



— THE —

Big House

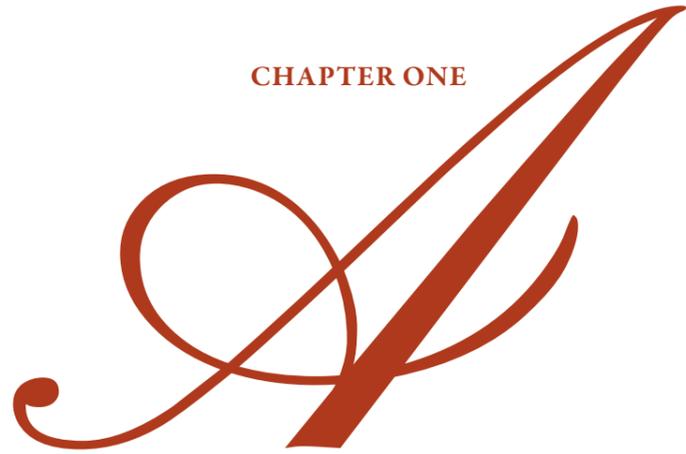
— AT HAMPTON ISLAND PRESERVE —

Historical Concepts Creates a Masterpiece

By LISA M. BURWELL

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.

CHAPTER ONE



s 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.OurTownPlans.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 purposeful architecture is a rare find, and the company mandate is to create timeless homes that embody traditional Southern culture, extolling and protecting 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 Morgan, who entrusted us to design such an emblematic and enduring place." In the mid-1990s—predigital days—Jim received a letter in the mail from John, who had purchased the property now known as Hampton Island. "It was captivating and poetic," Jim continues. "I was immediately swept into his erstwhile vision of re-creating an antebellum estate along the banks of the Newport River, at the very site of a historic ferry crossing along Georgia's oldest

Previous page: The nineteenth-century Greek Revival plantation homes of Louisiana and Mississippi became the inspiration for the Big House at Hampton Island Preserve designed by Historical Concepts.

Photo by Richard Leo Johnson



road." The result is a project that is symbolic of Historical Concepts' design philosophy and ideals, and one that has helped chart the course for future generations of the firm.

Enter the Big House. The design journey for this home took some unexpected turns that, in hindsight, seem rather serendipitous. "The original vision was for 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 fluted 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 to the interior, where eighteen-inch crown molding in the receiving room quiets the sixteen-foot ceilings and makes the huge room feel inviting. "Details aside, I think the success of this design is that it truly feels like an antebellum-era estate," Jim says assuredly. "There's an air of authenticity that comes from the scale, the materials, the ways 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 counterpoint 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," says Jim. The warehouse-turned-bunkhouse upper floor shades an open-air level below. "What once might have been a waterfront platform for shucking oysters is now a sheltered outdoor entertaining space that, in keeping with the spirit of vernacular architecture, was designed to enjoy the prevailing breeze."

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 approach from the North Newport River to the Big House's large veranda.

Opposite: Four rooms radiate off the central receiving room to the Big House's outer corners: a dining room, a gentleman's study, the master bedroom, and the kitchen/keeping room (left), which is clad in reclaimed wood.

Photos by Richard Leo Johnson



to the site, we wanted to create a structure that was humble yet would foreshadow the implied history of the main house and ancillary structures," says Jim. Butterfly Cottage, as it is called, is another Hampton Island club membership home—also photographed by Richard Leo Johnson. "The raised cottage form, a mainstay of vernacular Low Country architecture since the late 1700s, was a charming fit," Jim continues. "I love how it has become integrated with nature over time, with climbing jasmine and fig vines softening the foundation and chimney."

Historical Concepts also designed Dr. Bradley Goldberg's home on Hampton Island, which is a Low Country-style house that he and his family enjoy as a vacation home where they partake of all the amenities the club has to offer. "I love how free, safe, and happy we are as a family when we're here," says Dr. Goldberg. "We have such fond memories of all the good times we have when we are on the island."

Once you visit Hampton Island, it is hard not to be enthralled by her beauty. It is a place with a sacred past, where you can almost hear the trees whispering ancient secrets when gentle breezes tickle their

Above: Tapered architraves in the classical Greek Revival style frame the windows and doors of the receiving room, which fills the depth of the home.

Photo by Richard Leo Johnson

Left: Ron Leventhal of Tivoli Communities, president of Hampton Island Management, Inc. and managing member of Hampton Island Preserve

Photo by Gerald Burwell



The Ricefields golf course, designed by PGA champion Davis Love III, is stretched over 7,200 yards and nestled among the island's oak trees, marshes, ponds, and architecture.

Photo courtesy of Hampton Island Preserve

leaves. Originally Native American land until the mid-1700s, Hampton Island was first settled by land grants and developed as a Southern rice and cotton plantation. During the Civil War, the island was a Confederate coastal defense post. It remained in pre-Civil War condition and untouched through the 1900s, under the ownership of Union Camp Corporation (International Paper). In 1997, it was purchased as a personal retreat by John Morgan, who commissioned Historical Concepts to design the Big House on Georgia's coast. The current

development company acquired the island in 2006 to create Hampton Island Preserve.

Coming from an impressive real estate pedigree is Ron Leventhal. As managing member and president of Hampton Island Management, Inc., Leventhal has weathered what few have been able to endure. Having a determined personality, this survivor of two plane crashes and five heart procedures, he has successfully steered the island away from the rocks of bankruptcy through the fury of an almost equally tenacious real estate storm. "Ron is a bulldog," says former Atlanta Falcons quarterback Steve Bartkowski, who is also the honorary Hampton Island Club president. "He has the critical business sense and knew he was in for a fight to keep it out of bankruptcy. I honestly don't know how he did it—it's an amazing feat."

