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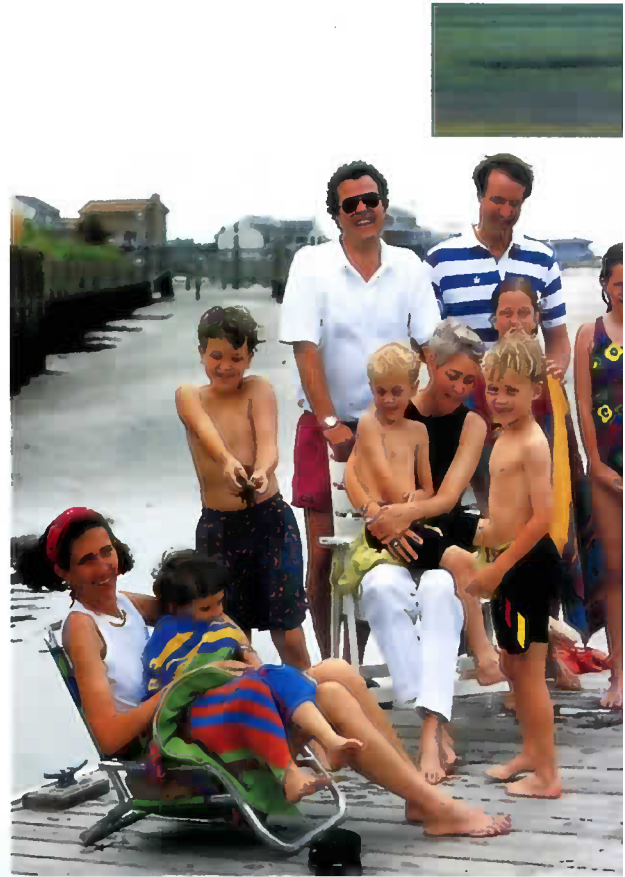
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a tale of

Two families,
one house: Patty
Wilson (front) and
husband Bill
(white shirt), Lynn
Young (middle)
and Jeff (striped
shirt), with six of
their children.
The sun sets right
off the back deck
(below, left).





two families

The land was theirs, the plans were drawn, but Bill and Patty Wilson's house on North Carolina's Figure Eight Island, a leisured vacation community on the coast south of Wilmington, remained an unaffordable castle in the air. Tantalizingly close, it dangled just out of reach. Until, that is, the night that old friends Jeff and Lynn Young came to dinner and mentioned that their dream house wasn't a castle at all, but half a free-and-easy place at the beach. A couple of what-ifs and a why-don't-we later, the two families—four parents, seven children—had formed a happy partnership they call Eleven at Eight. Two halves can add up to a whole lot more than one.

By Liz Seymour



Jeffrey, 8, looks at life from an inner tube. The inlet location means easy access for boats and swimming. Crab pots lowered off the pier can net a meal. See Resources.





“The house is a remarkable one for light,” says Lynn Young. Easy-care slipcovers and painted finishes keep maintenance to a minimum; heart pine floors reflect the light. The spirit is relaxed; the furniture is all manufactured by Lexington, Jeff Young’s company.

After agreeing to share a home that was not yet built, their next step was to turn a house designed for five into one that could sleep 11. With a lot of ingenuity and very little extra space (the original 3,000-square-foot plan grew by only 400 square feet), architect Cothran Harris added a second master bedroom; a library became a sleeping den with a fold-out sofa; and the utility room was enlarged to handle extra laundry—a small elevator carries supplies. Bunk and trundle beds in one bedroom sleep four small boys; daughters Annie Young and Anna Wilson, 11 and 12, share a second; eldest son Patrick Young, 19, gets the couch—but all to himself. “It’s wall-to-wall children when all the boys are here,” says Lynn, “but we fit.”

From the beginning, the plan was to build what is known on the Carolina shore as an “upside-down house,” with living quarters up top, sleeping quarters below.

The advantage is stunningly obvious when you gaze out of the generous windows that wrap around the room that serves as both living and dining area: “All you can see is water and the marshes across the inlet,” says Jeff. “It’s like living on a boat.”

Both the Wilsons and the Youngs loved the gray-and-white style of traditional Nantucket seaside houses, but the gale-prone North Carolina coast dictated that the house be elevated on stilts. The lowest level holds storage, mechanical equipment and a couple of outdoor showers for washing off the day’s accumulation of sand. As a concession to the intense Southern sun, wide eaves shade the upper windows and shelter the top deck; angled skylights let in only indirect light, which warms the rich heart pine ceiling.

Harris made some other practical adjustments as well. “When there are more people living together,” the architect points out,

“there are more opportunities for noise.” His solution: He insulated the ceiling space between the two floors, and hung drywall on sound-deadening strips. The living room comes with well-stocked bookshelves for quiet adult activities; a den on the bedroom floor provides a place for kids to play and watch TV.

As the house became a reality, responsibilities divided up neatly: The Wilsons (Bill is a commercial real-estate developer) oversaw the construction; the Youngs (Jeff is president of Lexington Furniture Industries) filled the house with his company’s appropriately





Window treatments are minimal throughout the house. The farmhouse table and Scandinavian-style chairs break beach house stereotypes. A poster over the mantel helps identify catches of the day. See Resources.



named Weekend Retreat furniture collection. The sand-in-the-shoes lifestyles of the two families differ a bit, but dovetail nicely: The power-boating Wilsons spend the day on the water (“Their activities rise and fall with the tide charts,” says Lynn), while the Youngs enjoy long walks and tennis.

The children, who know each other from school, splash in and out of the ocean all day, water-ski or enjoy the more leisurely pleasures of the inner tube. Whatever parent is closest acts as a lifeguard, or arbitrates the occasional dispute.

In the evening the two families gather for a dinner that often includes the catch of the day—mackerel from the Wilsons’ boat, or crab netted off the pier. With the boat moored and the kids in bed, the Youngs and Wilsons spend evenings together watching the marshes change color with the last rays of the sun. “Sometimes,” says Patty, “it just seems as though it was meant to be.”



VOICE OF EXPERIENCE

Even a slice of paradise can be sliced too thin, so work out early who plans to use the house when. For the Youngs and the Wilsons, Memorial and Labor Days are traditional get-togethers; the rest of the year is divided among the two families.

Designate a “managing partner”—the job can rotate—to handle the practical side of the partnership.

“That way there’s just one person keeping the books and looking after repairs,” says Jeff Young. And when the time comes to make changes in the house, from something as simple as replacing a dishwasher to refinishing the deck, let everyone have a say. “It’s ‘speak now or forever hold your peace,’” says Young. “After that, don’t look back.” **MH**

Produced by Christopher Hirsheimer.