

CREATING COTTAGE STYLE NEW OLD HOUSE



Susan and John Tew used old materials to build a new cottage that looks as if it's always been there

"We were looking for a respite from city

"ONCE YOU EXPERIENCE THE INHERENT BEAUTY and serenity of this place," says Susan, "it's easy to understand the philosophy of our home and how it epitomizes the simplicity that feels so right here."

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JOHN AND SUSAN TEW'S RUSTIC barn snuggles into the lush terrain of Spring Island, South Carolina, under a canopy of gnarled oaks hung with wispy Spanish moss. Overlooking a peaceful vista of marsh grass along the sparkling Colleton River, the home looks as if it's been there forever. But behind those wooden walls hides a surprise: This very old-looking barn is actually a very new house.

Designed by a team from Historical Concepts, including president and founder Jim Strickland, the barn was initially conceived as the smaller of two buildings. "The Tews commissioned the small barn-garage-guesthouse as well as a spacious three-bedroom raised Louisiana cottage for this stunning piece of property," Jim says. "They are so hands-on, the idea was that they would live in the guesthouse while the main house was being built. However, after they got into the 919-square-foot barn, it fit their needs so perfectly they scrapped the idea of constructing anything else."

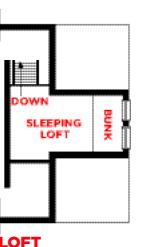
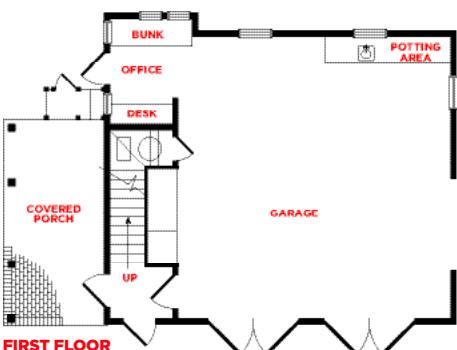
John Tew, who grew up on a farm in Linden, North Carolina, feels more than enthusiastic about the building—not only because of its pastoral setting but also because of his and Susan's long-standing connection to the area. The couple began visiting South Carolina in the 1970s and, after their kids were grown, explored elsewhere. John says, "When a friend asked me if I knew about the 3,000-acre preserve between Beaufort and Hilton Head, I told him it was in the same general region where we'd spent so much time. I remember saying we were looking for a place that was new and exciting—a respite from city life." Susan recalls the "prolonged exhale of all tension" as she and John crossed the causeway linking Callawassie Island to Spring Island. He adds, "Within minutes we knew we were in a very special place, and amazingly, later that day we were studying plot plans."

Describing Spring Island as a "wonderful camplike community," Susan says they loved the founders' underlying respect for the environment. (The 1,200-acre nature preserve, including a 300-acre live oak forest, will never be touched.) >



THE BARN, completed in 1999, features a screened porch on the second floor, overlooking the Colleton River.

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THE CHANDELIER IN THE MAIN living area is made from old ropes once used to guide pack mules.



THE PROTECTED PATIO under the screened porch is always a cool spot, thanks to the brick pavers and overhead ceiling fan.

On one of his first visits, Jim studied the shape of the Tews' 1-acre parcel and envisioned a raised-platform building constructed from new timbers. "Then I heard about a gentleman in Tennessee who was selling reclaimed barn siding, and we tracked him down. The Tews fell in love with the materials, and suddenly we were constructing and cladding the building with this wonderful old wood."

If Jim and the Tews marvel at this serendipitous sidestep, they also note that these humble relics marry the house to the land. Weathered oak boards serve as exterior walls, aged-pine planks as interior ones. Worn 100-year-old planks reassumed their former role as stair treads. "I often wonder about the families who walked up those steps a century ago," says Jim. "This little barn is giving all these materials a new lease on life."

Affirming Jim's sensitivity for "treading softly on the land," John underscores the designer's special talent for interior spatial relations. "The house is so small—the second, or living, floor is 818 square feet—it's as tightly constructed as a boat," he says. "Almost everything had to be built into the structure, and Jim's a genius at that sort of thing."

At ground level, beyond the covered porch, sliding barn doors open to the utilitarian garage designed to double as overflow living/entertaining space with a practical stained-concrete floor and a bath. On the second floor, soaring rafters above the living room create a feeling of spaciousness and light. Old pine walls and soft, earthy colors provide a warm backdrop for the kitchen and living area, decorated with a faded Oriental rug and worn leather armchairs John found with Cincinnati interior designer Paula Grulee.

The two bedrooms on this floor and a sleeping loft above reinforce the Lowcountry vernacular, with beds dressed in old plaid blankets and hand-stitched quilts. Cupboards and large drawers under the mattresses supplement storage for the lone closet. That's sufficient, says John, "because down here you don't need that much stuff. We wear it, wash it, and wear it again."

The Tews' barn emerges as an ideal retreat from a busy world, exuding the qualities of home, roots, and happy times. Generations of their family love the completely new "old" home in this enchanting natural setting of sweet jasmine, magnolias, and tea olive trees, disturbed only by the exotic calls of birds and wildlife on river and marsh. ■



THE SLEEPING AREA provides comfort at its simplest. There's nothing to paint: Old wood envelopes the space.

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