

PURE POETRY

A South Carolina
antebellum cottage
lives up to island
legend with an artful
redo that safeguards
its modest, 900-square-
foot beginnings

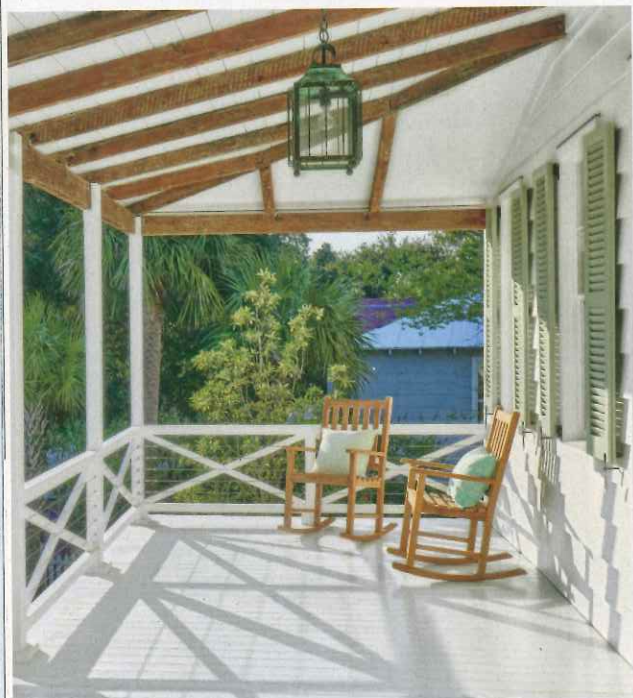
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The home was raised a full story above grade to protect it from flooding. The siding and trim are painted Superwhite, and the shutters are painted Sea Salt, both by Benjamin Moore. The shingles are natural cedar.





The heart pine support beams on the porch are original, "just cleaned up a bit," says architect Beau Clowney. The floor is painted Wickham Grey by Benjamin Moore; the lantern is by The Urban Electric Co. Top: The walls in the living room are the original heart pine boards, stripped of old paint and waxed.

Beau Clowney talks about architectural form, scale, and vernacular with an intuitive ease, the way the rest of us might chat about the weather. He reads buildings like they are stories. The Charleston-based architect is a sucker for a structure's arc of history—the what, when, and why of a place—and how, with thoughtful edits, he can help new owners continue the narrative into a well-designed future. And should a house whisper hints of its own literary legend, Edgar Allan Poe, well then, the story becomes enchanted indeed.

Such is the lore surrounding this cottage near the southern tip of Sullivan's Island. It was built in the early to middle part of the 19th century, the same time period when the famed writer was stationed at Fort Moultrie, and when this nearby cottage is believed to have been inhabited by soldiers and officers. "That's what the island old-timers say," Clowney says. "And legend is legend." The town itself is dotted with tributes to Poe, who lived here for a year and a half: There's his namesake tavern, as well as streets bearing his name and those of his stories (Raven Drive, Goldbug Avenue).

In his tale "The Gold Bug," Poe writes about Sullivan's Island and describes cottages very much like this one: "Near the western extremity, where Fort Moultrie stands ... frame buildings, tenanted, during summer, by the fugitives from Charleston dust and fever, may be found."

Keep Your Cool

The center-hall, four-room floor plan is similar to many loyalist cottages found in the Bahamas and other colonial settlements. The format creates a natural ventilation system, allowing sea breezes to flow directly through the center of the house.



Extend the Outdoors

Clowney added 950 square feet of porches and gained another 2,000 by simply turning the ground floor underneath the house into a breezy outdoor living area, complete with a fireplace and cozy sectional.



Today, this frame building is “tenanted” by owners escaping the hectic whirlwinds of work and general busyness for some rejuvenating family beach time. They were drawn to the home’s rich history, as well as its primo perch overlooking the Intracoastal Waterway, with views of Mount Pleasant and Charleston across the marsh. And they loved the fact that from Poe’s day to present, this intrepid, tiny cottage—with its antique glass and original heart pine walls and floors—has remained largely intact, withstanding hurricanes and the trend of turning humble beach shacks into sprawling mansions. The owners tapped Clowney to honor and safeguard its past while updating the historic, 900-square-foot home for more modern living. But first, of course, he had to elevate the cottage a full story above grade to meet Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) flood codes.

