly as a renowned team of bank robbers (played by Affleck, Jeremy Renner, Owen Burke, and George Carroll, better known as Slaine) set out for the ultimate score with a plan to rob Fenway Park. The film’s final scene, in Affleck’s character escape from authorities and goes into hiding, was captured at “Jack’s Shack” on Hampton Island.

How the story of Hampton Island Preserve will unfold from here is a mystery, but one thing we do know: Lonesome vows that she will live on.