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White House *on the Black River*

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ON 60 ACRES OF RECLAIMED LAND down near Bear Branch, a tributary of the Black River on the northeast Cape Fear, the crow flies over the highland and an English country estate. Designed by architect Cothran Harris, **THE HOME'S APPEARANCE SUGGESTS A HISTORY—** as though it has been there forever, added onto over the years.

BY *Marimar McNaughton*

PHOTOGRAPHY BY *Joshua Curry*, ASSISTED BY *Andrew Sherman*

Black River

Retreat



Find the English country cottage at the core of this rambling estate home designed by architect Cothran Harris and built by Tom Hanna for Griff and Joan Weld. Coastal vernacular wings and an Arts and Crafts-style screened porch are engaged with open trellises. The Low Country fishing shack, far right, is the guest house. The formal English gardens and grounds were designed by Landscapes Unique and Landscapes Nouveau.



the fiction of the house—beginning with the central structure—blends the owners’ aesthetic wish for an English country house, with Harris’s signature Arts and Crafts idiom, fleshed out in side wings, and a pitched roofline that follows the elevation of the floorplan adding yet another layer of detail to the sprawling structure embellished with graceful curved arches and trellised walkways, porticos and a white picket fence.

Most of its architectural features are engaged to the parent house, especially the Low Country tin-roofed two-bedroom, one bath guesthouse modeled after a board and batten sharecroppers cottage cum fishing shack. Behind the guesthouse, separated by a dirt lane, is a coastal North Carolina vernacular barn complete with shed porch and hayloft that anchors the property buffered by woods that line the creek banks.

Across the heather is a Victorian folly (this one, a tiny rotunda) — often found on old English estates. Follies serve no real purpose save framing the view of the estate’s parklands and maybe offer a shady respite from the glaring sun if one was inclined to walk one’s grounds. Homeowner Joan Weld laughs, saying the folly—like some of the other weathered elements found outside and within her home — adds character.

“I kind of liked the concept of a little English cottage or a farmhouse in the United States that you added to as you had the money or maybe you added to it as the family was growing, Joan says. “I wanted this house to merge with the land. I wanted it to be low and horizontal because the land is important.”

Standing in the breezeway between the screened porch and a side entrance, sur-

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rounded by groomed lawns, sculpted English boxwood gardens and open meadowlands, Joan says, "I like expanse."

She and her husband, Griff Weld, tamed the former dump, planted every plug of grass, every tree root and planned this house together with their architect. It is the second house that Cothran Harris has designed for the Welds. The first was located on Bald Head Island. Wrightsville Beach builder Tom Hanna constructed both.

Harris was challenged to create an elevation that did not resemble a standard ranch-style home, and Hanna, Joan says, was extremely patient with her requests, asking brick masons and carpenters to humor her desire to evoke the look and feel of an old home.

"I wanted a thatched roof for gosh sakes," she says.

The interior palette is a soothing white-on-white, layered with heirlooms, antiques and artifacts, white-washed wood and wicker, and slip-covered upholstery placed over bare, cobbled brick and hardwood floors. Family portraits hang beside photographs of exotic destinations amid an impossibly large collection of shells, hand plucked off of beaches from the North Carolina coastline, to the continent of Africa, and Patagonia, South America.

The open kitchen, dining area and sunroom is a complete environment. Exposed to views of the south lawn, the area is drenched in sunlight. Along the north wall, small chambers for laundry, the pantry and Joan's home office are tucked between relics and cabinets that were fabricated or refinished by Susan Covington of SAC Art Designs. A custom chandelier created by Louise Gaskill hangs above the distressed plank table.

But the kitchen was Griff's invention. As the family chef, this was one area he claims. The layout, he says, is simple but was upscaled to allow for two to cook and clean together. The