"IT'S A CAPTIVATING PLACE WITH SPANISH MOSS, OAK TREES, AND WINDING DIRT ROADS IN A SUR-REALLY QUIET RURAL SETTING. THIS PRIVATELY OWNED ISLAND ON GEORGIA'S GOLD COAST IS SOMETHING TO BEHOLD."

The Georgia Sports Hall of Famer took a great interest in the island's golf 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 spectacular piece of land," says Bartkowski. 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, stocked 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 surreally 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 this 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."



Above: True timber-frame construction and the sturdy simplicity of post-and-beam carpentry are evident in the Oyster House, the island's riverfront sporting lodge.

Photo by Richard Leo Johnson

Right and opposite: A short stroll from the Oyster House and across a bridge leads to the island's barn and farm, available for owners and guests to stop by and pick up fresh vegetables, fruits, and herbs.

Photos courtesy of Hampton Island Preserve



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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.



Along this tidal river, rice plantations once flourished and a ferry landing provided crossing for travelers on the state's oldest road, a simple trail built by James Oglethorpe in 1736.

Photo courtesy of Hampton Island Preserve

Her Story

CHAPTER TWO

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—lauded 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 it 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 Levnthal’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 a renewed energy and passion behind him, Ron is more determined

INDIAN FOLKLORE

I WATCHED AS THE WISE OLD LEADER, WHO HAD LIVED WITH ME FOR ONE HUNDRED YEARS, CALLED HIS TRIBE TOGETHER. HE WAS SAYING GOODBYE, BUT HE WAS NOT SAD. HE HAD LIVED LONG AND HAPPY. HE LED HIS PEOPLE WITH PRIDE AND HONOR, ALWAYS FAIR AND JUST. SEEKING COUNSEL WHEN NEEDED, HE HEADED HIS HEART. AFTER EARNING THE RESPECT OF HIS PEOPLE, HE PREPARED THEM TO THRIVE IN HIS ABSENCE. HE TOLD THEM HE WOULD NOT BE FAR, FOR HIS SPIRIT WOULD BE EVER PRESENT. THE MIGHTY OAK WOULD REMIND THEM OF HIS AGE AND WISDOM. THE GRACE AND BEAUTY OF THE WHITE-TAILED DEER WOULD BE REMINISCENT OF HIS YOUTH AND AGILITY. ONE HUNDRED YEARS ON THIS EARTH, HE WILL NOT BE MISSED. TO LIVE ON THE LAND IS TO BE OF THE LAND.

The brick and oyster shell pathways of Hampton Island meander under live oaks and along the river’s edge.

Photo courtesy of Hampton Island Preserve

La maison

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.



Above: 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

MUST GO ON

By JORDAN STAGGS

CHAPTER THREE

During the past several years, when the island was in somewhat of a financial holding pattern, a curious thing happened: Hollywood came calling. Its privacy and scenic vistas make Hampton Island Preserve a haven for filmmakers of all genres. (It doesn’t hurt that superstar actor and producer Ben Affleck owns a home there.) 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. Take a look at some of the projects filmed on this quiet oasis in southeast Georgia.

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.

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.

BEN AND ARA (2015)

Nnegest 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 cowrote 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,

The indie romance film *Ben and Ara* shot scenes in homes and on the grounds of Hampton Island Preserve. The film was released in September 2015 at the Miami Independent Film Festival.

Photo courtesy of Constance Ejuma





starring Clea DuVall, Melanie Lynskey, Natasha Lyonne, Vincent Piazza, Jason Ritter, Ben Schwartz, Alia Shawkat, and Cobie Smulders. Tensions rise and hard feelings come to the surface as the other couples admit to Ruby and Peter (Smulders and Piazza) that the trip was actually planned as an intervention to either save their marriage—or to finally convince them to end it and move on. Much of the movie was filmed in one of the homes on Hampton Island Preserve during the summer of 2015.

ANGLERS & APPETITES (2017)

David Zelski and former University of South Carolina offensive lineman Phil Proctor host this fun-filled travel and cooking series airing on FOX Sports South, FOX Sports Sun, and Destination America, a Discovery-owned channel. They visited Hampton Island in spring of 2016 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 Zelski. When scouting filming locations with the help of Leah Poole at the Liberty County Chamber and CVB, Zelski 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 seventeen competitors at “Camp Grit” on Hampton Island Preserve. Contestants battle it out to see who has guts and who can’t handle the heat as



Season Two of FOX’s reality fitness competition series *American Grit*, hosted by WWE superstar John Cena, turned parts of Hampton Island into “Camp Grit” for filming. The season aired throughout the summer of this year.

Photo by Jeffrey Neira/FOX

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 benefiting CURE 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, as Affleck’s character escapes 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: Leventhal vows that she will live on. ▀

Ben Affleck, a Hampton Island homeowner, wrote, directed, and starred in *Live by Night*. The crime thriller also stars Sienna Miller, Zoe Saldana, Chris Cooper, Elle Fanning, Brendan Gleeson, Chris Messina, and more.

“This view is to die for.” *Ben and Ara* won the Africa Movie Academy Award for Best Diaspora Feature, Best Director and Outstanding Feature Film at the Hollywood International Film Festival, Best Actress at San Diego Black Film Festival, and Best Actress and Best Picture at the Indie Film Festival Winter Film Awards, to name a few.

THE INTERVENTION (2016)

A couples’ retreat takes a turn for the worse as friends reveal their true intentions in this indie flick

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