“Our job was basically to save the life of the house,” Clowney says. This one is “a classic,” he explains, with “a similar center-hall, four-room floor plan of the loyalist cottages found in Nova Scotia and the Bahamas.” He’s referencing homes built by those loyal to the crown who fled the States during and after the Revolutionary era. As a major colonial port and hub of Atlantic trade, Charleston’s architecture often echoes the Caribbean vernacular, and vice versa. “This form is one that everyone in this area loves and understands, so we wanted to bring it back to life and add freshness, while still preserving its integrity and history,” he says.

The challenge was to balance the mandated new height with a bit more scale, and still respect the modest proportions of the original structure. Working with Sea Island Builders, Clowney moved an existing smaller cottage from the back of the property and attached it via a glass hyphen as a master-bedroom wing. The team kept three of its four main-floor rooms, turning two into comfy sitting rooms and a front room



A new screened porch (above and opposite) on the rear of the original house overlooks the Intracoastal Waterway. Top: Clowney designed the kitchen to bridge the old structure with the new; character-building materials like antique heart pine flooring, cypress cabinetry, and a textured plaster hood blend with sleeker elements like Namibian marble counters and stainless steel appliances.



The side bedroom wing (above) was originally a separate cottage and is now attached via a glass “hyphen.” The rear addition includes an open great room on the main floor, and a master suite on the second floor. Top: The stairway was updated with new newel posts and square pickets.

into a small bedroom. “We kept it raw,” Clowney says, referring to the original interior walls, some of which retain the colorful patina of weathered layers of paint added over the years.

The center hall, however, was wrapped in fresh shiplap (on the ceiling and walls), and a reconfigured stairway features traditional newel posts and square shoebox-shaped pickets, “in the spirit of an old sea cottage,” says Clowney. He “borrowed” a portion of the fourth original room and used it to link to a new kitchen wing and living space that tucks behind the home. The addition, outfitted by interior designers MACK Home of Columbia, South Carolina, also houses a master bedroom suite.

The kitchen was key for Clowney, as it bridged old with new. To soften the transition, he kept the space “simple and clean,” with all-white cabinets, white Namibian marble—“my favorite, it works great in either a casual setting or a formal one,” he says—and square-edged shiplap that lends a subtle nautical sensibility. One large cypress cabinet that is hand-waxed and will fade with age counterpoints the more contemporary white, and the oven hood is finished with a textured raw plaster. “It’s mellower than stainless steel,” notes Clowney. Corner windows by the sink extend to the ceiling, making the room feel taller. (They didn’t go lofty with the new wing’s ceiling heights.) “It’s all about matching roof lines and relative scale, so the new addition doesn’t overwhelm the structure,” he explains. A screened dining porch off the back delivers brilliant sunset views, thanks in part to unobtrusive cable rails.

Landscape architect Sheila Wertimer had her own ways of minimizing the home’s sense of distance from the ground. For instance, she designed a raised, terraced front courtyard, and planted olive trees below the porch to mask the height. Meanwhile, Clowney capitalized on a few side benefits of raising the house. “It creates this wonderful, breezy, shaded living and entertaining area underneath,” he says. He installed a fireplace under the new addition, an area that doubles as a pool house for Wertimer’s centerpiece pool with coral-stone decking.

Like the original, the revamped home holds a few secrets and mysteries of its own. Despite the additional wing extending off the back, passersby see only antebellum architecture and vintage cottage vernacular. “From the street, no one can really tell that there’s a whole new structure back there,” says Clowney, pleased that it also still manages to live up to its “loyalist” eponym: loyal to its history and lore, while poised and newly polished for an equally charmed next chapter.



Uncover the Past

As the team was prepping the guest bedroom walls for painting, they noted the character and color coming through in the layers of old paint. Instead of painting over them, they opted to simply seal them up and keep the heart pine boards in the bedroom and stairwell as-is, creating a beautiful reminder of centuries past.