lowcountry details

This Greek Revival house reflects the classic architectural traditions of the South.

A sense of history and a spectacular site distinguish this second home of Sara and Marc Finkle. Located on Spring Island, near Beaufort, South Carolina, the lot affords views of a broad salt marsh framed by century-old live oaks.
presenting the Southern Home Awards

Come inside, and take ideas from our award-winning homes, selected for their superb architectural design and craftsmanship.

"We started with the site plan," says architect Jim Strickland, "and we asked, 'What is the site telling you?' " To take advantage of the views, Jim and landscape architect Donald Hooten pushed the location of the house close to the marsh, but left it within the dense canopy of live oaks. The architect strung the principal rooms of the house from side to side. "You try to give as many of the main rooms as possible a view of the marsh," he says.

The house's historic style grew out of the plan. "We didn't intentionally say this is going to be a Greek Revival house," comments Jim. "We wanted something that was both formal and informal. The height and proportions were influenced by the width."

On the entrance facade, the formality shows with a symmetrical balance of elements. Identical wings flank a deep-set porch. Square columns, a full 18 inches on each side, support the large frieze and standing-seam copper roof. Bricks gently step up to the front door. A pair of 12-inch-diameter fluted columns flank the 7-foot-tall door. Rather than use half columns, full ones were carefully trimmed at the back so that each projects out from the door and sidelight, creating a strong shadow line and feeling of depth.

Inside, the plan combines elegant and casual elements. Columns create a sense of organization that would have been found in a 19th-century Greek Revival house. But instead of a stair plan with parlors flanking a center hall, the main living area of the house is one big space. The spacious living and dining room is light, open, and airy, thanks to a 19-foot-high vaulted ceiling and three dormers.

Instead of the formal center hall, a wide cross hall serves as both an entry and circulation spine, providing access to the master suite at one end of the house and the kitchen at the other. (See plan at right). The brick surface of the front (right) Two pair of double doors open the kitchen to the screened porch. Live oaks dripping with Spanish moss frame the view of the marsh.

(below) Rear porches anchor each end of the house. The open porch at left serves the master suite; the screened one connects to the kitchen.

This house draws on a rich architectural history in its organization and details, yet it accommodates a modern lifestyle.

Tom Witten, juror

Whether you like classical style or something a bit more contemporary, the 2001 Southern Home Awards definitely have something for you. Turn the page to find out why three outstanding Southern architects—Bobby McAlpine of Montgomery; Virginia Dawson Lane of Charleston, South Carolina; Tom Wilson of Houston—and the Southern Living Homes Editors selected these five houses as the best of the best in architecture and design across the South.
GREEK REVIVAL STYLE

Popular in the second quarter of the 19th century, the Greek Revival style was inspired by archaeological explorations in Greece and a desire, after the War of 1812, to turn away from British influence in architecture. The style strongly emphasizes proportion and classical detail, copying the columned symmetry of ancient temples. Three orders of columns—Doric, Ionic, and Corinthian—were used, with the simpler Doric one being the most common. The diameter of the column was carefully matched to its height to achieve a look that is light yet substantial. To correct for optical distortion, round columns of the Greek Revival style, like those of the ancients, were designed with entasis, a slight bulging of the column as it tapered upward. This is illustrated in the semicircular fluted columns flanking the front door of the house shown here.

In the 19th century, the Greek Revival style was often interpreted in a more relaxed, less elaborate way. This vernacular Greek Revival featured square columns and simpler detailing but still followed the classical proportions. For example, the column capital for a vernacular Greek Revival house might consist of simple boards wrapping the top of a square column. The entablature—the horizontal band below the roof supported by the columns—often would have been ornamented on a Greek Revival structure. On a vernacular house, such as this one, it would be a simple wide band with a narrow strip of trim dividing it into the frieze and architrave. The cornice above is unadorned (see sketch on page 103).

WHY THIS ENTRY WON

This home is a fine example of the Greek Revival style that has played a great role in defining the architecture of the South. Through properly scaled architectural details and a wonderful floor plan, the architect was able to create a sense of history in a fresh, new structure.

(above) Fluted Greek columns and a transom frame the front door. Simpler square ones support the porch. (left) Working shutters are used for Southern authenticity and to provide hurricane protection. Each one is capped with copper to shield the wood.

porch, carried through to the interior hall, delineates the traffic area and provides a surface that will withstand the abrasion of tracked-in sand. "Brick is tougher than other flooring materials and helps define the space," says Jim.
The kitchen sits next to the living and dining room, separated by four shutter panels. These allow the room to open to the dining area for casual entertaining or to be closed off for more formal occasions. Two pairs of tall glass doors can be opened completely to expand the kitchen onto a screened porch overlooking the marsh.

At the opposite end of the house, the master suite connects to an open porch which echoes the shape of the screened one. Between these two outdoor rooms, a broad porch provides a transition from the living and dining room to the outside.

Because the main house has only one bedroom, the architect designed a garage with an apartment above and a separate guest house. Placed flanking the parking court, these structures recall the carriage house, stable, and other outbuildings that would have been typical of a 19th-century plantation house.