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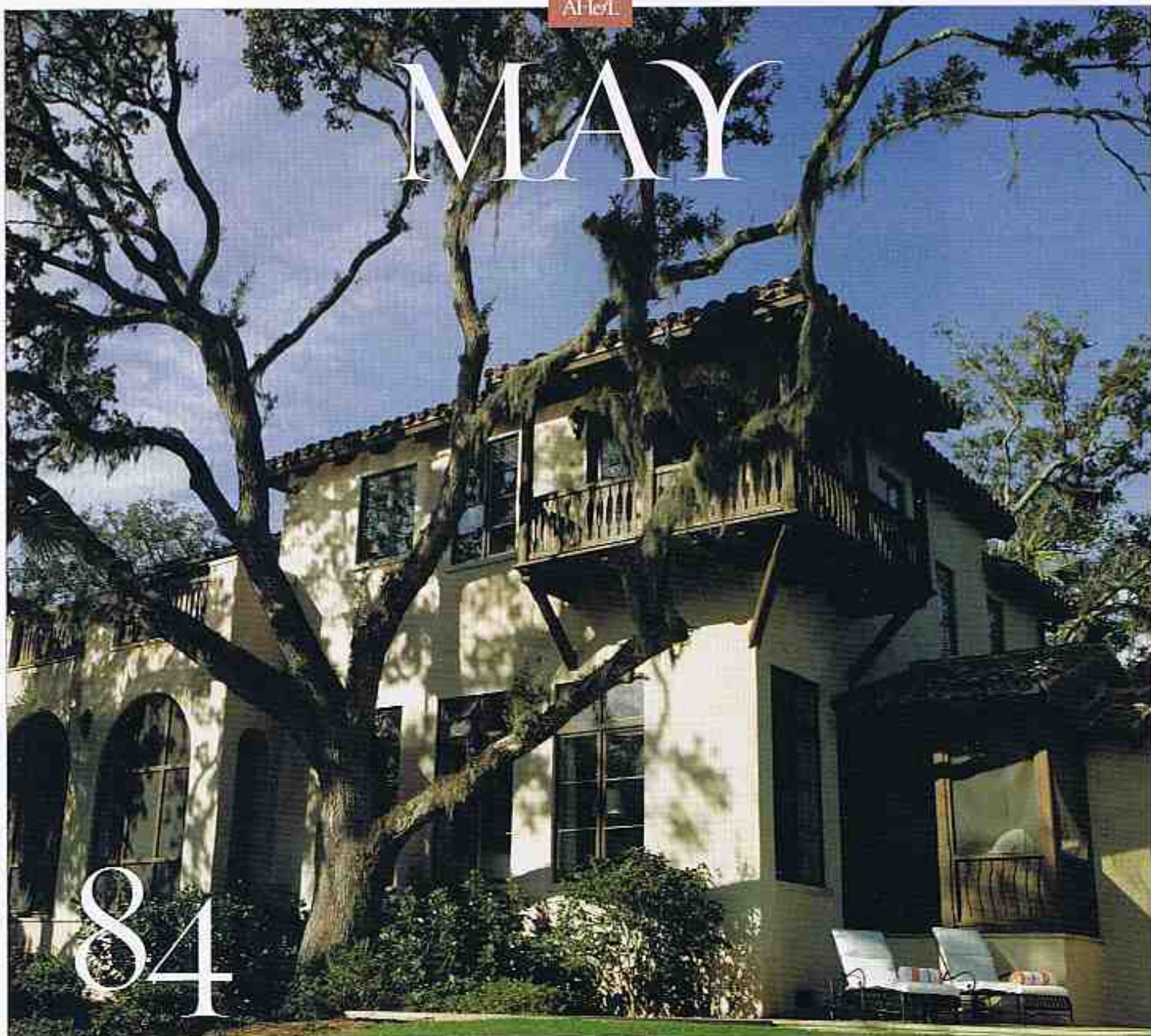
The Prettiest Cottage In Georgia

