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Natural Allure

In an ode to casual elegance, an agrarian-style home near Savannah nestles into its wetland surroundings without disturbing the view.

Banks of double-hung windows, cypress timbers, and stone walls give Jim and Dana Scavo's great-room a naturally inviting ambience. Streamlined furnishings let the rich materials—and the views—serve as the space's dramatic focal points.

stylist by Greg Cook photographer Richard Johnson produced by Sandra L. Mohlmann



Blue herons fishing for dinner,

grasses rustling restlessly in the breeze, water twinkling under a sparkling sun—these are views Jim and Dana Scavo never tire of. There's a natural rhythm to life on the 1,800 acres of waterfront property that comprises the former rice-growing estate of the Ford Plantation just south of Savannah, and it seemed only fitting to the Scavos to honor it with a farmhouse-style home.

The recipe for humble serenity: A cluster of buildings connected structurally and with breezeways that deliver generous living quarters without an imposing single structure. "Though everything was built at once, the pieces are designed to look as if they evolved," residential designer Jim Strickland says. "While the exterior looks like a series of additions to the core of an older home, the interior yields a surprisingly open space flooded with natural light."

The main structure contains the kitchen and master bedroom, which are connected by a light and airy central great-room.



A screen porch, sunroom, and informal terraces enhance the home's indoor-out connection, while a barn and carriage house serve as office, garage, and guest quarters. Crafted from stone, slate, pecan, and cypress, the buildings reflect the simplicity of the home's natural environment. "When you walk out of the main house to the back deck, it doesn't feel at all like you're leaving a formal environment and going outside," Jim says. "Even though you're stepping from a pecan floor onto stone, it all feels integrated."

The home's seamless transitions foster casual living and entertaining. Guests gather around two large islands in the kitchen when not mingling in the open great-room or out on the terrace. Indestructible stone walls, pecan flooring that's almost impossible to dent or scratch, and a quiet color palette—including the light tone of the cypress ceilings and the soft color of the stone—also make entertaining a stress-free affair.

Dana and interior designer Robin Thomas reinforced the casual mood by focusing on crisp lines and neutral tones for the furnishings. A handful of large-scale pieces help tone down the volume of the rooms. "Lots of little things can start to conflict with each other when you have one huge living room," Thomas says. "The clean lines of the furniture contrast with the texture of the stone walls and wood floors, which creates a very calming feeling."

Pillows, flowers, and accessories introduce color to the rooms in a nonjarring way. "The house works because of the simplicity of the structure and the attention to all of the details," Thomas says. "No one element outshines another."

Playing to Mother Nature's strengths was a win-win for the Scavos. "People love to come to this house," Dana says. "Whether it's six people, 12, or 40—everybody gets to enjoy everybody else."



This photo: To bring a little of the outside in, the dining room chairs are upholstered with a modern leaf motif. The high chair backs, like the tall kitchen cabinetry, help scale down the voluminous ceiling. Opposite: Thanks to the great-room's breezeway design and its walls of windows, guests can see through the center of the main house to views of water beyond as they approach.



“The property’s natural beauty promotes serenity.”

—INTERIOR DESIGNER ROBIN THOMAS



Opposite, clockwise from top left: Woven blinds and seating pieces in the master bedroom play to the tawny textures beyond the windows. Nestled at the water’s edge, a simple deck invites quiet contemplation. Cozy seating encourages lingering in the sunroom. One section of the kitchen’s oak cabinetry—which was bleached to lift the grain and then stained—is topped with a riveted metal countertop. Above: A long screen porch provides a bug-free sitting area.