Town & Country was cordially invited to decorate a freshly built house, with a designer of our choice, at the Ford Plantation—a new type of development on the outskirts of Savannah. We couldn’t resist this opportunity to create our own HOUSE OF DREAMS.
WHEN MID-AUGUST ARRIVES in Georgia, the only natives you’re likely to see out and about are alligators and tree frogs, and even they come to a torpid standstill at midday. So there could be only one explanation for the presence this past August of a New York decorator, two members of his staff, a photographer, an editor, and several truckloads of furniture on the outskirts of Savannah: a designer showhouse was in progress. As the Spanish moss seemed to melt right off the trees, the extremely talented and awfully unflappable Thomas Jayne performed his own sleight of hand inside a 6,000-square-foot neo-Georgian house that was essentially still under construction.

The locals were probably watching from their centrally cooled living rooms, wondering, Didn’t he know what he was getting himself into? He did. In fact, so did Town & Country, because we were the ones who’d put him up to it.

THE SETTING It all started a year ago, when the magazine received an interesting offer. The developers behind the Ford Plantation, a new second-home community just getting under way near Savannah, were about to break ground on their first two houses. They invited us to decorate one at their expense, as long as we agreed to three conditions: that we’d stay within their budget, observe an aggressive deadline, and exercise the supreme good taste their reading of the magazine had led them to believe we possessed. Intrigued, we went down to check out the site.

Developments always sound great on paper, but real life usually intrudes about fifteen years down the line, when the neighbors are squabbling over one another’s hedge heights and the only available tee times are 5:30 and 6 A.M. Or maybe not. The Ford Plantation hopes to avoid these ruts, and may well do so, thanks to the combined wisdom of its three lead partners, Peter Pollak, Chip Dolan and Steve Schram. Together they’ve had more than a little luck in the fields of investment banking, real estate sales, and resort turn-around and management (at nearby Bray’s Island).

At the Ford Plantation, they’re lucky to be starting with land that is superb and full of history. The 1,800-acre waterfront property, twenty miles south of Savannah, is an unusual combination of grassy low-country wilds and plantation-style manuring, with nesting blue herons on the one hand and avenues of antebellum live oaks on the other. Part of a rice-growing estate in the 18th century, the property eventually became the winter home of automotive tycoon Henry Ford and his wife Clara from 1925 until Clara’s death in 1950. After several subsequent private ownerships—one resulting in the creation of an 18-hole golf course designed by Pete Dye, for a man who didn’t even play golf—a

The classical style and Georgia waterfront setting of the Town & Country showhouse (preceding pages) inspired decorator Thomas Jayne (top left) to scheme the décor in an easygoing traditional vein, one not without its trademark sense of fun. The first thing chosen was the striped wallpaper by Cole & Son in the entry hall (top right); it went on to become the leitmotif for the entire house. OOPosite: Chuck Hettenger and George Wittman painted the library with faux boiserie bookshelves to mimic cypress, an indigenous Georgia wood. The 19th-century Scandinavian kilim is from Doris Leslie Blau, Ltd.; fabrics on sofa, chair and table are from Brunschwig & Fils. The antique copper urn is from William Lipton Ltd. For additional product information, see page 281.
group of investors acquired it. They've wisely held on to more than just Henry Ford's name: they've also got his favorite tractor, his hunting cabin, his deepwater marina on the Ogeechee River, and other talismans of the good life that may just seduce the children of the information age to rise up from their screens for a few hours and enjoy the outdoors. The partners are trying hard to avoid becoming a golf ghetto, and they have undertaken to build a diverse sporting colony for active families, with a fitness center and spa, riding, tennis and squash, fishing and kayaking, sporting clays and nature trails—in short, a setup any summer camp could love.

