

MAY-JUNE 2007

# VERANDA





*Savoring  
Sea Island*

THE CLOISTER'S RENEWAL

ARCHITECTURE BY PETER CAPONE INTERIOR DESIGN BY PAMELA HUGHES  
RECIPES BY CHEF DE CUISINE SCOTT CRAWFORD PHOTOGRAPHY BY HOWARD LEE PUCKETT  
PRODUCED BY RICH MICHELS TEXT BY LINDA SHERBERT





ing and service staff and I are thinking of your whole experience in The Georgian Room."

In a sense, that "whole experience" began taking shape long before the new chef was hired. Sea Island Company Chairman and CEO Bill Jones III had devoted himself to improving on the legacy of luxury and tradition that have characterized The Cloister during four generations of his family's ownership of the coastal resort.

"The goal was to create a hotel clearly inspired by the original yet built to a new standard unlike anything we'd had before, and unlike an experience found anywhere else," says Jones. "Scott values our Sea Island roots and has used his exceptional culinary skills to do just what we hoped for." Referring to a survey by *Esquire* magazine, he adds, "Having The Georgian Room named one of America's top new restaurants last year is testimony to that."

Jones called upon the talents of Sea Island master architect Peter Capone and interior designer Pamela Hughes of McLean, Virginia, and Sarasota, both of whom have overseen massive resort projects during their careers, to execute his grand vision.

"When you walk into a building like this, the inside should be an extension of what it is on the outside," says Capone. "That's what we did in The Georgian Room. You have a variety of spacial experiences so that a family can enjoy the primary space, two people can have one of the secondary spaces or a group of up to twelve guests can dine in the round space with the stained-glass windows; we used the same European manufacturer that had made the original stained glass for the hotel's Spanish Lounge. As for the cuisine, Scott does with food what I hope I was able to accomplish in the architecture."

Designer Hughes points out, "Our charge was to make The Georgian Room look very residential so that visitors will feel as though they are guests of the Jones family, which they really are. In addition, we wanted to reflect the tradition and heritage of Sea Island in everything we did. The Georgian Room is uniquely Sea Island with its classical architecture, fine furnishings and pink and green colors,



Sea Island master architect Peter Capone used the design of the rebuilt Cloister to frame views of a river and the marshes.

all embellished with a background of Sea Island flora and fauna woven into its one-of-a-kind handmade wool carpet produced in Thailand."

An Old World Weavers regal floral fabric in that same signature pink and green, set off by a dark wine color, covers many of the Italian-made dining chairs as well as accent pillows on banquettes. These colors reappear in Smith & Brighty tassels and trim that adorn custom green damask draperies. Comfortable banquettes wear a silk-velvet made by Jim Thompson.

"We searched the globe for the best of everything," says Hughes. "You can take a tour of the hotel and just look at the incredible tassels."

For *Veranda* readers, Crawford is sharing enough recipes for a seven-course meal. "I chose seven out of a hundred dishes in our spring-summer dinner repertoire. The menu changes daily. I base my decisions on whatever products are fresh and available from the ocean and local farms."

The meal begins with Crawford's asparagus soup with morel mushrooms. "I wanted an intense contrast between the smoky, earthy morel mushrooms and the warm, delicate, silky soup poured over them. You have to find the right balance in putting ingredients together. I'm big



The restaurant's private dining room has chairs in a Lee Jofa damask and, like the Spanish Lounge, stained-glass windows.

festive pink and green circle around a slice of his rich Valrhona Chocolate Terrine. A diner can easily see that these colors have nearby counterparts in the Old World Weavers fabric on chairs and pillows. Did the chef match the dessert to the decor on purpose?

"I didn't this time," he says with a smile. "Maybe it was subconscious. We do it on purpose sometimes."

Crawford leads a visitor behind the scenes into his "Euro-style kitchen," with its stainless steel Montague Excalibur island suite for cooking, and then heads across the room into "the cooler," a corridor where food products are meticulously stored, labeled and dated to track freshness. One cannot miss seeing his "philosophy bulletin board" intended to inspire his cooking and service staff. "Finesse," says this week's posting. "Refinement and delicacy of performance, execution or artisanship."

Turning to the business of preparing dinner that evening for the eighty-seat restaurant, Crawford says, "I like that word 'finesse.' That's what we try to achieve here." □

The Georgian Room  
The Cloister at Sea Island, Georgia  
1-800-732-4752; sea island.com

Recipes begin on page 251.

To learn more about The Cloister's historic Spanish Lounge, see page 268.

HISTORIC  
PERSPECTIVE

BELOW: Addison Mizner designed the Spanish Lounge at The Cloister in 1928. LEFT: The rebuilt room includes four lounge chairs designed by Mizner. Stained-glass windows, fireplace and chandeliers are also original.



# THE SPANISH LOUNGE

REMEMBERING ADDISON MIZNER

ORIGINAL ARCHITECTURE & INTERIOR DESIGN BY ADDISON MIZNER  
INTERIOR DESIGN FOR RECONSTRUCTION BY PAMELA HUGHES  
TEXT BY ALICE LAWLOR

For many guests of The Cloister at Sea Island, Georgia, walking into the hotel's Spanish Lounge is like stepping back in time to an era when austere elegance was everything. Yet one can sense, even today, that ladies in flapper-style sheaths would not look out of place in this high-ceilinged salon. So it is hardly surprising that for families who have been returning to this 1928 resort for generations, entering the room is like coming home.

