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Jonathan Simpson's House, c. 1780 *1785*
55 East Bay Street
Home of Mr. and Mrs. Graham Smith

Exterior

This handsome Georgian townhouse was built in the early 1780's which was one of the most turbulent periods in Charleston's history. In May of 1780, the city surrendered to British forces under the command of Sir Henry Clinton and began what would be the first of two military occupations of the city by enemy forces, the second occurring during the Civil War.

It stands on a lot that was the middle portion of lot #3 of the Grand Modell, and at the time it was built it was within the original walled city. Charleston is one of only three cities in North America that was totally fortified by walls and bastions.

The land was acquired from the Pinckney family who built the companion house next door. The builder, Jonathan Simpson, was a wealthy merchant who owned a fleet of ships and was engaged in the Atlantic and West Indies trade. Simpson encountered financial reversals and was forced to sell this house at auction in London in the early 1790's. *1785*

The house was built at a time that tastes were changing in the colonies as well as in Europe and although it retains architectural features of the late Georgian period, it also embraces the ornamentation that more closely resembles the Adamesque or Federal period of architectural development. (The term Adamesque is a style named for the famous English designers, Robert and James Adam.) The elliptical fan light and use of tall glazed windows typifies the work of this period. Of significant architectural interest is the cantilevered marble balcony which projects from the second floor and is the only one in Charleston constructed in this manner.

A succession of owners, including an Episcopal minister, occupied this dwelling until the Civil War. After the war, the house became a boarding house, with each room a separate apartment. In later years, it acquired something of an infamous reputation. It is reputedly the last house south of Broad to have experienced a vice raid. In 1958 on a Sunday a ~~madam-called~~ Black Maria reportedly removed five girls and fifteen sailors from the establishment. But the lean years

are probably responsible for the ^{Saving} ~~usage~~ of the original woodwork. The house was restored in the 1960's.

Entrance passage.

An unusual feature of this house is the positioning of the hall along the north wall. This scheme differs from the traditional single house plan. You have entered the house through the 18th century trade entrance which led to the counting house. The family would have used a private entrance away from the street (where a window now occurs). It was customary and even stylish in 18th century Charleston to live "over the shoppe". Please note the ornamentation at the cornice which is particularly bold and handsome. The pine floors run the full extent of the house (28 feet). The etchings on the inside wall are by Goya and date from the 19th century.

Counting House

The term "counting house" was used in England and in the American colonies in the 17th and 18th centuries to describe a room or rooms in which a merchant's clerks kept his accounts and transacted business. The term appears often in 18th century inventories but seems to have gone out of use in the 19th century.

It was customary in Charleston for a merchant to set aside one room on the ground floor for mercantile uses - reserving the upper floors for household use and entertaining.

The mantle and cornice in this room ~~date~~ from the original period of construction. The cupboards enclosed behind a pair of arched doors are a handsome architectural feature. They were salvaged from a ~~de-~~ ~~polished~~ dwelling on Ashley Avenue and installed here in the 20th century.

The chandelier is 18th century Waterford crystal. It was found in pieces in St. Louis and reworked in duplication of one in a castle in Norfolk, England.

The Chinese needlework tapestry (over the mantle) was executed in the Peking stitch, Ming Dynasty. This intricate stitch is also known as the "forbidden stitch" (possibly because it led to ^{BLINDNESS} and was only done for the Empress of China).

The English Hepplewhite sideboard is an 18th century piece, c. 1790). This half-moon sideboard with its original lion's-head mount with pendant ring also retains the original brass rail. These rails were usually

Jonathan Simpson's House

curtained to ward off drafts and act as a splash board. The majority of furniture used here is English and dates from the late 18th century.

The service plates appear to be antique but are actually recently made. They were manufactured by the Wheeling Glass Company in England around 1930 and found by the owner's mother in Canada.

The paintings are: 1. Landscape by the American artist David Johnson, c. 1860 (oil on canvas).