ATLANTA HOMES & LIFESTYLES MAY 2005

EASY WEEKEND LIVING

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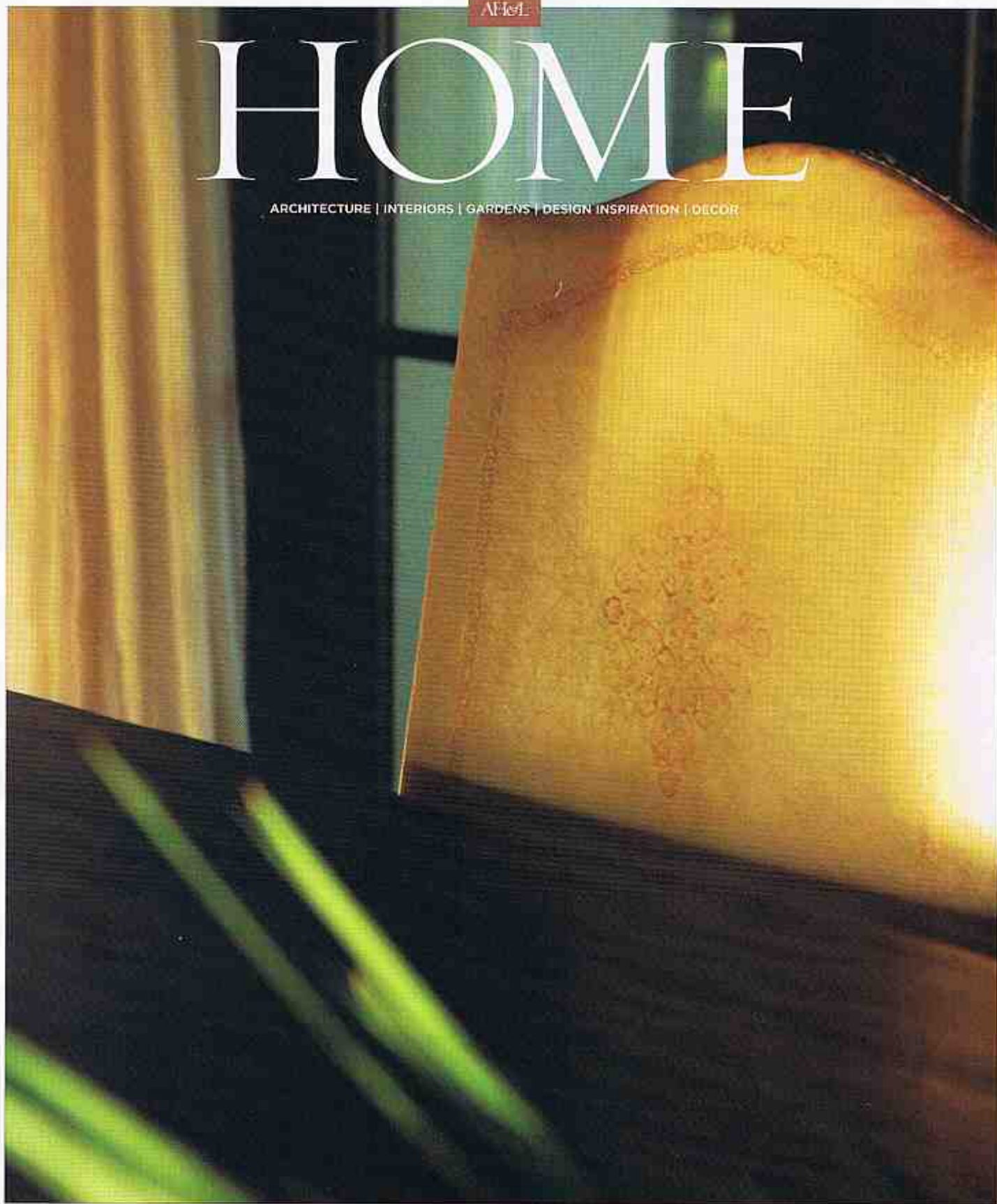
Explore the new look of mountain style from the 2004 Cashiers Designer Showhouse