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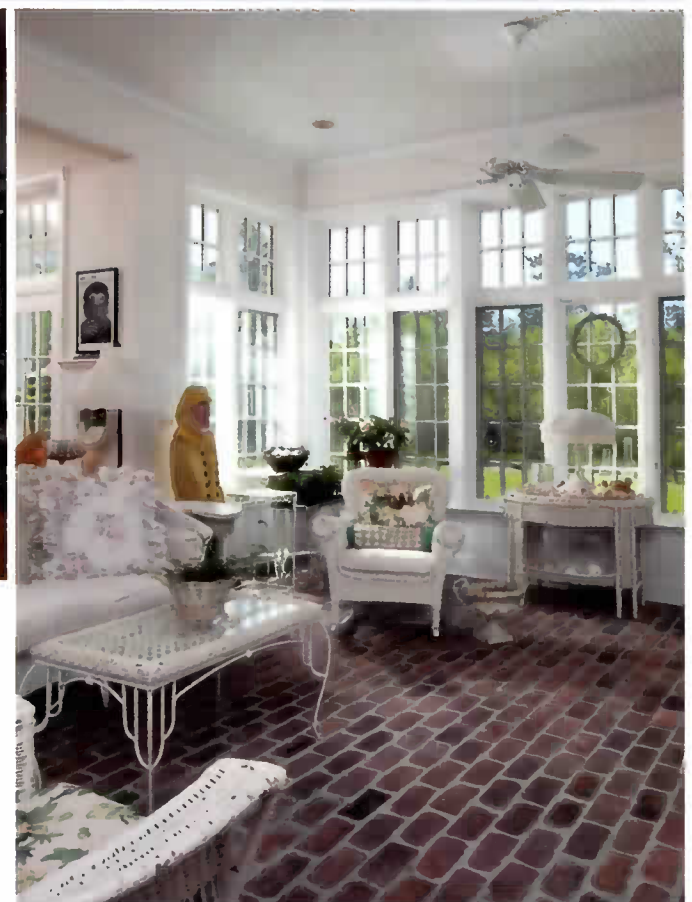
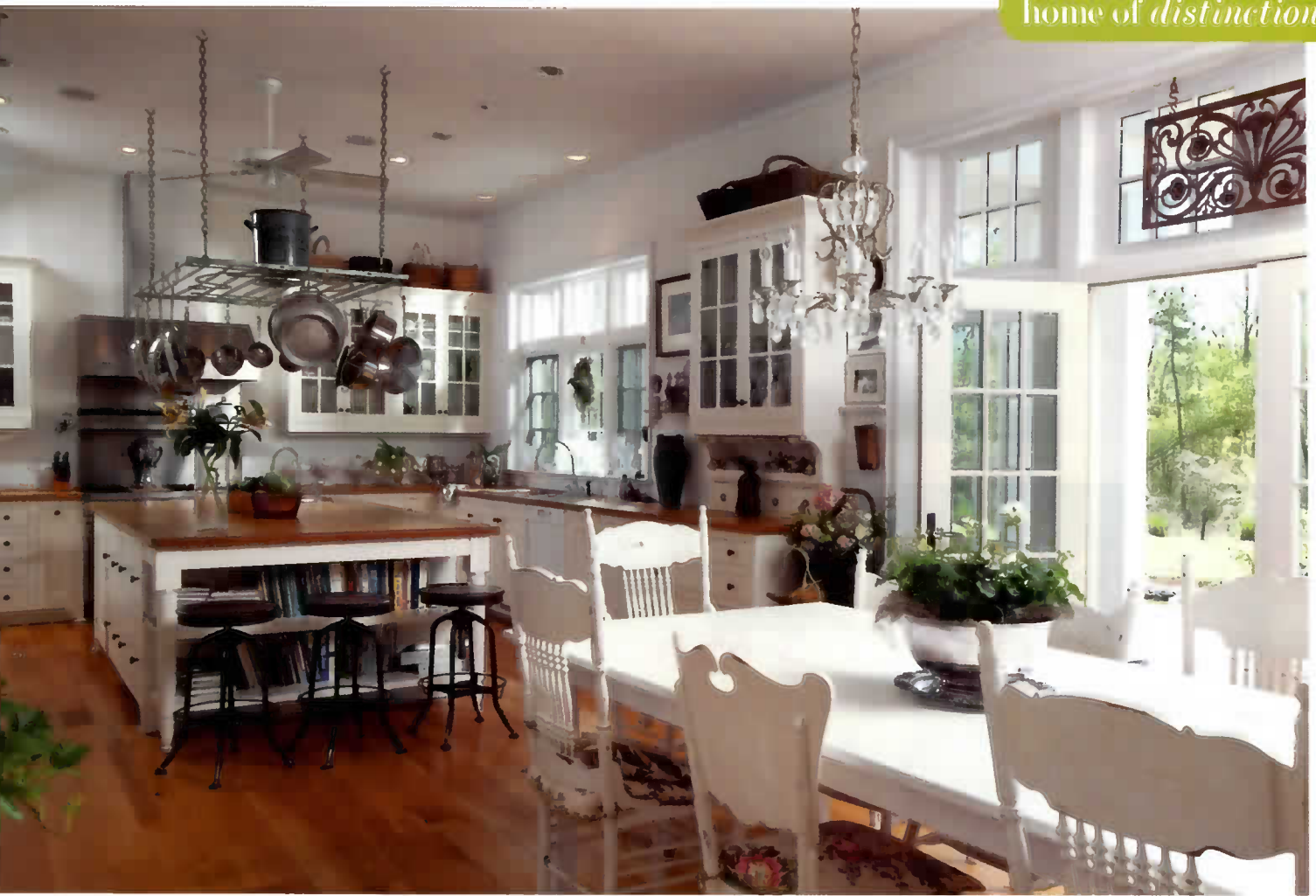
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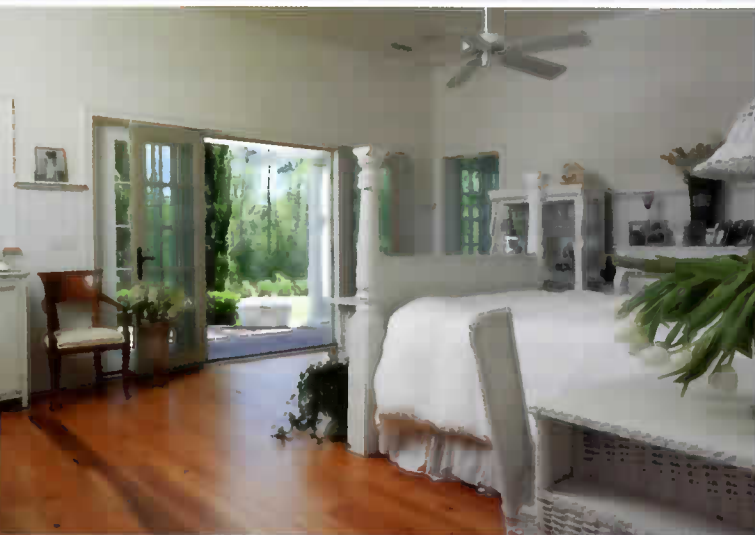
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Sunlight pours through windows and travels through the screened porch and side entry into the informal sunroom furnished with custom-made pieces designed and fabricated by Susan Covington of SAC Art Designs.