2. "The Crabbers" a genre scene by the 19th century artist Emilio Sanchez (oil on canvas).

Stair Hall

An unusual feature of this dwelling is the positioning of the principal stairs in a private stair hall. It is believed that the family entered the house by way of an entrance on the north elevation. This magnificent staircase rises steeply and elegantly for four full flights and is one of the tallest in the city.

Furnishings include:

Tall case clock, 18th century American. The time mechanism date from 1760.

Painting of a young ^{mother} ~~lady~~ in period costume is oil on canvas and was purchased by the owner's mother and was once in the collection of the Cincinnati Art Museum.

On the landing, guest will see an excellent example of contemporary American craftsmanship. The hunt board was manufactured in this century by a Pawley's Island craftsman. It is a delightful piece in scale and in ornamentation.

Upstairs hall: An elevator and small study have been created out of the once ~~spacious~~ ^{prayer} hall. ROOM

Drawing room

The exquisite cornice and mantelpiece date from the original period of construction and are excellent examples of the Adamesque style of interior ornamentation. Nothing has been altered in this room since it was built except the ceiling which collapsed and had to be replaced. The Adam mantle has a typical scene from Greek mythology. Its twin is in the pineapple gate house on Legare Street which suggest that they

made from same mold as

were probably ~~carved~~ in Charleston. The interior of the fireplace is noteworthy for the Patera design, also an Adam favorite. Both the hob grate and fender are 18th century Adam style.

When restoration of this house began in 1960, this room had been partitioned into a ~~4~~-room apartment. The bedroom was so small, a cradle had to be hung from the ceiling by ropes.

If asked:

1. The Dutch marquetry chest is ^{17th} century, as is the Italian baroque arm chair.
2. The large Queen Ann table, with tulip feet, and arm chair are American.
3. The Sheraton sofa made in Boston is unusual for its Hepplewhite curved back.
4. Mirror and small stands are regency.
5. ~~Small table is 19th century French.~~
6. All the Oriental work, except for the ox blood lamp and watercolor of the cock which are Chinese, is Japanese. The scrolls on the bay wall are 19th century, attributed to Tannyu.
7. The oil on leather screens are 19th century English.
8. Painting over mantle is a copy of Van Dyke's self portrait.

Second Floor Landing

1. 19th century Japanese screen depicting silkmaking.
2. Small table made by a Pawley's Island craftsman.

Master Bedroom

This room with its Adam mantle is again, with the exception of alterations for a bathroom and closets, in its original state. It reportedly accomodated the Madam of earlier times. The signatures of 19th century tenants can be seen in the east windowpane. Most of the furnishings are European.

If asked:

1. Mirror is 19th century French and duplicates the design of the mantle.
2. China on mantle is Italian Capo di Monte, c. 1750.
3. Russian lamps on the mantle.
4. Powder table is English 18th century and only one drawer deep.
5. Color etching above it is by the 19th century artist Joseph Nash.
6. Small oil of Marie Antoinette is a 19th century fake, signed by

the court painter Vigee Le Brun and bought by the owner's great-grandmother in good faith. Alas.

7. ~~Bird pictures are Gouids.~~
8. Small English Adam style desk, c. 1810. Over it lithograph signed in the stone by Renoir of his son.
9. The little book trough was a favorite piece in English houses in the 18th century, enabling a guest to make a selection from the library and transport it to his room.
10. The oak armchair is English in the Louis XV style.
11. The little coffee table is American. It is a Kentucky sample piece of the 19th century of a dining room table, made completely to scale, including the leaves, that was carted about on a wagon in the territory to solicit orders.
12. Rug is 19th century Ushak, copying the design of a French Aubusson. *Bed 1810 - posts from DAR museum in Richmond*
13. Scottish and English chests show the basic differences in furniture made in these two countries.

LIBRARY

Originally the dining room extending across the rear of the house, this room was altered to accomodate a powder room and utility room. However, most of the cypress panelling was saved and taken down to its original finish, removing eight coats of paint in the process. The furnishings make to attempt to conform to the period of the house but reflect the varied interest of the family.

