

Lutyens-Inspired Island Masterpiece

An international art and furniture collection finds its permanent home.

words DENISE LORRAINE DAVIS
photo METROPOLIS ICONIC SHOTS

IT’S A FANTASTIC STORY OVER COCKTAILS WITH YOUR GUESTS: While living in Washington, DC, you drove by the British Ambassador’s residence often, became inspired, and started to sketch ideas for the home you are entertaining them in. And it’s a true story.

Tom McDuffie and his wife Barbara have lived all over the world including a “terrific apartment in Paris,” he mused. During this time, they amassed a stunning collection of art, sculpture, artifacts, décor, and furniture. Early in his career, Mr. McDuffie was a commercial architect in Charlotte with CTHL (now known as LS3P) and made lasting friendships there.

After they purchased a lot bordering the Cassique golf course and marshland on Kiawah Island in 2008, the process of inspiration and imagination began. “I contacted my long-time friend and former colleague, Mike Tribble, former partner and now chairman emeritus of LS3P,” explained McDuffie, “The plan was to just have some fun on this design and we did just that.”





“As you view the art, what is immediately self-evident is that this residence must have been designed to house this collection. It is frankly too perfect.”

Tribble explained the collaboration process, “The first concepts were designed upon his wishes and evolved from there. He served as the critic, often sketching on airline napkins as he traveled. LS3P (Charlotte office) handled all the drawings, plans, and models from start to finish. As a team, we were all like-minded about the outcome.”

The foundational reference was, yes, the only residence in the United States that Sir Edwin Lutyens designed. The English architect is mostly known for the 8-ft long Thakeham bench he designed in 1902—the now mass-produced Lutyens Bench. A higher-end replica crafted in teak by Restoration Hardware stands proudly centered off McDuffie’s pool as a salute of sorts.

So what exactly inspired McDuffie to reference his creative process to this palatial building on Embassy Row? “Compelling symmetry,” states McDuffie, “a motor courtyard defined by winged

structures that serve as garages with administrative spaces above. Everybody has L-shaped residences. I loved the symmetry, formality and command of a common courtyard entry.”

McDuffie goes on to explain the magnificent setting of the lot and what he aspired to achieve. “I sketched (on a napkin) how one could see through the house to the marsh from the front of the house for a visual experience that creates an expansive, single indoor/outdoor living space.”

True symmetrical balance was profoundly key in every ounce of effort by all involved. It required constant communication and buy-in to hit the mark consistently. “I told Rob [Hutzler] and John [Glidder] of Kingswood, that I would be visiting the job site every two weeks; and asked if anything is not aligning perfectly at any phase, to stop and call me instead of making concessions in the moment. I’d rather delay the schedule than compromise perfect





symmetry in each and every detail of this design,” asserts McDuffie. “And I have to say, they understood this architectural pin-point focus. They would call often and really wanted to make this happen. Even the follow up today is tremendous as we tweak, change, and add things.”

This architectural plan had over 80 sheets during the design process (including many napkins). Most luxury homes may have 20-30. The art of rendering perfection was the team’s commitment from start to finish. Tribble adds, “To improve our presentation of ideas in real context (to the architectural review board), we created several models, each one taking 12-15 hours to print on a 3-D printer. We were going in a more unique direction in this development and wanted everyone to feel confident that our ideas were solidly-based on decades of combined architectural experience and plenty of credentials.” It’s certainly not your typical tag team on a residential project: Both men are honorary fellows of the Royal Institute of British Architects, and Tribble is also a fellow of the American Institute of Architecture.

At the center of everything was the fact that McDuffie did not want to move in the home and regret any decision he had steered. And there were plenty of

challenges. Originally, they wanted two double-car garages, but the wing buildings were too large and overtook the main structure of the home. They had to scale down the size of the “gate houses” to a proportion that was complimentary. When they redesigned them to single car garages with full-amenity guest suites above, the flanked structures still looked too large.

To create a pleasing and effortless balance, they lowered the fascia to align with the main house and designed vaulted-ceilings to create greater comfort and appropriate scale of interior space for guests. The effect is remarkable: the fascia aligns visually across the front elevation spectrum even though the main house is 5 1/2 ft. above the motor courtyard.

The property at 5,478 heated sq. ft. is a system of respective datum points and anchors. For example, the gate houses anchor the main residence (but at a comfortable distance), every exterior corner is punctuated with a column and throughout the interior living spaces, all elements of various materials are visually aligning. There is not a single line that does not relate to another. It all makes so much sense, that you instantly relax in its presence from any perspective allowing the artwork and design aesthetic to come alive in your senses over anything else.



As you view the art, what is immediately self-evident is that this residence must have been designed to house this collection. It is frankly too perfect. McDuffie chuckles, “You are correct. I had an inventory of our collection including furniture and every detail on planning floating walls, wall sizing and lighting was prioritized to accommodate our collection. We even drew these pieces into the plans during the design process. We knew where everything was going to live well before we moved in.”

Another appreciated achievement was that while the couple desired to have a grand open space for entertaining guests, they wanted the same space to feel intimate and homey when they spent time in the home alone, as they did recently over the holidays. The museum-like space seems to be restful and cozy due to its exacted sublimity. The master bedroom and study are exactly the same rooms, just decorated differently. Even the fire places in these spaces are precisely in the same location on the left and right exterior walls. The guest



suites with covered walkways and runway lights for late nights are precisely identical. McDuffie’s ideation of every detail was often in flight, as the runway lights were inspired by landing one night in a plane.

The master bath is a sight to behold as well. Unusual floor to ceiling teal glass tile from Germany frames the oval window, which is mirrored from the kitchen window on the opposite side of the home. The glass enclosures were inspired by a stay at a luxury hotel in China. Although much larger in scale in this home, the concept of a floating tub flanked by two glass enclosures is unique and jaw-dropping. “I have to give my wife and Kingswood credit for this one. I had concerns about the color, the pattern and how it would turn out in the end. They knew it would be great and now it is one of the great features of the home.” says McDuffie.

From an architectural journey standpoint, Tribble summarized it this way: “The best projects are the ones that stay true to the concepts.”