So, too, the partners hope, will the sultans of the cellphone generation, family-minded achievers in mid-career who are looking for another home in a place with a sense of tradition, a full roster of diversions and an airport less than thirty minutes away. For those who can afford it—two- to fifteen-acre building lots are priced between $275,000 and $1.5 million—the place is extremely ap-

"Color is nothing to be afraid of," believes Thomas Jayne, a man blessed with a painter's instinctual eye. Case in point: the master bedroom, where silk-covered walls, hand-painted by Lucettia Moroni, bring the room alive (right). The bed and bedside commodes are from Florian Papp; custom linens are by E. Braun. Jenas Upholstery concocted the peacock-blue armchair. In a detail (top), the ruching, tufting and welting that make it an exceptional piece of upholstery emerge.
In just eight months, the Ford Plantation and Sterling Construction Management built the first of an eventual 400 houses planned for Ford's 1,800-acre property south of Savannah. Town & Country, working in conjunction with decorator Thomas Jayne, installed the final pieces of furniture as the contractors were still finishing up the bathroom. "That's normal these days," says Jayne. "People no longer want a house decorated in two or three years—they want it in six months."

**Top Left:** Georgia architect Jim Strickland took various bits of the classical vocabulary and recomposed them into a rambling and functional contemporary house. His team included Phil Windsor, Terry Pylant, Dave Bryant, Zhi Feng, Aaron Daffy and Sandy Gunitz. Ford Plantation partner Steve Schram's 1955 MG is parked in front on a walkway laid of reclaimed 18th-century brick.

**Top Right:** Our project team, from left: Town & Country's Sarah Medford, decorator Thomas Jayne, project managers Alison Nash and Eric Smith (from Jayne's office), and construction manager Peer Rinde-Thorsen.

**Bottom:** The screened porch, with two exposures and a lake view, is a comfortable living area nine or ten months a year. Jayne put as much thought into the space as he would have an inside room, with comfortable seating, places to rest drinks, and lighting to extend its usefulness into the evening. Behind the door on the right is an outdoor fireplace. In the foreground are McGuire's "Gothic" rattan sofa and chairs on an Elizabeth Eakins cotton carpet; the coffee table is from John Boone. In the background, McGuire's teak dining table is surrounded by reproduction Windsor chairs from Barton-Sharpe, Ltd.
The showhouse is a four-bedroom, 6,000-square-foot neo-Georgian designed in the southern vernacular. It’s meant to look as though it’s been added on to once or twice, with breezeways (bottom plan) leading to single-story wings.

**Top Left:** A detail of the guest bedroom highlights etched curtains by Lakewood Interiors, made of F. Schumacher & Co.’s “Madras Sheer” cotton. The wallcovering is Donghia “Hemp.” English satinwood occasional table from Kentshire Galleries; bust from Robert M. Hiklin Jr.; Syrie Maugham-style chairs from Jonas Upholstery.

**Middle Left:** One of the two breezeways, with its painted floor and windows on two sides, has the attitude of a porch—and the sophistication of a living room, thanks to a Doris Leslie Blau, Ltd. Caucasian carpet, a Banton-Sharpe, Ltd. demilune table and an abstract work on paper by James Nares. The Chinese pagoda lantern was bought at the Whitney estate sale at Sotheby’s last spring.

**Bottom Left:** The boy’s bedroom is painted a sophisticated khaki from Benjamin Moore. Wrought-iron bed from Charles P. Rogers; Finn Juhl chair from Baker Furniture; carpet from Patterson, Flynn & Martin; lamps from Flos U.S.A.; tasseled Chinese hats from William Lipton Ltd.; photos by Peter Beard; drawings by Karen Blixen, Kamante and Kivoi.
pealing. Only 400 families will buy in, most of whom will probably spend less than three months a year in residence.

Technically, the Ford Plantation is a second-home community that also maintains a private club. In order to use the sporting facilities, homeowners must be admitted to the club (the initiation fee is currently $85,000), which a managing body, not the homeowners, controls. “We’re looking for residents who will be good citizens of the community and good stewards of the land,” says partner Steve Schram. “Yes, we’ve turned a few people down at this point for club membership, though it’s had nothing to do with nationality, race or relative wealth. We just want this to be a place for responsible, civic-minded people.”

No question the partners are targeting an audience with traditional tastes. Buyers must submit the credentials of their chosen architect, who must agree to follow a set of building guidelines based on classical models (written up for Ford by Donald Rattner, of Ferguson Shamamian & Rattner Architects, LLP). And final plans must be approved by an architectural review board. Such restrictions will have their rightful detractors—after all, plenty of tasteful, civic-minded communities in this country have moved beyond classical building principles, from Sea Ranch, in northern California, to New Canaan, Connecticut. But one of Ford’s rules does seem particularly inspired: a house may not exceed 6,000 square feet, excluding porch areas. That’s not exactly small, but neither is it ungaily, considering the lot sizes. And

Whimsy has its day in the studio (above), where an alternative living room becomes home to a collection of Chinese kites. Old and new furnishings share the space: an 1820s American sofa and camphor-wood trunk set off Summit Furniture’s square table, a rattan lounge chair from the Ralph Lauren Home Collection, and Keith Haring’s child’s chair.