1. A Kentucky rifle is among the gun collection, and the sword was carried by an ancestor during the Civil War.
2. The sofa is 19th century Charleston made, while the chest in front of it is a Japanese Hibachi. The chairs are 20th century designs by Mies Van Der Rohe and Charles Eames. The glass topped table was made from a porthole.
3. The ceiling mobile is an abstract of a Chinese kite dragon.
4. Most of the sculpture is precolumbian from Mexico. The mother and child on the mantle is Tarascan, c. 700 A. D., and the oldest object in the house.
5. The wall of lithographs are 20th century European.
6. The English fender is an unusual variant of a nursery screen.

7. The red leather stool is an English tack room stool which accommodated the gentleman whilst he removed his boots.
8. The small cherry chest on the hearth is another Kentucky sample piece.
9. Ship's cabinet lights on bookcase.

(The book collection is as jumbled as the rest of the room, ranging from an American first edition of Johnson's dictionary to Agatha Christi.)

Kitchen

The modern kitchen was created out of the back piazza and rear terrace. The flagstones, two hundred years old were discovered and elevated two feet to form the present floor. On the brick wall above the cabinets can be seen the original brickmason's signature, a diamond formed in black bricks.

Garden

The walkway which leads to the rear garden contains a stone grating which is one of the few known entrances to Charleston 19th century sewage system, which was hopefully built so that flood tides would rise and wash the streets. The master plan has now been lost. The garden was designed by Loutrell Briggs.

Guests will exit by way of the "common path" (one shared by two houses) runs along the north elevation. It is exactly 1 bale wide and the track marks from the cotton bale carts can still be seen.

House

1. lot 3 -
original

JONATHAN SIMPSON HOUSE

55 East Bay Street

Home of Mr. and Mrs. Robert C. Heffron, Jr.

This handsome Georgian town house was built in the early 1780's, during what was one of the most turbulent periods in Charleston's history. In May of 1780, the city surrendered to British forces under the command of Sir Henry Clinton and began what would be the first of two military occupations of the city by enemy forces, the second occurring during the Civil War.

The house stands on a lot that was the middle portion of Lot #3 of the Grande Modell, and at the time it was built this house was located within the original walled city. (Charleston is one of only three (3) cities in North America that was totally fortified by walls and bastions.)

The land on which Jonathan Simpson's house was erected was acquired from the Pinckney family who built the companion house next door. The builder, Jonathan Simpson, was a wealthy merchant who owned a fleet of ships and was engaged in the Atlantic and West Indies trade. Simpson encountered financial reversals in 1788 and was forced to sell this house at auction in London.

In addition the house was built at a time that tastes were changing in the colonies as well as in Europe, and although it retains architectural features of the late Georgian period, it also embraces the ornamentation that more closely resembles the Adamesque or Federal period of architectural development. (The term Adamesque is a style named for the famous English Designers

Robert and James Adam.) The elliptical fan light and use of tall glazed windows typifies the work of this period. Of significant architectural interest is a cantilevered marble balcony which projects from the second floor and is the only one in Charleston constructed in this manner.

Likewise, of notable distinction is the house's front door. The detailed woodwork and roping around the door frame make this one of the more attractive entrances in historic Charleston.

A succession of owners, including an Episcopal minister, occupied this dwelling during the Civil War. After the war, the house became a boarding house, with each room a separate apartment. In later years, it acquired something of an infamous reputation; and is reputedly the last house south of Broad to have experienced a raid by the vice squad. (On a Sunday in 1958 a Madame called "Black Maria" reportedly removed five girls and fifteen sailors from the establishment.) Though these lean years brought no particular distinction to the house, those are probably responsible for the fact that the original woodwork has been salvaged. The house was restored to a single family dwelling in the 1960's; and was renovated by the present owners in the fall of 1985.

