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# SHADES OF GREEN

When a champion of historic preservation meets a lauded contemporary architect, their shared passion for the environment yields surprising results.

**IT WAS AN UNEXPECTED MOVE.** When Gordon Matthews, a former president of the Historic Savannah Foundation, left his Jones Street home of 22 years, he might have retired to the luxurious Landings. He might have restored yet another downtown gem, but he didn't. Matthews struck out for new territory. In fact, you could say he went from preserving history to making it.

Matthews' contemporary, sustainable new home on Tybee Island, designed by architect Dan Snyder, won a Special Commendation Award from the American Institute of Architects in 2006. And it's easy to see why: This elegant edifice marries its marsh-front surroundings with all the tenderness and care of a loving husband.



BY **ANNABELLE CARR**  
PHOTOGRAPHY BY **RICHARD LEO JOHNSON**  
STYLED BY **MELISSA SCHNEIDER**



**REACHING FOR THE SKY:** High above the sustainable ipe wood deck overlooking the marsh, a lofty meditation space soars on a single diagonal beam. **OPPOSITE PAGE:** The lush view from the marsh, the dogtrot dining porch and the cleverly concealed dogtrot as seen from the street.

## SHADES OF GREEN



**OUTSIDE IN:** Natural materials and bright, modern accents create a palette that complements lush marsh views.

### Soulful Style

On first approach, Matthews' home appears simple enough. Already weathered to a sage gray, sustainable Georgia cypress creates a dense shape that resembles a mod version of the Tybee beach house. Then something happens. On passing, the building becomes iridescent, and what seemed solid now ripples and folds in upon itself. This is the ancient soul of the house, moving through the new design like wind in the Tybee pines.

"Have you heard of a dogtrot house?" asked Gordon Matthews, who moves barefoot between his indoor and outdoor rooms like a modern Robinson Crusoe.

"This is where my passion for historic architecture comes into play. Dan Snyder centered this house on an indigenous Southern building form that uses a central breezeway, or 'dogtrot,' as a cooling system," he said. "The home is one room thick in every direction, and the casement windows open in the direction of the wind, allowing the breeze to move through the entire house."

## THE STATS

**Homeowner:** Gordon Matthews

**Neighborhood:** Tybee Island

**Year built:** 2006

**Square footage:** 3, 855 with 2,169 square feet of conditioned space and 1,822 square feet of decks and porches

### Sources:

**Architect:** Daniel E. Snyder, Architect, P.C.

**Builder/contractor:** J. T. Turner Construction, Inc.

**Framing and interior trim supplier:** Guerry Lumber

**Framing and interior trim installer:** Roland Rinehart

**Drywall and paint:** Donald's Painting and Drywall

**Roofing:** ABC Roofing

**Cabinets:** Bill Owens, Architectural Woodworking and Design

**Tile:** Garden State Tile and Design of Savannah

**Electric:** C. S. Hurd Electrical Contracting

**Plumbing:** E. H. Hutson Plumbing Co., Inc.

**HVAC:** McDevitt Air

**Windows and doors:** Marvin Windows, Coastal Sash and Door Corp.

**Lighting:** Johnson Lighting

**Pendants (kitchen):** Fontana Arte

**Earthcraft certification:** Southface



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The house plan works. On an early August day, sweltering Savannahians were sequestering themselves in darkened rooms with central air conditioning, while Matthews' home was comfortably open to the elements.

"It's surprisingly private," said Matthews, climbing the dogtrot's airy staircase to reveal an elevated, outdoor dining room and a sleeping porch complete with a Murphy bed. While passersby can glimpse the bright marsh through the dogtrot's screened, open-air rooms, the rooms themselves are sheltered from scrutiny by backlighting and weathered slats of cypress.

"I feel incredibly at home here," Matthews added.

He ought to. Snyder goes to great length to ensure that each of his clients gets a home that suits not only their needs but also their very sense of self in the world. A proprietary questionnaire asks existential questions, and a series of interactive review sessions hones essential shapes into highly detailed domains.

### Sustainable Measures

"I want to capture each client's personality in a way that adds to the contemporary discourse," said Snyder. "Sustainability

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**GOOD MORNING:** A Murphy bed on this upper-level dogtrot porch presents a surprisingly private retreat.