Clockwise from top left, a metal gate functions as a pot hanger above the butcher block island in the open kitchen that adjoins the dining room. The chandelier, by Louise Gaskill Designs, hovers above a distressed plank table and vintage chairs by SAC Art Designs. Cobbled bricks cover sunroom floors furnished with vintage, white-washed wicker. Joan Weld's collection of white Depression glassware fill cabinets and her collection of shells line every available surface.



Clockwise from top left, custom beaded board covers interior walls throughout the Weld home. In the living room, the white-on-white palette is softened with muted floral-print throw pillows. A Louise Gaskill-designed chandelier is a centerpiece. Deep window ledges throughout the house allow Joan ample room to display antiques. Collections of clear glass and crystal pieces line the hall table; a library of books flanks the mantel. The master bath features antique fixtures. The four poster master bed is also by SAC Art Designs.



A landscaped pond designed by Jeff Lewis of Landscapes Nouveau is the centerpiece of the Weld's south lawn, an apron of grass that reiterates the contour of the nearby tree line. This graceful arc also inspired architect Cothran Harris, who incorporated Arts and Crafts details into the rear elevation.



A member of the board of the North Carolina Coastal Studies Institute on Roanoke Island in Manteo and an active member of the Coastal Resources Commission, she says that organization—which meets in different locales around the state—takes up a lot of time.

Enchanted by the sand roads and the natural environment, they considered a retirement to Bald Head Island and built a cottage there decades ago. As the island developed, the magic slowly faded and the worldly couple fled for the high country and moved into their Black River retreat days following 9/11. Now family and friends make the journey to this remote, rural retreat, about 20 minutes from downtown Wilmington, 30 from Wrightsville Beach.



Homeowners Griff and Joan Weld

Architect Cothran Harris

Contractor Tom Hanna

Interior Designer Susan Covington — SAC Art Designs, Melanie Bowe

Landscape Architect Landscapes Unique, Landscapes Nouveau

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