An unusual feature of this house is the positioning of the hall along the north wall, a scheme which differs from the traditional single house plan. You have entered the house through the 18th Century trade entrance which lead to the "counting house". The family would have used a private entrance down the alley and away from the street (where a window now exists) to access their living quarters on the upper floors. It was customary and even stylish in 18th Century Charleston to live over the shoppe.

Please take time to note the ornamentation of the cornice which is particularly bold and handsome. The pine floors run the full extent of the house (28').

Grafite drawings by Barry Spann, Parisian artist, 1984

THE DINING ROOM

What is today used by the current owners as a dining room, was originally used as a "counting house". The term "counting house" was used in England and in the American Colonies in the 17th and 18th Centuries to describe a room(s) in which a merchant's clerks kept his accounts and transacted business. The term appears often in 18th Century inventories, but seems to have gone out of use in the 19th Century. It was customary in Charleston for a merchant to set aside one room on the ground floor for mercantile uses reserving the upper floors for entertaining and living quarters. The mantle and cornice in this room date from the original period of construction. The cupboard enclosed behind a pair of arched doors are a handsome architectural feature. They were salvaged from a demolished dwelling on Ashley Avenue, and were installed in this house in the 20th Century.

The chandelier is 18th Century Waterford Crystal. It was found in pieces in St. Louis, and reworked in duplication of one in a castle in Norfolk, England.

The serpentine sideboard is an antique of the Hepplewhite style (circa 1850) and is made of English inlaid mahogany. The table is a two pedestal dining table (antique copy) made of the finest quality English handmade mahogany.

As you move throughout the house, you will note that the present owners have combined antique English style furniture with modern artwork and furniture from

the Early American Period.

Artist Print by Moti, over mantel

STAIR HALL

An unusual feature of this dwelling is the positioning of the principal stairs in a private stair hall. It is believed that the family would have entered the house by way of an entrance on the north side which would have been accessed by the adjoining alleyway. This magnificent staircase rises steeply and eloquently for four full flights, and is one of the tallest in the city of Charleston. On the landing is a Eva Carter original entitled "Highway Series #84".

As you proceed upstairs, you will note that an elevator and a small study have been created by previous owners of the once spacious hall.

DRAWING ROOM

The exquisite cornice and mantle piece date from the original period of construction and are excellent examples of the Adamesque style of interior ornamentation. Nothing has been altered in this room since it was built, except the ceiling which collapsed and had to be replaced. The Adam mantle has a typical scene from Greek Mythology. It's "twin" is in the pineapple gate house on Legare Street which would suggest that they were probably carved in Charleston. The interior of the fireplace is noteworthy for the patera design, also an Adam favorite. The brass fireplace fender is, likewise, of the 18th Century Adam style.

The piece of furniture on the north wall is an antique English mahogany George III Chippendale chest-on-chest with brushing slide (circa 1790). The tea table is a particularly exquisite old English reproduction. The handsome burl walnut card table/chest table is likewise an old English reproduction. Open on the side table is a copy of the Ray Ellis/Walter Cronkite volume South by Southwest, which takes the reader on a picture voyage of the old south. This house is featured in plate #40 (incorrectly entitled "Rainbow Row"). The two engravings over the side table are by Manet and date from the Civil War period.

When the previous owners began their restoration of the house in 1960, this room had been partitioned into a four room apartment. The bedroom was so small, a cradle had to be hung from the ceiling by ropes.

The artwork over the fireplace is a modern painting by Nancy Tuttle May, entitled "Beyond Because".

MASTER BEDROOM

This room with its' Adam Mantel is again, with the exception of alterations for a bathroom and closets, in its' original state. (It reportedly accommodated the "Madame" of earlier times.) The chest on either side of the fireplace and the seven drawer chest-on-chest are English and made of burl wood. The bed is a four poster wheat bed.

The painting over the fireplace is of the owners' two sons; and was painted by a local artist, Charles DeAntonio.

