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Writer: Stephen Henderson  
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# LOW COUNTRY, HIGH STYLE

*A plantation-style Georgia house evokes  
a bygone era but maintains a modern edge*



At the Ford Plantation near Savannah, Georgia, live oak trees and Spanish moss provide a romantic backdrop for a house built in an 18th-century Louisiana plantation style, with a wraparound porch. Salvaged architectural details — such as the antique lantern hanging from a pergola centered above the back door — give new construction an aura of dignified old age.





MOST PEOPLE DON'T BEGIN decorating until they see a finished room—or at least a blueprint. Susan Weiss, on the contrary, prefers to work from the inside out. She furnishes first, then constructs living spaces as a frame for her treasured possessions. For example, long before she had selected an architect for her newest house in Richmond Hill, Georgia, Weiss had already bought a 250-year-old English pine front door.

"I guess I'm just a manic shopper," she says. "I've got stashes and stashes of stuff." Weiss described a recent forage, on which her mother accompanied her, where she found an old metal cheese scale. "Mom said, 'What are you going to do with *that*?' I said, 'Trust me, I'll find the perfect place.'"

Manic she may be, but Weiss is hardly indiscriminate in her purchases. With the trained eye of an artist (she has an M.F.A. in painting) she claims that "in another life" she might be an interior decorator: "I just love everything about the process. I'm already fantasizing about selling this house and building another."

In the great room, a Sheraton pedestal dining table was cut down to coffee-table height. Armchairs are from Brunschwig & Fils, upholstered in Feuillage by Clarence House. George Cameron Nash sofas are covered with Pierre Frey fabric. Duck decoys and an antique weathervane rest on a mantel below an unsigned painting believed to be a portrait of Woodrow Wilson's bulldog.



Design, though, is only one of her passions. Both she and her husband, John, a retired investment analyst, are enthusiastic bicyclists and fly-fishers. (John is also an avid golfer.) After raising twin daughters in Northern California, the Weisses were keen to live in a locale that would accommodate their sporting lifestyle year-round.

Then an advertisement in *The Wall Street Journal* for the Ford Plantation caught their eye. A private family community, the 1,800-acre park is located on the Ogeechee River, 18 miles upriver from the Intracoastal Waterway, and about the same distance from Savannah. In the mid-1920s Henry and Clara Ford purchased what were once rice fields with a wooden tide gate and—after building a Georgian-style mansion—made it their winter retreat.

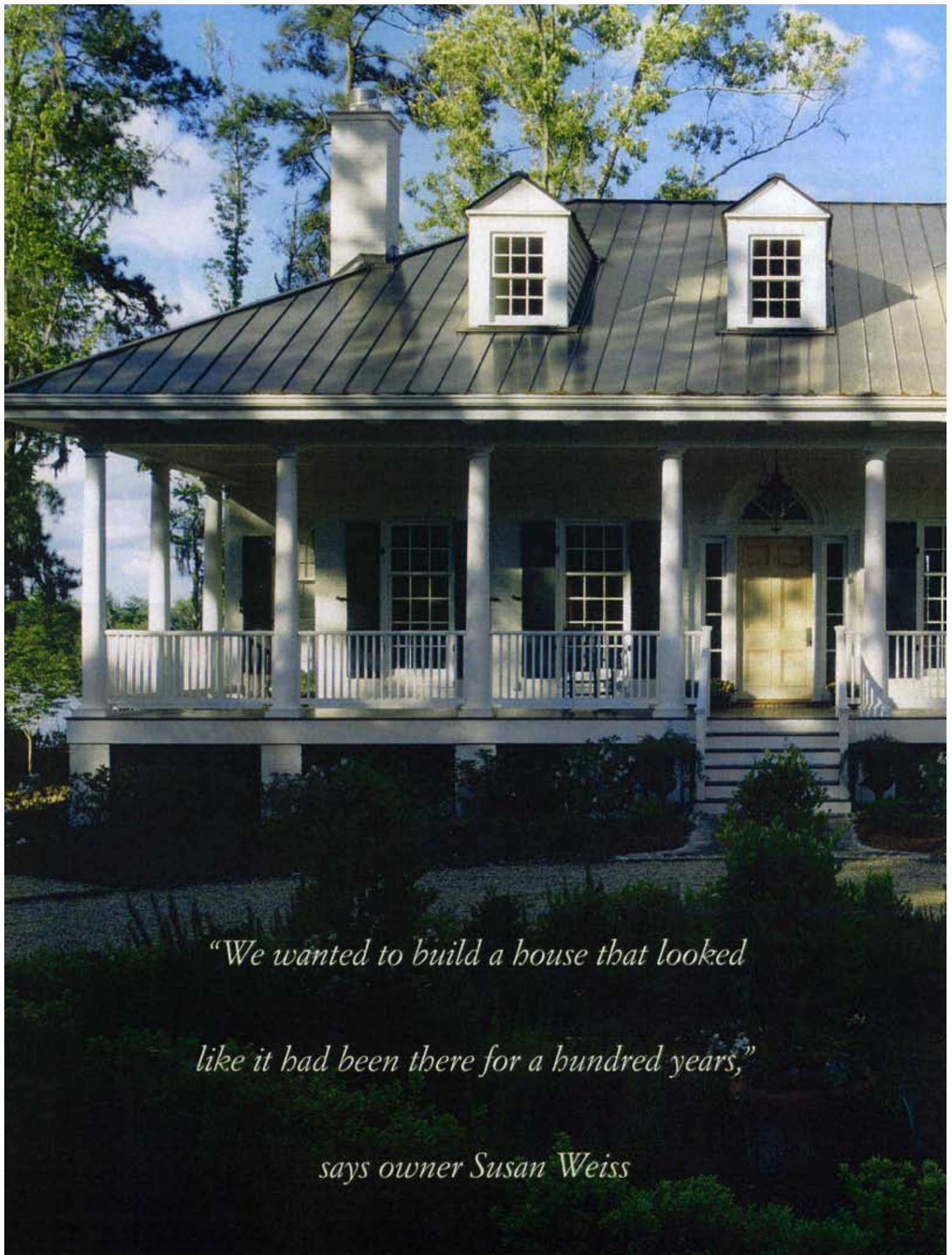
It's a hauntingly beautiful oasis of sea marshes, gently meandering lakes and lagoons, partially submerged cypress trees, and colonnades of some of the oldest live oaks in Georgia. These trees drip with Spanish moss that sways slightly in the early evening breeze. In deference to the evocative landscape, the Weisses hired Hansen Architects, a renowned local firm, to design a house in the classic style of a Low Country 18th-century plantation house.

