

SUMMER 2011

Charleston

STYLE & DESIGN



\$4.95 Display until September



0 74470 24102 7

Take a virtual tour online at www.charlestonstyleanddesign.com

Concierge Builder





This high-end homebuilder blends European and New World aesthetics with top-drawer service

By Wendy Swat Snyder | Photography by Gerin Choiniere

*B*uilding a home of one's own is not a project for the faint of heart. And with price tags of custom-built properties starting in the millions of dollars, owner expectations run high. For those who have acquired a home site out of the state or even out of the country, concerns are compounded, beginning well before the first ground is broken. Addressing the needs of a client embarking on a high-end custom home-building project requires nothing less than a team of professionals with both construction and communication skills—a rare combination indeed.

That very combination, though, is precisely what the partners at Kingswood Custom Homes have built their reputation upon. "They're investing their time and money into a project like this," says founding owner Peter Leeke of his clients. "We feel we need to take very good care of them—roll out the red carpet and never let them down."

Peter and his partner, Louise Leeke, started building in the Charlotte, North Carolina area over fifteen years ago, and have begun to expand their presence in the Charleston area. Both hail from the United Kingdom, where they developed, early on, a love for building and a passion for perfection.

"My wife, Louise, comes from a family of builders," says Peter, whose own career in construction began with the British government, providing housing to exacting specifications for people with special needs. "It was very demanding, and good training," he notes.

Louise remembers visiting job sites as a child with her father, who took over the London-based company her grandfather started during the Great Depression. "Once you get building in your blood," she says, "it's hard to get it out."

The company the Leeques formed has grown to include an award-winning project manager, an interior designer and a staff of service-oriented professionals. In fact, Kingswood Custom Homes' record of excellence in the custom home arena has garnered a decade of awards, regionally and nationally, for being among the industry's top custom builders.

"Not many builders combine the architectural side and sound construction," says Peter.



The company's process involves a concierge approach to building a home. Once a client's style and budget have been established, the Leeke's choose from a select group of local architects and "marry them together" in a design and build package. "The architect works for us," notes Peter. "We streamline the process."

Interior design is the domain of Louise, whose specialty is "hard-line"—making architectural selections such as unique roof coverings, brick and period-correct textures, custom cabinets—"everything from the chimney pots to the flooring."

"There are times when a client may come to us with a dream. ..They want a new home that looks

old world and "crumbly," and I know how to do it," says Louise. And when she is not satisfied with a vendor's selection, she uses a hands-on approach, creating her own textures and finishes, to obtain exactly the right elements for a project.

"Everything we do is customized, we take nothing for granted," she notes. "We like to create a personality for every house that we build."

To maintain that level of attention to detail, the Leeke's business plan includes limiting the company's expansion to the Carolinas since, as Louise notes, "You can't be everywhere and call yourself custom."

And because so much of the Leeke's referral-







based business consists of overseas and out-of-state clients, the company has gone to great lengths to develop a top-flight customer service component, ensuring that each and every client's project is a seamless experience from concept to close.

"Both my wife and I have been incredibly impressed," says John Cousins of Houston, Texas,

whose custom home in The Point at Lake Norman, near Charlotte, North Carolina, is currently being built by Kingswood Custom Homes. "They're very proactive and very positive... and always trying to satisfy you."

"When clients come to the construction site, I have a full itinerary for them," says Louise, "and I focus only on them. I have all the samples lined

up and labeled so they can touch them and see how beautiful they are."

For the Leekes, communication is key, and they take pride in a company-wide policy of courtesy and responsiveness as a way to eliminate stress for the homeowner. For example, client callback time is a mere five minutes when phone calls cannot be answered immediately.





In addition to individual building projects located primarily in Seabrook and Kiawah Islands, Kingswood Custom Homes has a few larger-scale projects breaking ground in the Lowcountry.

"The entire staff is first class," comments Cousins. "They work as a team and are always there to help. When we visit, everything is exactly as they said it would be. I would trust them to go on with the project even if I couldn't fly out to see it...There are no surprises with them."

Atlanta residents Anne and Ken Stovall are looking forward to spending summers and holidays at their new Seabrook Island getaway. "Kingswood has been on budget, and on time,"

says Anne. "Our experience has been phenomenal."

The Leekes have also made a considerable investment in their online presence with an artisanal Web site created by Denise Davis, president of Metropolis, a Charlotte-based national branding firm. The award-winning site's most innovative and client-supportive feature is a private portal, a password-protected platform that provides clients with interactive project updates, a running budget summary and

photographs—all updated on a continual basis.

"Patricia and I access the client portal all the time," notes Cousins. "You can watch the progress of the construction, what the spending is, change orders....You can see all that, in a totally transparent way....It's absolutely incredible, to be honest."

In addition to individual building projects located primarily in Seabrook and Kiawah Islands, Kingswood Custom Homes has a few larger-scale projects breaking ground in the



Photograph by Dustin Peck

Lowcountry. The company was recently engaged to create a unique design concept for new custom homes in Cassique, a lush, ocean side community in Kiawah.

The blueprint for Grace Bay Cottages, as the project is known, takes inspiration from the sprawling country residences built in the late 19th century by the renowned English architect, Charles Voysey. (His trademark style is best exemplified in his home in that famous Cotswold town, Stow-on-the-Wold.)

Developed by Kingswood Custom Homes exclusively for Cassique, the architectural design deftly blends traditional British Isles style with the tropical feeling of the West Indies. Balmy breezeways feature the beautiful arches of brick groin vaults, and pre-cast quoins surround

massive exterior doors. Characteristic elements include English plain tile, tabby stucco, slate and cedar shake roofing.

“Because we’re from England,” says Peter, “we have the ability to create a fusion of architectural styles, combine European and New World elements...and we’re not afraid to do it!”

Kingswood Custom Homes has also partnered with the Beach Company to help launch Scotts Creek, one of Mount Pleasant’s newest neighborhoods. “We’re very excited,” says Kent Johnson, Beach Company vice president of acquisitions and development. “There’s a lot of history on that piece of property.” The former tomato farm was a rifle range during the early 20th century. Soldiers would set up on the mainland and shoot across the marsh at a

hummock island for practice. “We’ve really felt a calling to do this project right.”

In response to current trends in the custom home market, models in Scotts Creek will feature open floor plans, more high-end finishes and outdoor living space, and a smaller overall footprint. “We’re starting with a brand new product, and we think Peter is the right builder to do it. ➤

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Kingswood Custom Homes
843-801-1600
www.kingswoodhomes.com

Wendy Swat Snyder is a Charleston-based freelance writer.