If you look into the bathroom, you will note the present owners have permitted one wall uncovered during renovation to remain exposed. During the recent renovation, it was discovered that behind the plaster and subsequent sheet rock walls were huge timbers measuring some 16 plus inches in width.

THE LIBRARY

Originally the dining room extended across the rear of the house. This room was altered during previous renovation to accommodate a powder room and utility room. However, most of the cypress paneling was saved and taken down to its' original finish, which involved taking off a reported 8 coats of paint in the process.

This room reflects the owners' interest in literature and music. The framed poster on the west wall entitled "Doors of Charleston" includes the front door of this house. The watercolor over the mantle was painted by local artist, Rhett Thurman, and is entitled "Unfinished Symphony".

THE KITCHEN

The modern kitchen was created out of a back piazza and rear terrace. The flagstones, 200 years old were discovered and elevated 2' to form the present floor. On the brick wall above the Early American sideboard, can be seen the original brickmason's signature --a diamond formed in black bricks.

THE GARDEN

The walkway which leads to the rear garden contains a stone grading which is one of the few known entrances to Charleston's 19th Century sewage system which was built so that, hopefully, flood tides would rise and wash the streets. The master plan has now been lost.

Guests will exit by way of the "Common Path" (one shared by two houses) which runs along the north elevation. The path is exactly one bale wide, and the track marks from the cotton bale carts of old can still be seen.

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mes In Detail

Color, variety keys to East Bay Street house

By ELSA F. McDOWELL
Post-Courier Reporter

The history of 55 East Bay St. is colorful and varied.

It is suiting, then, that "color" and "variety" are key words in the way Ruth and Robert C. Heffron Jr. have treated the interior.

Their colors are cool and clear: lavender, blue, pink and green.

And the variety comes in the way they blend modern artwork with antiques, and Early American pieces with Oriental objects of art.

It's a mix that works well — surprisingly well, in Mrs. Heffron's eyes.

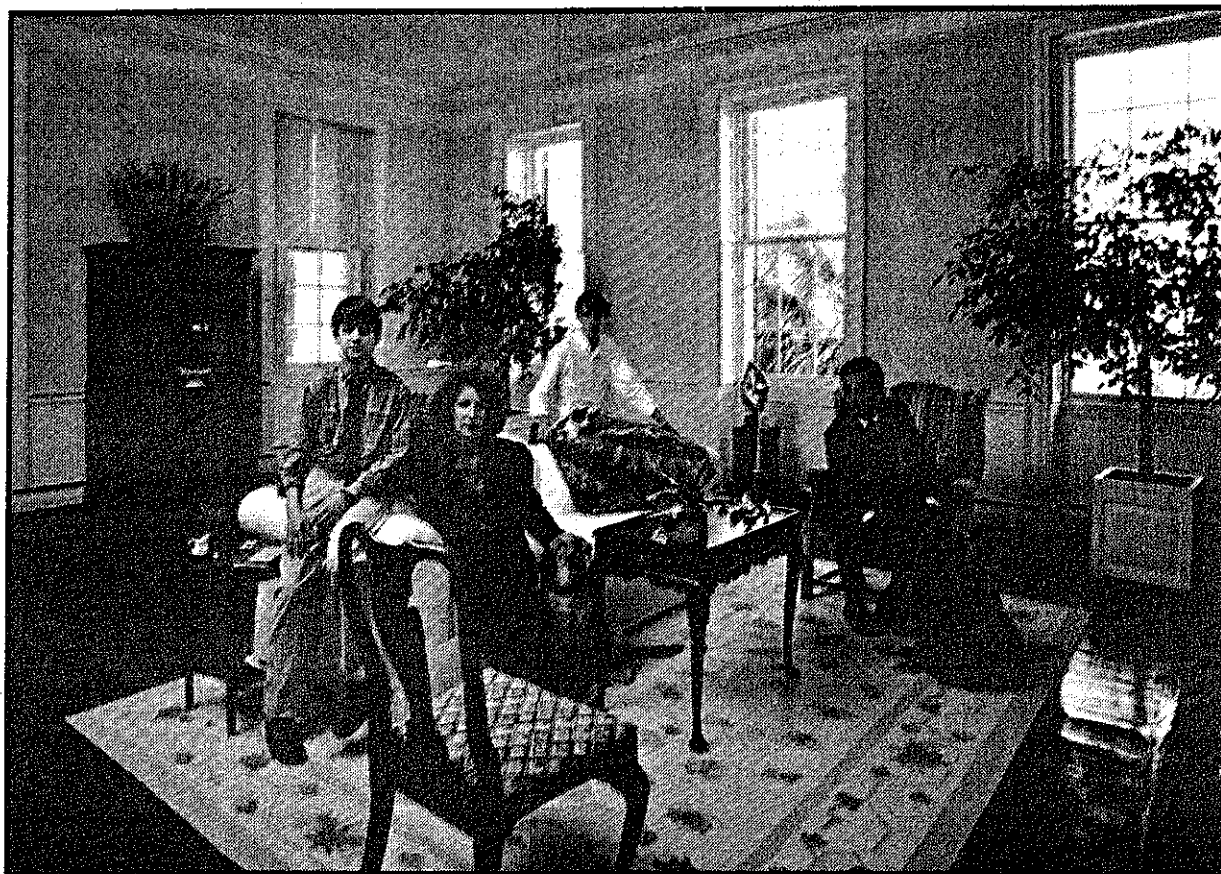
"We were nervous before moving here," says Mrs. Heffron. "The previous owners had lots of BEAUTIFUL things. Our things are eclectic."

