





SATISFYING SYMMETRY

MORRIS ARCHITECTURE DESIGNS A NEOCLASSICAL LANDMARK

BY MARGARET LOCKLAIR | PHOTOGRAPHY BY HOLGER OBENAU

From his brick-walled office in Charleston, architect and builder Buz Morris looks down on historic Broad Street and remembers his many months of driving to Effingham, South Carolina.

He had designed “a highly satisfying house,” one that demanded meticulously calculated proportions to create the look of being at least 200 years old. Designing it had taken a year.

Then he had served as its general contractor, directing construction as grandeur rose in a former cotton field. That had taken nearly another year. Somewhere in the process, Morris realized, he had “matured a little more as a neoclassical architect.”

Not that he’s typecast. Morris Architecture works with a full range of projects and styles. This project, though, had

spoken to him deeply of South Carolina, right down to the lake and the 122 live oaks planted on the property.

Morris’ clients, Meghan and McCall Swink, had chosen to build on family land. Separated by a grove of live oaks, McCall’s parents’ house is next door. Next to theirs stands his grandparents’ (now his uncle’s) home, which dates to 1838. Numerous outbuildings, from windmill to smokehouse, bear witness to the history of the family business, McCall Farms.

In planning their home, the Swinks were inspired by the neoclassical style of Millford Plantation, a National Historic Landmark in Pinewood. “But Millford is not functional to live in,” says McCall. “How do you put all the modern conveniences into a 200-year-old, timeless

Opposite: A decorative balustrade tops the standing seam roof, while the marble piazza’s joggling board and rockers further establish this as a classic Southern home.



Above: Ionic pilasters flank the mahogany front door and support the grand elliptical pediment above the transom and sidelights.

Right: In the central stair hall, 12-inch baseboards line the gallery. For large gatherings, the portraits can be safely stored and the recessed panels removed, revealing a bar for serving beverages.

look? I wanted our house to be attractive enough to stand the test of time." He also wanted it to be livable and comfortable.

"All we knew was the style house we wanted ... and that we wanted six columns that went all the way up." The prospect of planning and building, McCall says, "was almost too big to comprehend. It was a huge help to have an architect and general contractor in the same person."

Morris' plan, which proved satisfying to everyone, evokes the scale of building materials

used in grand historic homes. "Proportions are the key to making this house look right," he notes, pointing out the columns, the friezes, the dentil work. The exterior walls, particularly at the front of the house, are exceptionally thick, creating deep sills and casings around doors and windows.

Inside, 12-foot ceilings overlook the downstairs, except in the kitchen and gallery/stair hall where 10-foot ceilings provide better light for countertops and works of art.



Opposite: The center hall admits light from front door through back. Pocket doors wear solid brass handles, raised panels dress the arched doorways, and substantial newel posts anchor the staircase.

Below: The living room mantel wraps around the side of the chimney breast, accentuating the masculine details of its moldings and ornamentation.

In proportion with the high ceilings, the mantels over the home's three fireplaces are also high—68 inches above the floor. The wide, antique heart pine floorboards are reclaimed from an old Greenwood cotton mill.

The curved grand staircase rises through a curved opening in the ceiling—yet another study in proportion. “We had to carefully plan how far the stairwell engages into the stair hall,” notes the architect, to avoid interfering with Meghan’s desire for a clear sightline from front door through the backyard.

In keeping with neoclassical tradition, that wide central hallway and the formal rooms situated on either side are considered the most important rooms in the house and wear the most architectural detail. Their crown molding alone is made up of 17 pieces. The architectural details in the living room are more masculine—simpler,







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A mirror reflects the dining room's deep crown molding with its rounded edges and motifs, also found on the mantel.



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Left: Raised panels underscore the side windows in both the living room (shown here) and dining room, while front-facing triple-hung windows open to allow guests to step directly onto the piazza from the formal rooms. **Above:** The long view of the dining room is a picture of elegant formality. Casual meals take place in the separate family dining room.

cleaner, with sharper lines—than their counterparts in the dining room, which are embossed with acanthus leaves and have rounded edges and corners.

Between the formal rooms in front and the informal rooms in back is a hard-working lateral zone containing kitchen, stair hall, a powder room and a bonus room suitable as a workout room or office.

Behind that zone are the

comfortable den and the informal dining and family space at the back of the house. From the dining table, McCall says, the family can often watch deer and doves pick their way across the yard.

Upstairs, four bedrooms—each with a view—plus a sizable laundry room open off the wide center hall, which the children claim as a playroom. Here, and throughout the house, double

pocket doors allow rooms to be opened up or closed off, as needed.

For the Swinks, the future of the house is bound up in the children who can peer between the Ionic columns and down the oak allée, across the lake and through the garden, out to the world beyond. As it happened for McCall, he trusts that something here will always call them back home. ➔

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