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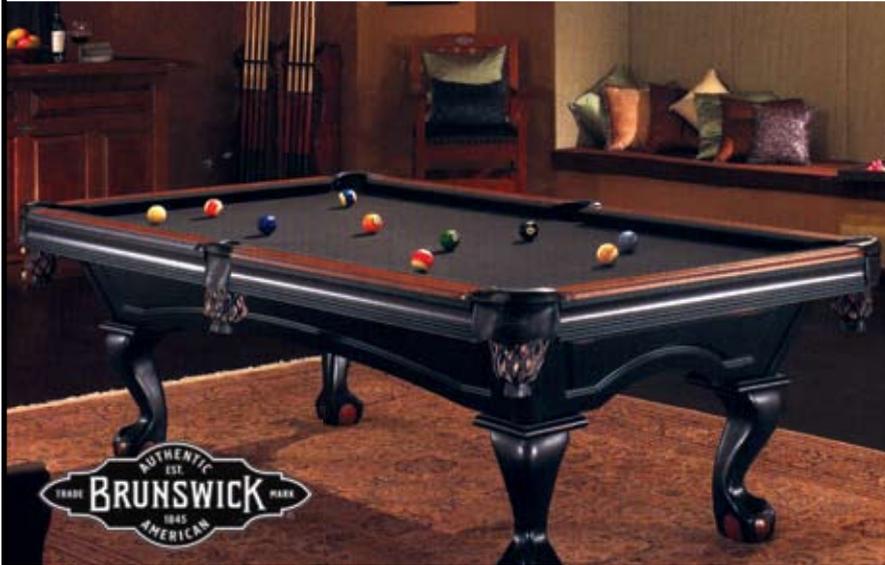
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is an important part of that discourse. It's a moral issue for all architects, particularly in this energy crisis."

"Sustainability is one issue that led me to Dan," agreed Matthews, who keeps his Earthcraft certification framed at the foot of a stunning staircase bathed in golden light.

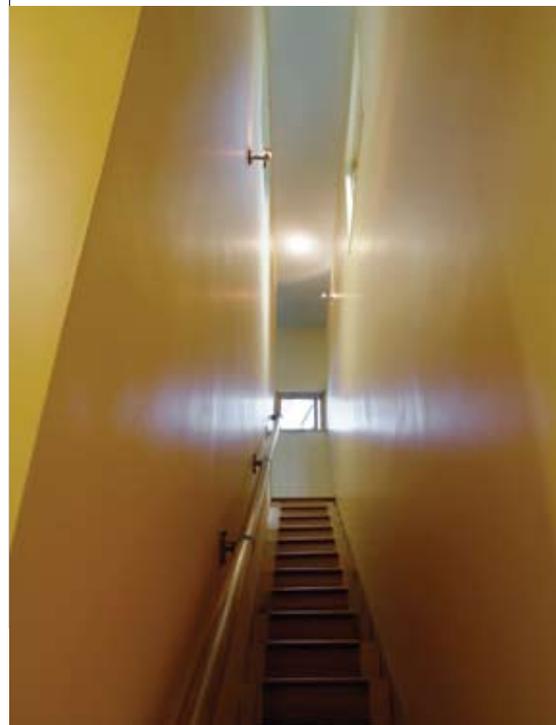
"My daughter is a LEED-certified architect, and my son handles environmentally sensitive real estate. Protecting the earth is important to us."

Matthews began conducting environmental studies on the property long before crossing paths with Snyder. He used a piece of lumber to create a makeshift compass, indicating north and south. He hung flags in the trees to determine the path of the breeze. He even brought in scaffolding to simulate a building and study the light and views at each level.

After so much careful planning, it should come as no surprise that the central dogtrot is just the beginning of this home's earth-friendly innovations. Matthews leads the way past a low-flow toilet, a solar water heater and Energy Star appliances that use about as much electricity as a 75-watt light bulb. Strategically placed low-emittance windows reject solar heat in summer but take in warming light in winter. South American ipe wood decks resist rot without chemicals. Southern pine framing and sustainable okoume plywood complete the construction.

Admiring the spectacular view of Tybee's sparkling marshes from the rooftop deck,

**GOLDEN HOUR:** A slender back staircase to the master suite bathes warm walls with coastal light.



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Matthews points out the roof's articulate runoff system. "On rainy days, this makes a waterfall into the cistern below," he indicated. "I can do all my landscaping with that water."

A walk into the wooded hammock behind the home reveals a final sustainable detail: This construction cost the earth just six trees.

"The contractor, J.T. Turner, was sensitive to our goals and helped us save 38 trees that most contractors would have removed," Snyder said. "He barricaded the site and kept heavy equipment off the roots."

### Creature Comforts

This green home of the future may seem a far cry from Gordon Matthews' old Jones Street haunt, but it's not without familiar spirits.

"I used to sleep on my grandmother's screened porch as a child," Matthews recalled. "So I insisted on installing a Murphy bed behind weather-proof doors. I also spent some time in an open-air palapa in Bolivia, so I enjoy the play between indoor and outdoor rooms."

Sometimes this house even reminds him of Jones Street. "To protect the marsh and make the dogtrot work, the footprint of this house had to be small," he explained. "After years of living in a row house, I feel right at home." ■

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**NATURE MEETS NURTURE:** Builder J.T. Turner helped Snyder and Matthews save 38 trees in the path of construction.