They found, however, that the high ceilings, large windows, lovely woodwork and random-width floors command lots of the attention anyway, and complement the furnishings.

The house itself was built by Jonathan Simpson, a wealthy merchant, in the early 1780s within the original walled city. As was the fashion, the family lived upstairs, and used the first floor as a shop.

It has Georgian features and Adamesque ornamentation which survived the years partly because of ill fortune. After the Civil War, the house became a boarding house, with each room a separate apartment. In later years, it acquired an infamous reputation and is reputedly the last house south of Broad to have been raided by the vice squad. (On a Sunday in 1958, a madame called Black Maria reportedly removed five women and 15 sailors from the establishment.)

"It was probably because there was a 'business' here that the woodwork was salvaged. In other houses, mantels and woodwork were removed and sold during hard times."



Family living

Staff Photo by Wade Spees

The house is particularly special to the Heffrons. In 1972, early in their marriage, they rented the carriage house behind the main house.

Later, they built a house in Creekside.

"I was in traffic on top of the Cooper River Bridge when my son Jason kicked the winning soccer goal," says Mrs. Heffron. "We began looking in town again."

Two years ago — about 200 years after the house was built — the Heffrons moved into the grand Georgian building, and since then have added their touches to those of previous owners.

Structurally, they did little. They enlarged the master bathroom on the second floor and added closets. They also put new appliances and cabinets in the kitchen.

Most of the Heffrons' effort, however, has been in adding furnishings, art and accessories that mirror their tastes. Heffron, who is in the insurance business, and Mrs. Heffron, executive director of Trident Community Foundation, enjoy shopping together for art and special pieces of furniture.

In the dining room — the front room on the ground floor — the peach-colored silk wallpaper was there when they bought the house. So was the Waterford crystal 18th century chandelier. The Heffrons added long draperies in a Chinese pattern and a Romanian Oriental rug in colors they use throughout the house.

Heffron family members (from left) Ruth, Tres, Jason and Robert, sit in the formal drawing of

The dining room table, a two-pedestal mahogany reproduction, shows their inclination to the traditional. A Moti print over the mantel (the couple's first joint purchase) shows their appreciation for contemporary. And an oak china cabinet on a side wall shows they like early American pieces as well.