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HOME

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PHOTOGRAPH BY JESSICA COOPER

May is... all about easy elegance. The postcard-perfect homes in this issue promote the ideals of casual, weekend living, yet the ideas you'll find here are applicable to any sort of space. From the cool, smoky mountains of North Carolina, to the understated island enclave that is Sea Island, the influence of Atlanta style is evident throughout the region. Wherever you find yourself—in far-off lands or in the backyard by the pool—here's to jump-starting your summer in style. Don't forget to write.

The afternoon sunlight casts a warm glow on an antique French dining room chair in Stan and Melanie Benecki's Sea Island vacation home.



While on a shopping excursion, homeowner Melanie Benecki just happened upon the giant clam shell that now graces the top of an English chest in the salon at her family's Sea Island vacation home. The mirror is 18th-century Italian. **OPPOSITE:** Architect Keith Summerour and the Beneckis collaborated on many of the home's finishes and details, including the home's flooring. Although it evokes the look and texture of ancient Italian travertine, the flooring is actually composed of new handcrafted cement pavers by Peacock Pavers in Atmore, Alabama. (25) 368-2072.



sea island confidential

On the Georgia coast, an Atlanta family's vacation home
revels in the SIMPLE PLEASURES and QUIET LUXURIES
for which the island community is known.

STORY AND STYLING BY CLINTON ROSS SMITH | PHOTOGRAPHY BY ERICA GEORGE DINEEN

Melanie Benecki in the home's salon. The Castle Praha Sofa is a Bobby McAlpine design. Mirrored-top table, Oly Studio, (510) 644-1870. OPPOSITE: The Beneckis bought many of the room's furnishings while vacationing in Buenos Aires, including the salon's 12-foot-long tapestry, dining table and the trio of small paintings. The painting above the fireplace was also bought in South America, although the couple assumes it has European provenance. The Shelter Wing Chair below it is also a Bobby McAlpine design, available through Lee Industries. Lamp, Match, (201) 792-9444. After an afternoon of bicycling, Stan Benecki relaxes with his son Collin in his arms.





This is a story of an Atlanta family's vacation home on Sea Island, but the story starts here in the city. Melanie and Stan Benecki's Cotswald-style primary residence in Tuxedo Park is a landmark of sorts. Sitting at a crossroads of three residential streets, it's often mistaken for a 100-year-old cottage—but in a good way. In true English style, amidst rambling Lady Banks roses, a crunchy pea-gravel driveway and disheveled wood shingles, the low-slung structure is imbued with a time-worn patina. Yet nothing hints at its young age of five years.

Architect Keith Summerour worked with the couple on designing that home, and the Beneckis' company, Benecki Fine Homes, built it. What does this have to do with their Sea Island vacation home, which looks completely different? Well, it's simple: details, details, details. "We strive to build inheritable homes," says Stan. "Homes that age gracefully and are indigenous to their areas. We try to be contextual so that they blend in, but we also like to push the envelope."

