

Charleston Mercury

MAGAZINE

Vol. 6 No. 2



Home Renovating with Style • Hunting Abroad •
Fashion Summer 2010 • Whisky Travels • Spa Special •

Lowcountry Renovations: Preserving a Sense of Place

BY MEGAN ABIGAIL CHANDLER

All in the Family
205 Queen Street

When houses outlive people and memories outlive dreams, homes can become part of us as much as our families are. It is a rare occurrence, but in our historic landscape, these family member homes are often unturned stones with stories seeping out like moss after rain.

Such is the story of the Donaldson home, tucked back off of the water just far enough for the breeze to brush the house. Sitting comfortably on Queen Street in the Old Village, this home has seen a century of newborns, deaths, hurricanes and sunshine.

Constructed in 1905, it is currently the residence of downtown-based interior decorator Margaret Donaldson and her husband Rob. They have folded their lives seamlessly with her husband's family history, and luckily enough, on the date of my visit, Mr. Donaldson, Sr., was able to regale me with some stories of his grandparents building the lovely home in Mount Pleasant. As he tells it, "I've been on this street the majority of my life."

Mr. Donaldson's grandfather owned Hobcaw Barony originally, and upon selling it he rented a carriage with his wife and rode down the beach (today that beach is a comingling of lawn and marsh). When they got to the bluff where the house stands now, his grandmother just had to have it. Thus, the family purchased the lot and divided it so that they could build their dream home and that each child could have a parcel. Today, of the four original divisions, they still own two.

Growing up in that home, multiple generations shared the walls at any given time. Building boats on the porch, which formerly wrapped around the construct before the 2009 renovation, was the family's pastime. There were a total of three boats fashioned on the front porch, with tender loving care, as the builder looked out to the ocean, craving a ride on the waves. First, as Mr. Donaldson explains, his Uncle Malcom built a 24-foot catamaran. Then came the 21-foot scow called the *Curry Comb*. Finally, Mr. Donaldson used the scrap lumber he found by climbing the great Oak out front to scour the ocean and look for floating debris from a demolished Fort Moultrie to build a 13-foot scow he called the *Jolly Roger*.

But, even a home in the hands of a carpenter can experience wear and tear. As all homes age with the people who built them, the Donaldson home has not escaped such a fate. That is why they called on Bob Fleming of Classic Remodeling to handle their prized house. Margaret, being an interior decorator, had worked with him on many projects and knew the caliber of his work was strong enough to trust him with her home.

So they redid the sagging transoms above the doorways in the living room and took out old bead board. Rob didn't want to throw



PHOTOGRAPHS BY BLAIR HALFORD

Through that special door, so carefully picked by Mr. Donaldson, Sr.'s grandparents, the view to the marsh is unparalleled.

away any original material of the home, so the bead board rests comfortably in a partially renovated master bathroom by a removed fireplace



The transoms on the interior doorways were sagging before Bob Fleming was able to repair and restore them.

waiting to be reinstalled. The wrap-around porch was cut off to expand the back areas of the house, and now the porch is relegated to the front, simply allowing the joys of the river instead of the intrusion of looking upon a neighbor.

Sitting solely between the living and dining rooms is a fireplace, no wall extending through it, allotting open space and fluid breezes as they blow off the marsh through the front door. The front door is original to the home, as it was found floating along the river, salvaged by Mr. Donaldson's grandfather, around which the home was built; of course, during the renovation process it has been handled with the utmost care as it is part of the character of the home.

Furniture is original to the residence, and memories are not in short supply. A gardener himself, Mr. Donaldson explains the 100-year-old hydrangea that survived Hurricane Hugo and ➤



A handsome living room looks out to a placid river. Margaret Donaldson, as a clever decorator, has left family heirlooms to fill in the decor of her house, and in doing so she maintains the feel of antiquity through the residence. This is a special room full of memories past and present, and even those yet to happen.

the recent renovation that sits off to the side of the home. He cut pieces of it to give to his sisters and children; then he replanted it, and it still thrives as much as it ever did.

It is as if history stands still on this lot. As Fleming describes the home, "It is a funky little house that was added to over time." With a century of memories in its walls, no renovation can shake the home of its delightful atmosphere. The sunsets leak into the original win-

dows, which Fleming saved to preserve the feeling the home exudes. Over time, more Donaldson generations will know what it is like to climb the oak out front or build a boat on the porch. Moving walls and screens and glass doesn't make a house a home; it is the stories that the walls and screens and glass retain that make this residence what it is and always will be.



Margaret and Rob's house in the Old Village exudes the comforts of lived-in quarters with a story in every hallway. The boat-building porch is guarded faithfully by the Donaldsons' sweet golden retriever.



DREAMS YOU CAN LIVE IN.

The kitchen, for many, is the heart of a home. A place of reassurance and welcome to family and friends. To others, it's a studio for performing art. However you view it, we can design and build it. Add space or find it. Lend warmth and ease. Tell us your vision. And see it well done.

843-763-3297 classicremodeling.com


CLASSIC
REMODELING
& CONSTRUCTION INC.