An antique Hepplewhite sideboard with Oriental lamp in the same colors as the drapery fabric completes the room with elegance.

Behind the dining room, the Heffrons are able to use less formal furniture — a lawson sofa in a tiny print, a roll-top desk and an old Irish pine square chest as an end table.

"This is where we live," says Mrs. Heffron. The walls are lined with natural wood bookcases, and french doors open to the kitchen and glassed-in informal dining area.

"We were lucky to find a house with such a nice kitchen," says Mrs. Heffron, explaining that their search led mostly to houses with closet-sized kitchens.

Apparently a previous owner made the kitchen from a back piazza and rear terrace. The 200-year-old flagstones were used to form the floor, and the brick walls

their East Bay Street house with their two dogs, Megan and Bear, and Trooper the cat.

were left exposed.

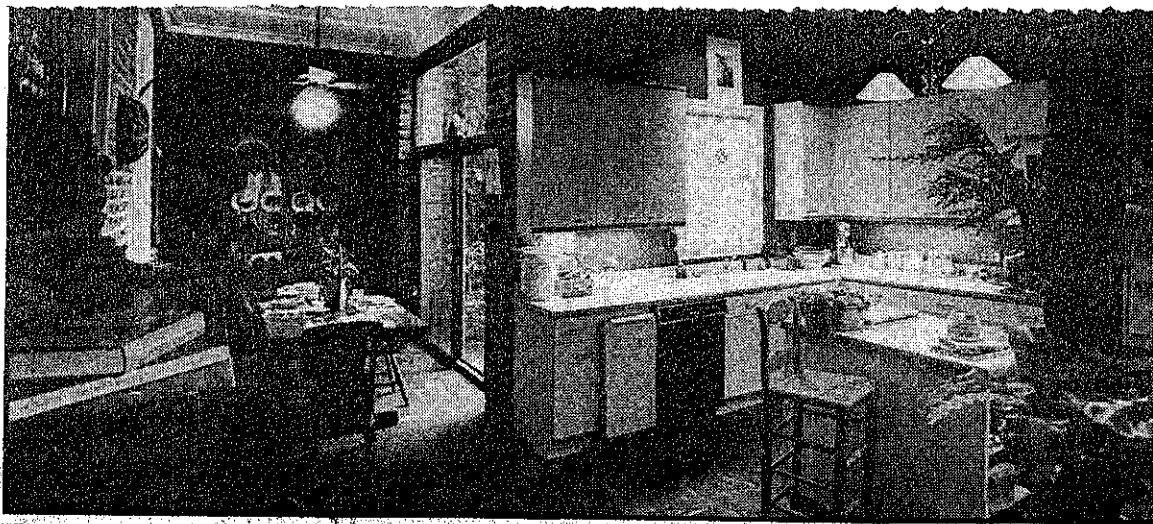
The Heffrons chose sleek white cabinets and hidden lighting — a nice contrast against a bright blue miniprint wallpaper. They bought an old pine pantry for one wall, and are using a table made for their Creekside house from old pine flooring. Special touches such as a large, shiny copper bowl full of fruit make the room inviting, but not cluttered.

The kitchen table overlooks a flagstone patio and walkway that goes past the carriage house to a formal grassy garden in the rear of the deep lot. The walkway is lined with tall camellias and low holly ferns, and serves as natural art for the room.

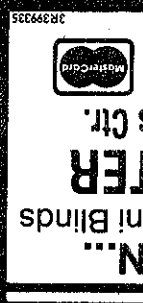
A magnificent staircase rises for four full flights and is one of the tallest in the city of Charleston. The first large wall on the first landing inspired the Heffrons to purchase a large oil painting in soft colors by Eva Carter entitled "Highway Series #84."

The formal drawing room is on the second floor. To

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The wedding is planned for March
in Second Presbyterian Church
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Fulp
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Dr. Fulp of Alex.
Margaret C.
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News and Courier/The Evening Post, Charleston, S.C., February 14, 1988

News & Courier