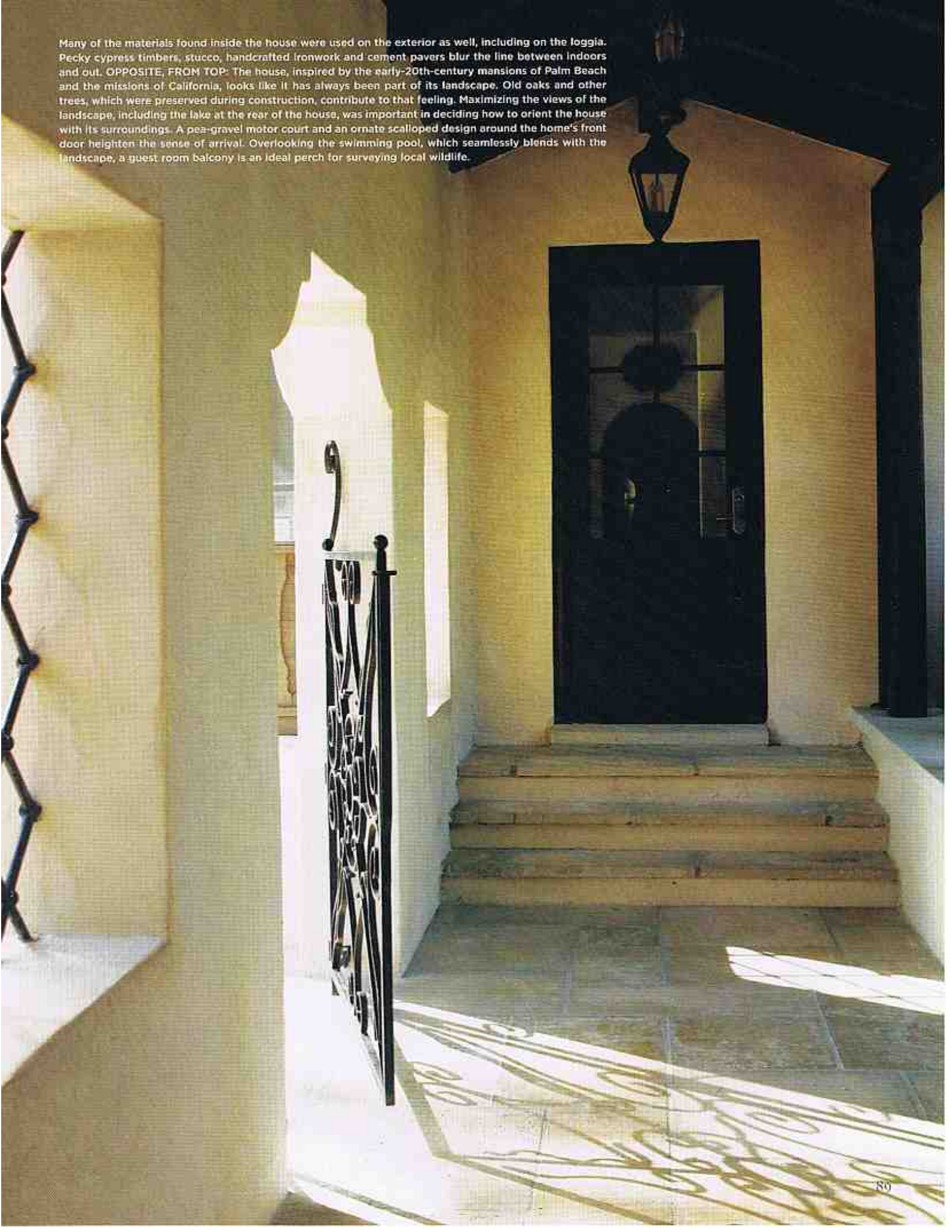


That's where Melanie picks up the story from Sea Island. "It's one of the few houses I've ever lived in and never felt like I had to go anywhere else," she says of her coastal hideaway. "It's the little things that make it so special—the sum of all the parts." Those parts include plaster walls and ceilings; intricate ironwork detailing inside and out; pecky cypress timbers; a stucco exterior and cement pavers as flooring—a real Old World style of craftsmanship.

"I love lying in bed and seeing the pond reflected on the cove ceiling or sitting outside on the pool terrace and watching the birds," says Melanie, an interior designer. This morning, a triumvirate of turtles basking on the edge of the pond commands her attention. "Each of the rooms has its own light and feeling and is so close to nature. The visual stimuli are amazing."

