

Atlanta
MAGAZINE'S

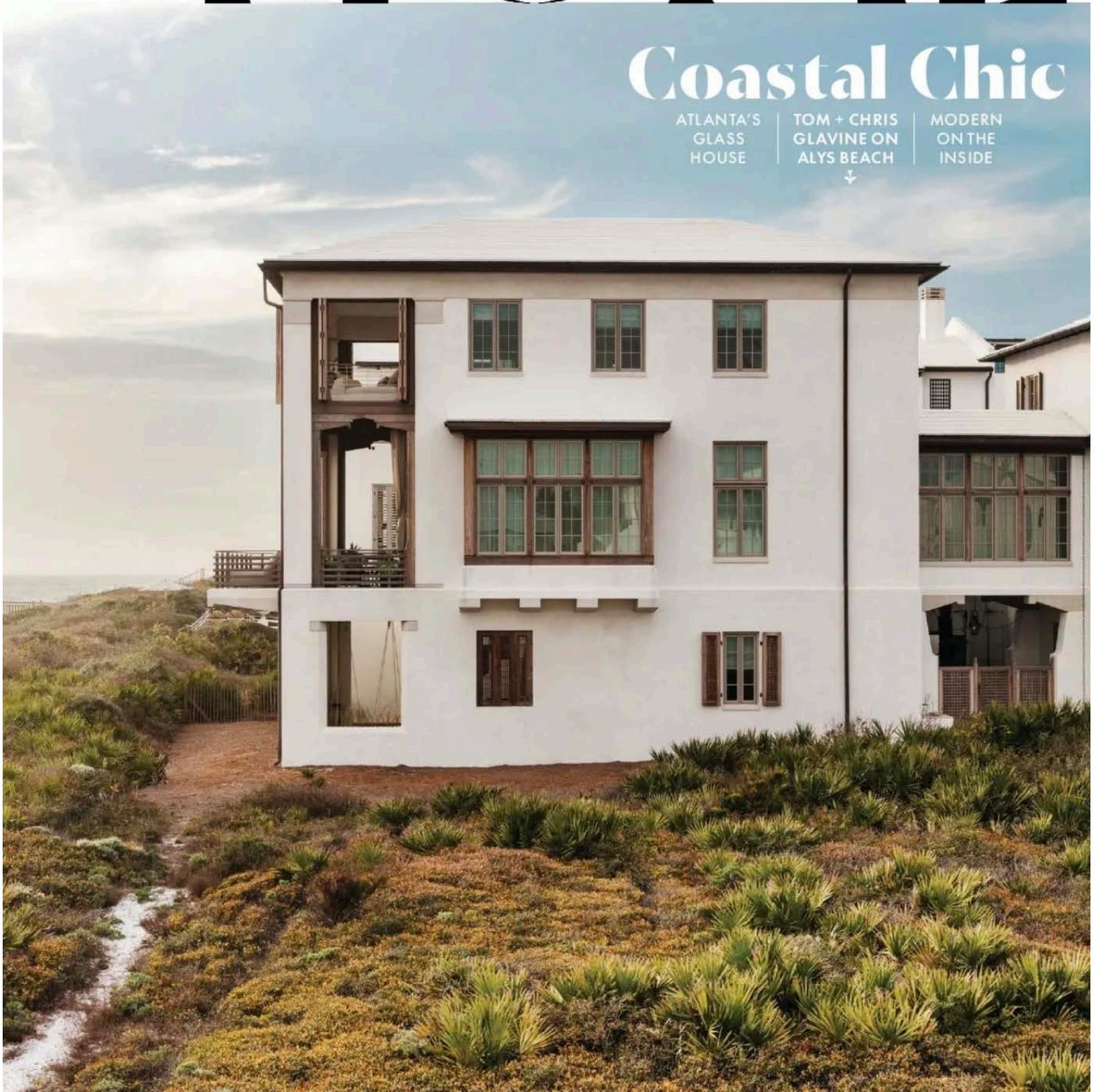
HOME

Coastal Chic

ATLANTA'S
GLASS
HOUSE

TOM + CHRIS
GLAVINE ON
ALYS BEACH

MODERN
ON THE
INSIDE



— REAL ESTATE + PROPERTY PRIMER —

SPACES

— CURB APPEAL —

Treetop Treasure

ONE OF ARCHITECT LESLIE ELLSWORTH'S
FAVORITE LOCAL ABODES IS A GLASS
TREEHOUSE NEXT TO THE BELTLINE

By BETSY RILEY | Photograph by PHILLIP JONES

→ Treectop Treasure

Philip Johnson's Glass House in Connecticut is a National Trust Historic Site, but it's easy to overlook Atlanta's own glass house, which is perched in the trees near Ormewood Park. Atlanta architect Leslie Ellsworth says, "I have two friends that live in that area, and I've cut through there a million times. And it was probably the millionth time when I noticed it behind the leaves. You do a double take once you see it."

The owners, architects Mary Clare DeReuil and Carlos Tardio, built the house themselves while they were out of work during the recession. The land, which is adjacent to the Southside BeltLine, was cheap because it is inaccessible by car. The couple placed footings where they wouldn't disturb any trees and used industrial materials like cast concrete, steel beams, and salvaged glass (and no off-gassing products like plywood or paint). The process took four years. The couple calls it the "House of Doors" because its structure accommodates large openings and pivoting glass panels designed by Tardio.

"It's a very modern, contemporary-style steel structure, and yet, it's not screaming, *Here I am!*" says Ellsworth. "It's quietly tucked behind the trees and very responsive to that environment." She's amazed by the persistence required to design around trees and use salvaged materials. "That could only be an architect's house because those types of limitations take a lot of time and effort and experimentation to make it work," she says. (The owners rent it out on Airbnb.)



Palmetto Bluff

A Lowcountry landscape where conservation comes first

By **BETSY RILEY** | Architect: **FRANCK & LOHSEN ARCHITECTS** | Photograph by **WAYNE MOORE**

WHEN SOUTH CAROLINA'S Palmetto Bluff launched in the early 2000s, the first thing the developers did was found a conservancy to manage the land in perpetuity and guide the build-out. "It was heresy," says broker-in-charge W. Bryan Byrne, who's been there from the beginning. "We were green before it was a marketing gimmick."

