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Open Invitation

by Savannah Magazine

A big, blended family gathers on tiny Grove Point Island, surrounded by river and marsh. Written by Judy Bean. Photography by Richard Leo Johnson.

Call it fate, destiny or the stars aligning. The Palmers of Grove Point Island—and friends who know their story—believe they're now exactly where they were meant to be.

As soft-spoken Christie Palmer recalls, she and husband David "had no intention of moving" from their previous home in Pooler. Built as a regional magazine's "Idea House" in 2002, the home was both spacious and well-appointed—so much so that a visiting Chicago couple made them an unsought, above-market offer.

With that sudden good fortune, the Palmers began a broad home search, followed by a nomadic month, that

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ended in a well-worth-the-wait homecoming for the couple, their children and "grands" this past June.

Here's a Story

Christie, a nurse, and David, an orthopedic surgeon, have six children and four grandchildren between them. As we begin our tour of the family's home, one of the grandchildren, 16-month-old Beck, crawls up the deck stairs as fast as a fiddler crab, gleefully seeking his "Gammie." His mother, Morgan, Christie's daughter, cheerfully races behind him, and Beck is gently—albeit temporarily—pried from Christie's neck so that she can show us around.

We're joined by Lana Salter and Victoria Holmes, the interior designers who brought this spec home to life and became Christie's friends during the process.

When the Palmers began their home search, "we knew we wanted to live near water," says Christie.

After seeing a half dozen homes in the Wilmington Island area, the Palmers felt led to this house, which happened to be next door to a house where Christie had visited family friends many times as a child.

"Way back then, I used to say that I wanted to live [in this neighborhood] someday," Christie recalls, shaking her head as if she can't quite believe her good fortune.

A Cheerful Outlook

Tickled as she was to be back on her old island playground—and enchanted by the new house's river view and boathouse—Christie knew the house's blah, builder-basic appearance had to change.

Built in 2007 as an investment property, the home "had zero personality," Christie recollects. Water-facing windows had up to 30 panes each, fragmenting an expansive river view that was further obscured by mauve curtains. Fixtures and appliances were big-box store bargains. What little trim there was looked out-of-scale or overly ornate.

Christie learned about Holmes and Salter from contractor Robert Lyons, an old friend of David's. The connection was instantaneous.

"Christie was the ideal client," Victoria says with a smile as Lana nods.

From the very beginning, the designers recall Christie's clarity about the Palmers' preferences: "Not fancy, just

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happy and livable," in Christie's words. She had functional priorities, such as being able to house and feed a growing family and friends, and a bottom line that was adequate but not indulgent.

Just as helpfully, Christie's collection of magazine clippings revealed a desire for a soft, relaxing palette and a preference for traditional textures—all in perfect harmony with the home's river and marsh surroundings.

Divine Design

To maximize light and views in the common areas, the designers and contractors worked together "from day one," Victoria says. All agreed on the need for uninterrupted picture windows, new real-wood floors to replace laminate and carpet, and new openings from room to room. Shiplap and ceiling beams were added, along with antique bricks. Some ceilings were painted blue for coastal style.

Fulfilling Christie's hopes to host big family meals, the kitchen was reconfigured and gutted, its "builder basic" appliances and dark cabinets replaced with a full array of Viking products and driftwood-toned faces. A counter between the kitchen and breakfast room was removed, making it easier for family members to come and go. A small door to the dining room was expanded to a large arch, allowing more sunlight for meal preparation and allowing cooks to enjoy beautiful views on either side.

An upstairs office became a family reading nook with the addition of custom shelves. Other remodeled rooms included the master suite, a music room, an airy home office just off the kitchen, bedrooms and baths for 13-year-old Sarah and 15-year-old Jonathan—David's two youngest and the last ones at home—and a cozy playroom for grandchildren Beck, Coleman, Bree and baby Jack.

"I close myself in here with the kids and relax while they color and play," Christie says blissfully.

Practical Magic

A "waste not, want not" policy inspired clever re-use. Old flooring, appliances and fixtures were used in the remodeled boathouse—or donated to Habitat for Humanity.

"From the very beginning, we all felt this place was meant to be," says Victoria. Lana agrees, recalling how many

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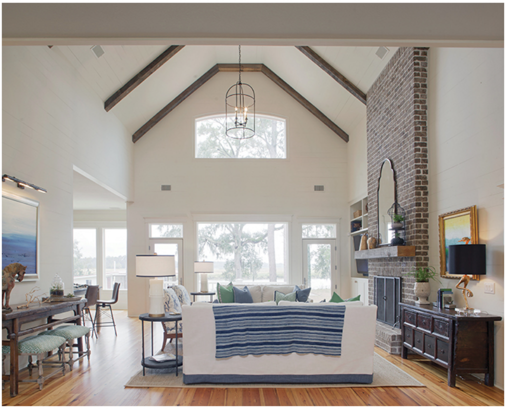
of the Palmers' old pieces perfectly fit the new spaces, and how smooth and happy the collaboration was. When Christie burst into joyful tears upon entering the finished home for the first time, the designers knew the results were happy, too.