Set alongside the banks of Lake Clara, the 3,700-square-foot, two-story structure has a wide wraparound veranda and a standing seam metal roof. A pebble driveway circles a knot garden, a medieval design where various species of boxwood are tightly intertwined.

Inside, a pleasing symmetry prevails. Rooms with 12-foot ceilings are paired and all cross-axes line up precisely;



Above: In the sleek, light-filled kitchen, two Sub-Zero refrigerators are concealed behind painted pine paneling. Left: A French zinc-based steel-top table is c. 1900. French doors open onto the side porch, overlooking Lake Clara. Opposite: The library's paneling is densely textured pecky cypress. The black slate and stainless-steel coffee table is by Preben Fabricius. The painting above the fireplace was found at a flea market in Provence.



*"We wanted to build a house that looked  
like it had been there for a hundred years,"*

*says owner Susan Weiss*





triple-hung windows on the front of the house are mirrored by multiple French doors in the rear facade. An inviting center hall bisects the downstairs, off of which opens a library, great room, powder room, and master bedroom suite. Upstairs are two guest bedrooms, two bathrooms, and a shared sitting room.

“Susan was an extremely involved client,” says Alexandro Santana, the project architect. “She had many rare objects that she had found throughout the years. She would bring these in one by one, and they were ‘architecturalized’ into the design.” “We all fed off Susan’s enthusiasm,” agrees Cullen Murphy, Hansen’s in-house interior designer.

During construction, Weiss went on buying trips to England and France—timing her visits to a flea market at L’Isle-sur-la-Sorgue, a town in Provence that she calls a “must-see” for any antiques lover. She returned with treasures such as a sheaf of calligraphic 18th-century British real estate deeds found on Portobello Road that became wallpaper in a powder room.

Choice woods used throughout the house burnish the patina of these found objects. Floors are made from eight-

Symmetry rules on the front facade, where triple-hung windows frame an 18th-century antique English pine door — Susan Weiss’s first purchase for this house. As is typical in the Low Country, the house is raised on stilts to protect from flooding and hurricanes. Fran Gross Linden of Birmingham, Michigan, landscaped the circular knot garden with various types of boxwood.





inch-wide planks of heart pine, and the library is paneled in pecky cypress, which is densely whorled. Most other walls are covered with old-fashioned pine paneling. As these flat planks age, they will separate—an effect that Weiss not only desired, but has also enhanced by painting the walls behind the paneling black.

“We wanted to build a house that looked like it had been there for a hundred years,” she says, “but of course we wanted modern amenities, too.”

Contemporary comforts, however, are obscured from view. A television and stereo are hidden in custom cabinetry along the great room’s fireplace.

The kitchen boasts two Sub-Zero refrigerators, but good luck finding them, hidden as they are behind paneling. Weiss considers both hanging kitchen cabinets and islands to be clichés, so she opted instead for tall open shelves, which hold still more artistically placed curiosities.

“Even the kitchen is curated,” marvels Santana.

An enthusiastic entertainer, Weiss enjoys happy afternoons working on either a long farm table she found in Vermont, or a zinc-based table from France. On top of the latter stands the metal cheese scale.

Just as Weiss promised her mother, she found the perfect place for it. ●

Opposite and above: The master bedroom suite includes a dressing area with walnut cabinetry. Cheetah pillows made from old fur coats are set on an 18th-century American carved four-poster “rice” bed. Antique bamboo end tables are from Portabella, a shop in Savannah. Glass canister lamps are by John Saladino; sepia equestrian prints are from the Stalls antiques market in Atlanta.