This desire to protect the surrounding Lowcountry landscape, which stretches along 32 miles of riverfront about 24 miles northeast of Savannah, will limit construction to fewer than 4,000 homes. Palmetto Bluff is only about a third of the way there, though the number of homes completed or under construction has more than doubled in the last two years. It's about two-thirds the size of nearby Hilton Head Island but will only have one-tenth the density. The conservancy's PhD-level staff also provides hundreds of annual programs for visitors and residents and conducts research, including surveying alligator, turtle, white-tail deer, and bird populations; monitoring bald-eagle nests; and analyzing artifacts from the antebellum Pettigrew Plantation. Their work contributes to what Byrne calls the "Lake-Chautauqua-esque" tone of the place.

Palmetto Bluff was also ahead of its time in centering community around retail villages with boutiques, restaurants, and a market rather than around private clubs—an approach today's planners would call "placemaking." There is a highly rated Jack Nicklaus-designed golf course (with another course in the works), as well as a day

spa, racquet sports, boating, fly-fishing, hiking, shooting facilities, an equestrian center, and a farm; but enthusiast club memberships are optional.

There's also a five-star, 200-key inn, Montage Palmetto Bluff. The hotel "generates interest and makes the place interesting," says Byrne. "It allows us to have all the amenities we couldn't have had as a typical 400-lot, gated community."

Nearly 100 Palmetto Bluff homeowners have their primary residences in Georgia. Deborah and Lee Watkins, who lived in metro Atlanta for more than 20 years, recently moved here full-time. "I don't miss one thing about Atlanta except for my church family and Antico Pizza," says Deborah. They love that their new neighborhood is not too touristy, allowing them to savor both "space and place."

In 2021, Palmetto Bluff was purchased by South Street Partners, which also owns the Cliffs properties around Lake Keowee, and average home-sales prices jumped by 37 percent. "Almost all properties are single-family homes created by preferred or vetted builders, with relatively few resales. Short-term rentals are allowed only in certain neighborhoods. Currently, lots start at \$400,000, and move-in-ready homes at about \$2 million—though Byrne notes homeowners could likely build for less. "We put maximum sizes on things but not minimums," he notes. "We're more worried about McMansions than we are about a small, understated, well-done house. Our customers love that."