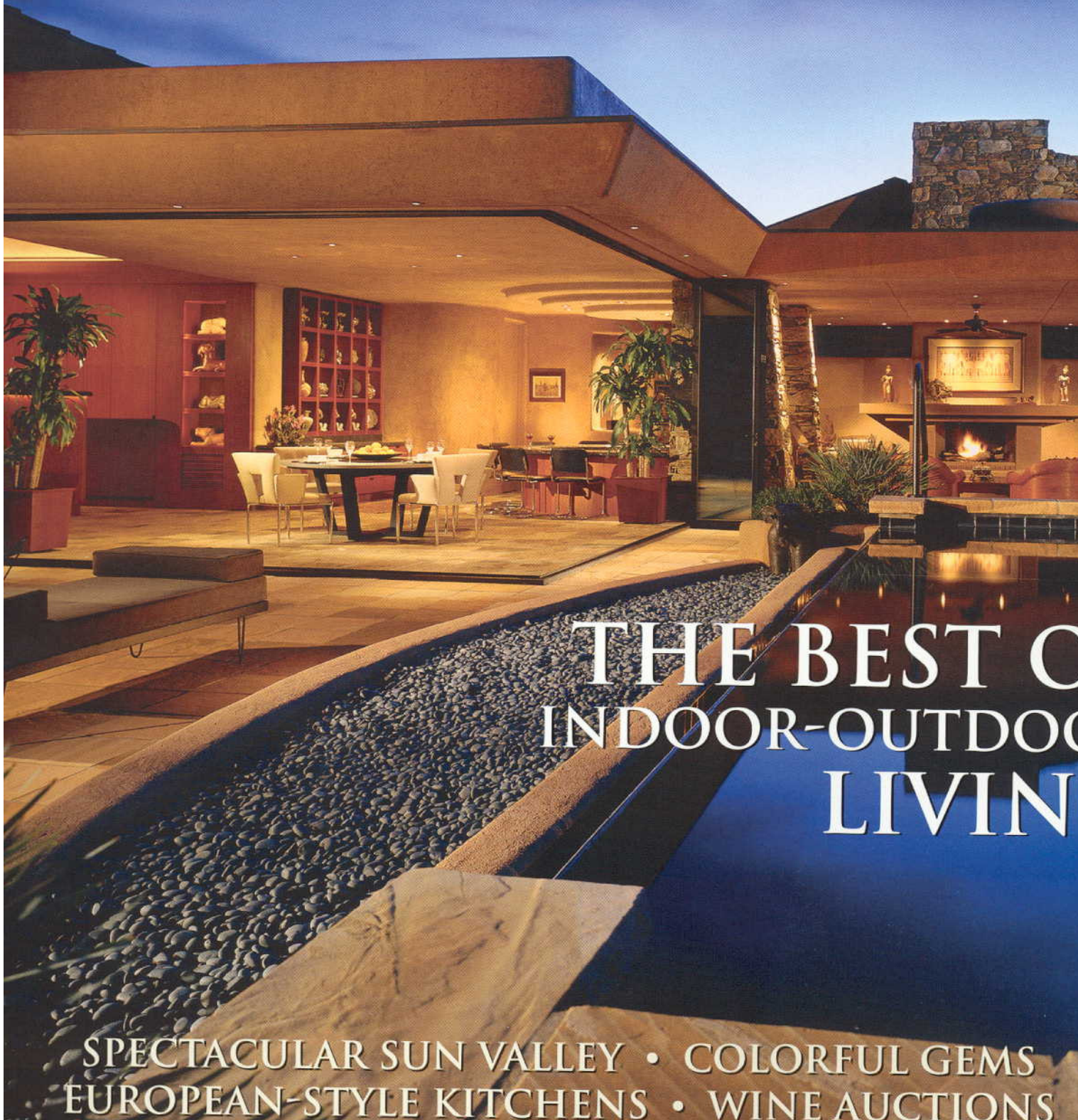


# LUXURY LIVING



THE BEST OF  
INDOOR-OUTDOOR  
LIVING

SPECTACULAR SUN VALLEY • COLORFUL GEMS  
EUROPEAN-STYLE KITCHENS • WINE AUCTIONS



# YOUR OWN PRIVATE ISLAND

Spring Island, South Carolina, offers residents a beautiful, peaceful retreat



BY DEENA C. BOUKNIGHT

Spring Island, once a well-kept secret, has been quietly leaking out among the global elite for 10 years. Over a casual discussion during a round of golf, one might ask where another resides. "Spring Island," he says. "Be my guest, see it for yourself." Once there, the sea island—situated between Beaufort and Hilton Head Island, South Carolina—captivates. Soon the guest is inquiring about lot prices and amenities.