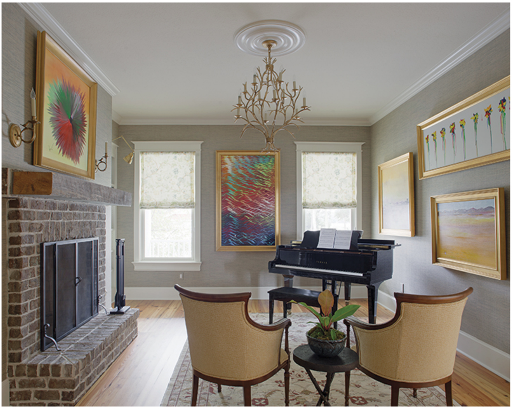
"The Palmers are humble, sweet, happy, grateful people," Lana says. And now they have a home that's worthy of them.



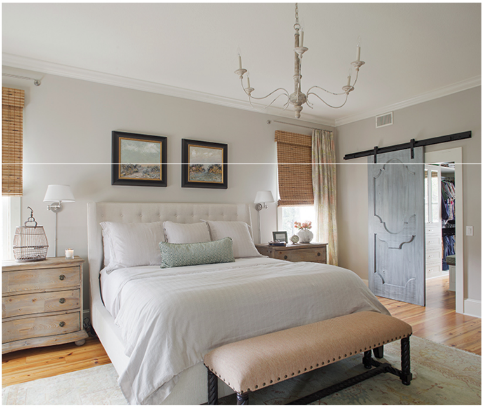
Drink in the View. The Palmer home overlooks the Grove River from the same bank where Christie played as a child. The Palmers found the eight-year-old home, empty since construction. Renovations included replacing divided-light windows with larger picture panes for uninterrupted views of river, sky and the boathouse. Birds are Christie's favorite motif, and they play perfectly in the nature-inspired interior Holmes and Salter designed. In the living room, an ibis lamp by Cyan pairs with a painting by Vincent Golshani, the family's favorite artist. The wall is covered in painted shiplap to imbue color and coziness in the large living area, which was once encased in vast planes of blank drywall.

Build Character. "David and I both love downtown Savannah homes, especially all the old brick," Christie says.

To echo that colonial aesthetic, Old Carolina brick tile and pavers were used in the dining room, back hallway and office. In the kitchen, soapstone counters and driftwood-toned cabinetry hide Christie's much-used appliances. The island was painted blue for contrast—and as a nod to the river, which is visible here and from most of the home.



Take Note. Both Christie and Sarah, David's 13-year-old daughter, study and practice piano in the music room, among vibrant Golshani paintings. Although more subdued Golshanis shine in the living area, most of the pieces shown here feature intense colors that inspire allegro playing. Glass doors allow the room to be closed, but kept bright, during practice sessions.



Sing the Blues. Relaxation was top priority in designing the master suite. Shades of blue backed by creamy off-whites combine to create calm, while varying textures add warmth. The English linen curtains feature a bird pattern beloved by Christie. The blue barn-style door, custom-crafted by carpenter Arnold Lanier of C-Two Cabinets, leads to a walk-in closet with custom, built-in shelves and a front-facing window that looks toward the marsh. Across from the blue door, an exterior door leads to a screened porch overlooking the river.

The Palmer Specs

Owners: Christie and David Palmer

Year Built: 2007

Year Purchased: 2015

Square Footage: 4,600 heated in main house; 748 in boathouse

Accommodations: 4 bedrooms, 5 baths

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The Palmer Referrals

Interior designer: Holmes and Salter Interiors

Contractor/builder: Lyons and Son

Flooring: Old Savannah Hardwood Flooring, pavers via Cherokee Brick Company

Countertops: Karen Sellers, Counter Designs

Wallpaper: Schumaker and Thibaut, installed by Madeline Gunter

Windows/doors: Coastal Sash and Door

Kitchen design: Showcase Kitchens

Bath design: Holmes and Salter

Lighting design: Holmes and Salter

Upholsterers: Lulu and Coco

Landscape design: Hester and Zipperer

Hardscape design: Marshall Masonry & Concrete

Carpenters: C-Two Custom Cabinets and Renovation

Plumber: Lyons and Son

Landscaper: Hester and Zipperer

Furniture: C.R. Lane, Verellen, Four Hands, Custom

Appliances: Viking, Southern Bath and Kitchen

Accessories: Peacock Alley, Uttermost, Juliska, Serena and Lily, Textillery, Texture Imports, Williams-Sonoma, Lacefield, Cyan

Art: Vincent Golshani via Golding House Gallery, Alicia Leeke, assorted others

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