And while the natural sights and sounds surrounding the home can sometimes seem surreal, even dreamlike at times ("I often feel like

Many of the materials found inside the house were used on the exterior as well, including on the loggia. Pecky cypress timbers, stucco, handcrafted ironwork and cement pavers blur the line between indoors and out. OPPOSITE, FROM TOP: The house, inspired by the early-20th-century mansions of Palm Beach and the missions of California, looks like it has always been part of its landscape. Old oaks and other trees, which were preserved during construction, contribute to that feeling. Maximizing the views of the landscape, including the lake at the rear of the house, was important in deciding how to orient the house with its surroundings. A pea-gravel motor court and an ornate scalloped design around the home's front door heighten the sense of arrival. Overlooking the swimming pool, which seamlessly blends with the landscape, a guest room balcony is an ideal perch for surveying local wildlife.



Resting and relaxing are usually the main goals when going to a vacation home, and the Beneckis' retreat provides no shortage of rooms for those endeavors. In the master bathroom, a few key pieces with sculptural forms help create a light and airy oasis. Tub, Waterworks, (404) 266-1080. Chair, Oly Studio. Linen curtain fabric, Kravet. ADAC, (404) 816-7941. OPPOSITE, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: An arched alcove offers a quiet spot for one. The game room is the perfect spot for large gatherings, with billiards and board games a favorite family pastime. With a canopy bed and sitting area recalling old Hollywood glamour, the master bedroom is the epitome of quiet sophistication. Bed and tufted sofa, Barclay Butera, (323) 624-0200. Chandelier, Currey & Company.





Cinderella," Melanie says with a laugh), she and Stan were instrumental in bringing the fantasy of building on a challenging site to a reality. The couple owns five parcels of land

on the island, but this one just spoke to them. Preserving the natural environment, including 100-year-old oaks just inches from the home, was a priority, as was capitalizing on the waterfront surroundings while also maintaining a sense of privacy.

The architecture of the home is the amalgamation of two different, but complementing, styles. Incorporating the elements from Mediterranean villas that Addison Mizner designed in Palm Beach during the 1920s with details from the Spanish Colonial missions of California, the home is appropriate because it is in line with the local vernacular, which also draws upon some of the same influences.

But this isn't the 1920s, so a floor plan was devised that accommodates the needs of modern-day family life, including the Beneckis' three children: Cydney, 17; Harrison, 14; and Collin, 3.





Design Details

ARCHITECT

Keith Summerour, Summerour & Associates, Atlanta, (404) 603-8585; St. Simons Island, (912) 634-6645; summerour.net

BUILDER

Benecki Fines Homes, Atlanta, (404) 250-0999; beneckifineshomes.com

INTERIOR DESIGN

Melanie Benecki, ASID, (404) 250-0999

With its expansive wall of windows and an abundance of natural light, the family room is one of the most popular areas of the home. Crisp linen fabrics in a brown-and-white palette are refreshingly simple. Sofa and desk chair, Postobello, (323) 931-1899. Tufted chairs, Barclay Butera. Ottomans, Oly Studio. THIS PAGE, MIDDLE: Collin Benecki enjoys an ice cream sandwich, just one of the pleasures of summer.

"The rooms are grand," says Stan, "but it's still very homey." Melanie agrees. "Every room is functional and usable," she says. "It's comfortable with just two people here or with two or three families."

For architect Summerour, rooms—in this house, or any house—are more than just four walls; he views them as sculpture. "They should have the proper sense of decorum in scale," he says. The result is a series of spaces that unfold in order of use, with private areas relegated to the rear of the house on both floors. There are no hallways—rather, small rooms simply open into larger spaces, and intimate spaces are juxtaposed next to grander ones, all according to Summerour's design philosophy. "I like the discovery of a house, one that slowly emerges," he says. As for the Beneckis, the home and property have provided just that—a new discovery awaits them at every turn and on each visit.

"I'm just amazed at the beauty down here," says Melanie. No doubt, beauty of the natural *and* man-made varieties.