That is what happened to Bob and Joan Horning, two of the first residents to inhabit the 3,000-acre private island. Horning was asked to visit the island by a friend who owned a home there. "We spent the day riding horses, enjoying low-country cooking and catching shrimp," Horning recalls. "When we were leaving my wife said, 'I want to live here.' That completely threw me. She always wanted to have a little flat in Manhattan to escape to after retirement. But she said the place reminded her of when she was a kid in Michigan."

Horning loved the idea, and immediately secured a lot. In 1995, he and his wife made the move from their home in Connecticut and have basked in what he describes as "luxury living in not an elegant, glitzy way, but in a peaceful, beautiful way."

Thousands of years ago, Native Americans made their home on this lush tract of land featuring high bluffs surrounded by salt marshes, tidal creeks and wide rivers. The Spanish passed through here, then the French, and finally the Scots, before a plantation home was built in the early 1800s using regional tabby construction of oyster shells, sand and mortar. The structure's remains still stand, a symbol of the island's history and charm.

It was not until the late 1980s, when Jim and Betsy Chaffin visited the island by boat, that the reality of several families sharing this paradise began to take shape. The Chaffins say they were "overwhelmed" by the place, and were determined to spend the rest of their lives here. They joined forces with friends Jim Light and Peter LaMotte, formed Chaffin/Light Associates, and purchased Spring Island in 1990.

A previous developer had obtained permission to build 5,500 units and two golf courses on Spring Island. The Chaffins and their business partners, however, vowed to impact the pristine landscape as little as possible. Thus, it was decided that only 400 sites and one golf course would be developed, while the established Spring Island Trust would conserve and manage 1,200 acres set aside as a nature preserve.



PHOTO BY ROB BROWN, COURTESY SPRING ISLAND

PHOTO BY PHIL LANE

(top) The island green of the par-4 No. 15 at Old Tabby Links.  
(above) The equestrian center includes a 24-stall barn surrounded by 15 grass paddocks. Spring Island residents enjoy 35 miles of riding trails.



PHOTO BY RICHARD LEO-JOHNSON, COURTESY HISTORICAL CONCEPTS

Spring Island's amenities are appealing, including the Arnold Palmer-designed 18-hole Old Tabby Links course. The golf legend describes the No. 17 hole—positioned on a narrow strip between a spring-fed rookery inhabited annually by nesting snowy egrets—as being so challenging that “you better bring your A game.” Plus, there is an equestrian center, first-class tennis courts, a fitness center, pool and dining facilities.

But it is the opportunity to commune with nature that is the biggest draw. Outdoor activities include biking, hiking and horseback riding on more than 30 miles of trails, fishing in 33 fresh- and salt-water ponds, as well as kayaking, croquet or skeet shooting. A focal point is the nature center, staffed by naturalists who host seminars, camps and consult with homeowners on view corridors and attracting birds.

The Spring Island Trust, funded by a percentage of site and home sales, protects habitats for hundreds of species of birds, animals and plants. All of the 200 or so homes on the island are purposely hidden from view down long driveways densely bordered by primordial live oaks, hickories and pines. The ratio of homes to land is one home to more than seven acres, making it the lowest-density planned community on the Eastern seaboard.

The architectural review board is strict, but for good reason. Says Carol Miller, who owns a getaway with her husband John, “They told us that they wanted a ‘nature curtain’ in front of the house, and that once you build, you should allow Mother Nature to grow back to some degree. That is definitely part of the charm of this place for us.”

Whether residents purchase cottage sites from \$250,000, estate lots from \$350,000 or homes in the \$1 million to \$4 million range, they must agree not to introduce foreign flora, and are limited to the number of

This Spring Island home was designed with nature in mind. It features ample outdoor spaces, including an open terrace and a large front porch flanked by screened sitting areas.

trees that can be felled. Most architects design Spring Island homes in harmony with the trees, such as the ancient oaks, heavy with Spanish moss. “These trees are just magnificent,” says Horning.

Many of the homes are modest in size—2,500 to 5,000 square feet—but they often include a cozy guest cottage. This is so no single building overwhelms the landscape. Although varied in styling, homes will incorporate wide and low lines to maximize views of water, golf course or forest. In keeping with the natural surroundings, common building materials include wood, stone, hand-shaped bricks and crushed oyster shells. Large custom windows bring the outdoors and natural light in. “It’s a complementary palette of materials that work with the natural environment,” says architect Grady Lanier Woods, whose design for the Millers is described as a modern-day stylized plantation farmhouse.

To get to the island, one must travel by boat or cross the Callawassie Island causeway and then a bridge to Spring Island. But as remote as the location may seem, it is only minutes from a dockside lunch in the antebellum town of Beaufort or international-quality shopping on Hilton Head Island. The graceful sophistication of Savannah is only 40 minutes away, while resplendent Charleston is about an hour’s drive.

“We have all the culture we need nearby, but no noise,” says Horning. “We come back over that bridge and we’re in our own domain.” ♦

Spring Island, (843) 987-2200, [springisland.com](http://springisland.com)