1 Water Street is a handsome two-and-a-half story masonry residence built in 1857 in the Italian Villa style by James Chapman, a local commission merchant and real estate investor. Constructed on fill land adjacent to the former Vanderhorst Creek (now Water Street), the home is one of two originally identical ‘sister houses’ and is listed as a Category 2 structure in the City’s Architectural Inventory. The house is notable for its distinct symmetrical facade, which features dual entrances recessed on either side of a central mass, piazzas ‘masked’ by a unique masonry screen wall, as well as ornate bracketed window hoods, masonry quoins and detailed twin door surrounds.

After surviving its first 160 years largely intact and unchanged, 1 Water began to take on water repeatedly with a series of storms starting in 2016, and the ongoing threat of climate change made clear the consequences of building in an old creek bed. As incessant flooding continued to threaten the structure on an almost yearly basis, the owners, Bernie and Denise Mansheim, would elevate all of their furniture and retreat to the second floor, waiting for the water to recede before taking on the latest costly repairs. At wit’s end, the Mansheims began to consider selling the home in 2019 and reached out to Julia F Martin Architects with the goal of developing elevation plans that might entice a buyer.

After careful study of local precedents, including similar properties like 54 Hassell and 4 Logan, the architectural team developed a plan to raise the home 8 feet in the air and construct a double masonry stair at the street facade which would lead to each of the original entrances. The owners were thrilled with the design and abandoned the idea of selling, deciding to elevate the home themselves and ensure the long term preservation of this important structure.

Before construction could begin, the project required extensive soil testing, complex engineering and multiple reviews and approvals from the Board of Zoning Appeals, the Board of Architectural Review and a FEMA Variance to allow for traditional construction methods in a VE flood zone. There were three separate Structural Engineering teams involved – one to address the initial excavation and temporary supports for all the jacks, one to handle the physical elevation process, and one to design the new, elevated foundation. Right out of the gate, as excavation got underway, the contractor encountered the historic foundation: a 6 foot thick woven raft of cypress logs, which required Herculean efforts to bore through.

Eventually, an elaborate system of steel beams was installed under the first floor system, and hydraulic jacks lifted the 450 ton structure in 8 inch increments over the course of several days. Almost 2 years later, and after considerable setbacks, the project is almost complete.

With the guidance of Morris Construction, 1 Water Street is the first non-reinforced masonry structure to be elevated in the City of Charleston. At its final height of 16 feet above mean sea level, the home rests on a new solid masonry foundation composed of three massive cast-in-place concrete bond beams supported by 91 helical piles that extend 70 feet into the marl below.

The new foundation is finished in traditional 3-coat lime-based stucco, with a projecting masonry band to indicate the original grade level prior to elevation, and openings between the piers under the piazza are screened via traditionally detailed louvered panels that relate to the existing shutters on the house. The original symmetry of the street facade is preserved through the introduction of a double masonry stair and landings with iron handrails, which lead to the original arched entry doors. Care was taken to incorporate details that are both a reflection of local Charleston architecture and yet respond to the unique challenges of an elevated structure. Elements such as the small window at the central landing and the recessed arched doors below the stairs reference existing details on the home and provide small scale interest at the pedestrian level.

Landscape Architect Glen Gardner has carefully crafted a new garden design worthy of this important property, thoughtfully incorporating water tolerant plantings, high quality materials and functional elements which allow for improved permeability and drainage on site.

Most importantly, the success of this project is largely due to the unwavering commitment of Bernie and Denise Mansheim who have been incredible stewards of this exceptional property and have willingly accepted the requirements of carrying out this project sensitively, and with the quality and craftsmanship such an important house deserves. Visiting the site on an almost daily basis throughout construction, Bernie and Denise have been an integral part of this massive undertaking and demonstrated a steadfast investment in the long term preservation of 1 Water and the City as a whole, which makes them so deserving of this award.