**OPPOSITE:** In the guest bedroom, a deceptively neutral palette plays against bursts of yellow, blue and shocking pink. The bed fittings, of F. Schumacher & Co. printed cotton, are by Gina Bianco; E. Braun linens and coverlet. The Turkish Giordes carpet is from Doris Leslie Blau, Ltd., the armchairs by Jonas Upholstery. Over the mantel is a portrait by Alison Nash, one of the decorator’s project managers.
Homeowners are being encouraged to think about breaking up their allowed square footage into a smaller house with an outbuilding or two—a garage or guest cottage—rather than putting up a single dwelling.

Town & Country admired the Ford Plantation's appeal to active, community-minded families. Not to mention that we were also charged up at the prospect of taking on a decorating project. In its 153-year history, the magazine has had a long record of reporting on houses, their decoration and their occupants, but we'd never designed one from scratch, and the chance to do so proved irresistible. We imagined a house that would be comfortable, tasteful, extremely well made without being precious, and full of personal style—in this case, the style we imagined that a family drawn to the Ford philosophy might possess.

And so Town & Country made a deal with the Ford Plantation. We decided to work with a single decorator in a collaborative spirit, and to open the completed house to the public this November to benefit charity. The decoration budget was set at $400,000, a fairly moderate sum, considering the house's size and eventual price tag of $4 million. We agreed to a completion deadline of August 15, 1999—which sounded innocent enough, even though our "house" at that point was still a hole in the ground.

The House Plans for the house, which is set on a point of land overlooking a lake, had been drawn up for the Ford Plantation prior to our involvement by respected architect Jim Strickland of the Georgia-based firm Historical Concepts, Inc. In keeping with the traditions of southern classicism, Strickland had taken various bits of the classical vocabulary—columned porches, breezeways, a pedimented Georgian facade—and recomposed them.
Architect Jim Strickland designed the kitchen to look as though it had been an addition, as many kitchens are in updated antebellum houses. Clapboard walls and a paneled ceiling effect the look of a one-time screened porch. Thomas Jayne drove the point home by keeping walls white to match the showhouse exterior and treating the floor to gray porch paint. High-performance SieMatic cabinetry and granite countertops meld right in.

OPPOSITE: The adjoining breakfast room is a tour-de-force mix of styles that sums up the lighthearted traditional spirit of the house. Dining chairs from Hickory Chair Co., slipcovered in China Seas chintz from Quadrille, encircle a marble-topped Eero Saarinen table from Knoll. The area rug is by Elizabeth Eakins Cotton, the mobile from the Guggenheim Museum Shop.
into a rambling and functional contemporary house. He even developed a story line that had the “19th-century” core of the building relocated to the site in the 1930s, when the porches, kitchen and breezeways were tacked on.

Inside, the four-bedroom house has a symmetrical orientation around a central entry hall. A combined living and dining room comes directly off the hall, with a kitchen adjacent; breezeways lead to a master bedroom suite on one side and a studio and office on the other. Upstairs are three bedrooms, two for the children and one for guests.

Who might buy such a house? We imagined a family from Boston or Chicago, two cities with uncharitable winters and direct flights into Savannah. They might be in their mid-forties, with a boy and a girl in grade school, in search of a place where the kids could have their independence and soak up some southern history (perhaps unconsciously). Dad could get back on a horse after twenty years, Mom could learn to play golf, and the kids could mess around with some boats, at least until the tennis lessons began.

Such a family would want an easy-going house, we decided, one nice enough for entertaining or putting up the occasional guest but not so fancy that they’d worry about leaving it empty most of the year. It might also be fun to give it a historical inflection and see how their taste, considered somewhat flamboyant back home, would translate to a more traditional context.

For recent photographs of the Town & Country Idea House, please visit the Residential Gallery section of our website.