

WARM WELCOME
A traditional Lowcountry entry opens into an expansive showcase of rear water views.



Home is where their hearts are

QUARANTINED IN THE QUINTESSENTIAL RETREAT

STORY BY PAULA MAGRINI
PHOTOGRAPHY BY J. SAVAGE GIBSON

Upon arrival at the home of Betsy and Jim Utterback, I'm greeted by two of the most energetic, engaging grandchildren, Imogen and Seamus. They're communicating with walkie talkies but politely pause on their flight down the stairway to chat with an unfamiliar guest. They lead me through the bright beckoning foyer to their grandmother, who is completely unflustered by all the activity surrounding her in the midst of her signature Colleton River Club retreat. What makes the home a signature production is the fact that Utterback herself has steered all the interior design. While her selections are as measured and deliberate as her theories on transforming house into home, she says the sequence of events following the purchase of the Colleton River property was anything but planned.



FAMILY MATTERS
Imogen, Nikki, Seamus, James, Betsy and Jim Utterback will always share a special bond following their Lowcountry quarantine.



"Their home is strategically tucked close to the shoreline so the great room and porch feel virtually surrounded by rippling water and wisps of colorful horizon."

"We intended to gradually transition into our new Lowcountry lifestyle since we had deep roots in Connecticut and were in no rush to sell our Wilton home," she said. In fact, Utterback was immersed in several design projects for her new company, Nod Hill Interiors, while her husband, Jim, was successfully launching a consulting business after years in the pharmaceutical industry. "Little did we know we'd fall so quickly and completely in love with our little piece of the coast," she added.

The attraction is no wonder since the Utterbacks' home site is a unique pie-shaped parcel, flaring to embrace the most breathtaking views of the Colleton River. Their home is strategically tucked close to the shoreline, so the great room and porch feel surrounded by rippling water and wisps of colorful horizon. Sunsets are especially sensational.

"There's no question the home's footprint was limited due to the position of the lot," pointed out Brandon Edwards, partner and operations director at Element Construction. "We applied for a county variance so we could accommodate both the home's outdoor living and swimming pool areas with the water's edge just steps away."

Architect William Court weighs in with his conviction for bringing the outer habitat indoors. "Somehow we balanced the floor plan despite the challenging geometry," he said. "The result is well-proportioned, connected open spaces that flow together for relaxed, casual living, inside and out."

Betsy Utterback realizes now just how critical the thoughtfully calibrated flow of her new retreat was once the country shifted into quarantine mode. About two years after she and Jim moved into their new Colleton home, the Utterbacks' son James, wife Nikki, Imogen and Seamus (my welcoming committee) joined them while working from home and away from the pandemic woes of their Manhattan offices.



WHITE ROOM Their modern white kitchen became a culinary command central during the Utterbacks' quarantine at Colleton River Club.



GET CREATIVE Betsy Utterback encourages mindful floorplans. "If you have a creative side, designate a space for painting, sewing, woodworking ... or simply observing nature's beauty outdoors."



"Suddenly I found myself in the role of round-the-clock hostess, multi-task manager and short-order cook, all wrapped into one," she confessed. Thankfully the home's floor plan has allowed privacy for all parties, from the staggered second-story bedrooms to gracious great room and adjacent mud room and porch. "The bonus room above the garage couldn't provide a more ideal escape for two kids constantly on a mission," Utterback said.

Dwelling on the connectedness Court emphasized, she recalls quarantine days when one minute she was assisting with online home-school sessions and moments later she was serving lunch for five. Nikki, a dedicated architect, filed her projects from one of the upstairs bedrooms while her husband, James, manned the mud room below for Zoom calls and other business communication. Jim also worked from his designated space and occasionally turned mixologist for the family happy hour.

"We made a conscious effort to relax during late afternoons," Utterback explained. "With quarantine restrictions looming, our backyard truly became our favorite (and only) destination." With its manicured gardens and meandering terrace framing the waterside pool, the family couldn't ask for a more serene and secluded default space.

"Everything is perfectly and intentionally positioned in this home, as though Betsy knew exactly how it would all fit together well before installations began," said Andrea Eldred, partner - business development at Element Construction. "Collaborating with her took this custom-build experience to a new level because Betsy's a detailed communicator. Plus she's an extremely intuitive interior designer," Eldred added. "We're always grateful for this kind of positive ending to a project."



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RIGHT FRAME OF MIND More design wisdom from Nod Hill Interiors. "Use windows to frame captivating views and expand your space by bringing the outside in."



When asked to describe her design style, Betsy Utterback said she avoids clichés and, at Colleton, focused on the coastal aspect of her Lowcountry retreat. "I think a home can be light and airy yet still sophisticated." With abundant floor-to-ceiling windows and French doors ensconcing the first level, Utterback's bright color choices pop. Her finish and flooring selections provide textural contrasts, while the vivid artwork selections add elegance. She has a remarkable knack for integrating traditional furnishings with whimsical accents.

"When I think about the last few months, I see parallels between my design approach and the group of six who have called this house 'home and office' throughout the pandemic," Utterback said. "Though full of contrasts, our lifestyles blended together beautifully," Utterback said. Perhaps they offered balance for each other during their quarantine. One conclusion is certain; the family thrived in their versatile new living space. Utterback added that she looks forward to hosting her other two children, Chris and Jenny, and their families. They currently reside on opposite coasts: Chris in Philadelphia and Jenny in Los Angeles.

James, Nikki and the kids have since returned to their home in Brooklyn so the pace at the Utterbacks' Colleton address has slowed down; however, not the juggling.

Nod Hill Interiors is committed to an antique house renovation in Duxbury, Massachusetts, as well as an ambitious med-spa project in Philadelphia. Betsy also is working on a couple of local projects as she continues to grow her passion and business.

After living all over this country, from Wisconsin and Indiana to Florida and then the Northeast, the Utterbacks took their talents abroad to Paris and South Africa. "That's a lot of addresses and cultures," Betsy admitted with a sigh. "What a wonderful compliment to the Lowcountry, since after all our relocations, this is where we've decided to nest once and for all." *LL*

THE HOME TEAM

Builder: Element Construction

Architect: Court Atkins Group

Appliances: Billy Wood Appliance

Blinds: Budget Blinds

Counters & Tile: StoneWorks

Lighting: Circa Lighting

Windows: Grayco

Hardware: Bird Decorative Hardware