Preserving that feeling was no easy feat—the Spanish Lounge has been dismantled piece by piece and reconstructed within a brand-new Cloister hotel. It was a Herculean task, but last year the Spanish Lounge was reborn, its *Continued on page 266.*



HISTORIC PHOTOGRAPHS COURTESY OF THE CLOISTER, SEA ISLAND COMPANY. TOP: HOWARD LEE RUCKETT



In the original Spanish Lounge, vacationers gathered to chat, and oftentimes there were impromptu piano recitals and other musical performances.

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new location just yards away from the original and rotated by ninety degrees.

Conceived by renowned Palm Beach architect Addison Mizner as the focal point of his Cloister hotel, the Spanish Lounge combined gothic, Moorish, Byzantine and Renaissance styles in its design. The chic parlor was the toast of Sea Island guests—including many a U.S. president—from the moment it opened. As the old hotel's only public lounge, it was here that wealthy vacationers gathered to take afternoon tea or sip evening cocktails, discuss politics or listen to an impromptu grand piano recital. Many high-society parties and receptions were held in the lounge, and a harpist would often play for guests.

Today's decor and atmosphere are much the same as they were, thanks to Sea Island Company Chairman and CEO Bill Jones III and his handpicked team. Back in 2003, when Jones decided to rebuild the aging Cloister, retaining the character of the hotel's most historic space was a high priority. But for Jones—whose family has owned this barrier island property for four generations—it was also a matter of preserving his own heritage.

Working together with a collection

of craftsmen, engineers and stonemasons, Jones and Sea Island master architect Peter Capone, known for the large-scale structures he designed at the Edward Durell Stone firm, produced detailed plans for dismantling and rebuilding the Spanish Lounge.

To give the room maximum impact in what was to be a building larger than the previous one, Capone made sure the lounge's distinctive stained-glass windows were visible from the hotel's main entrance. Since the new Cloister would overlook the picturesque Black Banks River and marshland, the relocation took the lounge safely out of the flood plain.

But before any dismantling could begin, the Mizner-designed stained-glass windows had to be carefully removed. Stained-glass artisans Celia Meech-Henigman and her husband Jim Henigman, owners of AIG Studio Inc. in Forsyth, Georgia, oversaw this painstaking process.

"This was a rare restoration," says Celia, "because there was such a genuine love and concern for all the artifacts and elements. Everyone was fully aware of the sentimental concern Bill Jones III had with this project, and I don't think a nail was hammered into any board that wasn't done with that in mind."

Using the Henigmans' specifications, the windows were released from their cast-stone frames. With the stonework safely stored for its next life, the windows traveled more than 250 miles to the Henigmans' studio.

Meanwhile, the Spanish Lounge's imposing carved limestone fireplace was salvaged, along with sliding doors, radiator grilles and Moorish lanterns as chandeliers. Interior designer Pamela Hughes, of Hughes Design Associates in McLean, Virginia, and Sarasota, Florida, was determined to retain as many vintage elements as she could.

"We wanted to keep everything as close to the original as possible," she says. "We were very respectful of the history of this room."

After a year of work on the windows, they were rehung and the baton was passed to Hughes. She refurbished four lounge chairs that had been designed by Mizner, replacing a silky damask with a velvet stripe from

Old World Weavers and adding fringe by Watts of Westminster. "The original Moorish chandeliers also were lovingly renewed and reinstalled," she says. Antique torchieres from the room were preserved as well.

Besides incorporating the salvaged items, Hughes commissioned some new pieces. An ornate Moorish-style sofa was custom-made in Los Angeles, and two wooden credenzas were hand-carved, inspired by a photograph found by Jones.

For the area directly in front of the fireplace, Hughes covered facing ratchet-arm sofas in a German chenille made by Gisbert Rentmeister. Throw pillows on the sofas have an old-world look in a Stroheim & Romann fabric that resembles tapestry. A large, one-of-a-kind rug was handmade in Turkey.

Did the interior designer have to make concessions for modern sensi-

**Mizner's interest in Spanish design began when he moved with his family to Guatemala City. During the year he spent there, Mizner traveled throughout Central America with his diplomat father.**

bilities? "Just one," Hughes says with a smile. "Some of Mizner's things were a bit stiff, so our furniture is a little more comfortable."

The entire process may have taken three years of intense collaboration, but when the reconstructed Spanish Lounge welcomed its first hotel guests in the spring of 2006, the response was overwhelmingly positive.

As Hughes observes, "Many people have told me that if they closed their eyes and then opened them again, they would feel like they are in the old Spanish Lounge."

And what about the designer's famous muse from the 1920s? "If Mizner walked in there today," says Hughes, pausing for reflection, "I think he'd be very pleased indeed." □

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For more information on The Cloister and its Georgian Room, as well as recipes, see *Savoring Sea Island* on page 236.