A modern wing inspired by the past

By Robert Behre
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SULLIVAN'S ISLAND -- The piazzas of a Charleston single house do more than provide outdoor living space; they also shade the house so it doesn't heat up as much in the summer sun.

That fact --and not the prevailing breeze theory --is probably why these piazzas most always are found on the southern or western facades.

The guest pavilion not only adds two bedrooms, an office and entertainment space to the main house, but it also creates a breezy, shaded outdoor living area next to the existing pool.

The trapezoidal pool feel like an outdoor room framed by the existing house (right), the new guest pavilion (left) and new plantings along the other sides.

A new guest pavilion here riffs on the same line of thinking, using a dramatic wooden screen rather than a piazza to shelter the house from the sun while giving its interior a brighter, more open feel.

Architect Stephen Yablon, who grew up in West Ashley and now practices in New York, says he had fun finally doing a project in his native area.

A few years ago, Yablon helped with the renovation and slight expansion of the 20-year-old house at Station 24 Street and Atlantic Avenue. He says the owners wanted a clean, minimal look, "a very unfussy 'We don't want to worry about it' experience. Not ostentatious."

But the new guest pavilion completed this year is the real design triumph, a relatively small addition that feels much larger.

The 1,500-square-foot wing not only contains two extra bedrooms, an office and an entertainment area, but it also helps frame the home's rear pool, giving the backyard more of a feel of an outdoor room.

Left - Inside, the new guest pavilion contains the same clean, modernist design touches as found in the main house, but the wooden screening allows abundant natural light and views that make the space feel larger than it is.

Right - To create this living space with its stone floor, the architect and owner agreed to rip out a concrete driveway and replace it with pavers that would let rainwater soak through.

Many beach houses treat their underneath as a sort of storage area for beach chairs, bikes and other junk.

But the new guest pavilion takes that space and finishes it with a stone floor and lighting suitable for a shaded entertainment area and for nice furniture (that can be moved upstairs when the next hurricane comes).

Yablon says the design is uncompromisingly modernist, "but I think it's very much modeled after a Charleston house, open to the garden side, closed to the neighboring side, with cross ventilation."

The new wing maximizes the town's limits for height, square footage and impervious area (to get permission for installing Alabama stone pavers underneath the house, the concrete driveway was ripped out and replaced with pavers that lets the rain soak through).

Despite maximizing the zoning, the new wing doesn't feel like it was squeezed onto the site. A plan by landscape architect Sheila Wertimer of Wertimer & Associates helps soften the new wing from many angles.

The distinctive screen is made of ipe hardwood that eventually will weather to an off-white color, blending in further with the house. Yablon says it keeps the direct sun out of the wing until about 5 p.m.

The screen is interrupted in a few spots by cantilevered screens that block the sun while allowing an interrupted window underneath.

The pavilion wing has a steel frame to allow for more window openings, and its interior feels more open, not only because of the natural light and views through the screen, but also because its pocket doors can disappear into the walls, minimizing the interior clutter.

"I think one of the achievements is how open and airy it feels," Yablon says. "And how simple it feels. It's like a boat."

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