

The Inspiration

Eighteenth and nineteenth century settlements in the American southern port towns of Savannah, Charleston and New Orleans received French, Spanish and English immigrants from cities across Western Europe. The warm, breezy, humid climate of these port towns was quite different from their northern latitude origins. It became necessary to define a new style of home for these regions borrowed from Mediterranean, West Indian and Caribbean Island settlements where a sophisticated style was evolved to tame southern latitude environmental conditions.

The style of these homes began taking shape in the new urban centers. Those with the means, planned their homes around large, internally facing courtyards. These courtyards provided a layer of security from the busy, dirty, noisy streets and encouraged out of door living during milder seasons. High ceilinged spaces with large windows and "French Doors" opened directly into these courtyards creating a unique indoor / outdoor living experience. The homes were located on properties and oriented to capture the south easterly winds, funnel them through the courtyard and through the home. Natural cross ventilation and solar orientation were important drivers in keeping the home as cool as possible during the long, warm seasons. Western and southern facing windows were kept to a minimum or were shaded by deep overhangs or porches, north and east facing windows provided plenty of interior light. This approach minimized the effects of the sun's summer heat.

The home at 1509 Banks Street was inspired by these homes still found and occupied in Savannah, Charleston and New Orleans. It is an urban property intentionally selected for its north facing street frontage and its nearly square planning area. The "L" shaped plan of the home is reminiscent of those historic homes but is reimaged in an elegant, modern form still with the private courtyard as its center.

Like its inspirations, visitors are introduced into the courtyard before being given access to the home, providing an extra layer of security between the street and the home. The private, enclosed courtyard provides a comfortable resort-like oasis that is the focal point of the home. Southeasterly breezes are captured and directed through the courtyard. Dense plantings, perforated metal gates and 9' high walls provide visual privacy from the street but allow cross ventilation through the courtyard. Low level, low maintenance flowering plants ornament the space. The lap pool acts as a reflecting fountain as well as a place for relaxation or exercise. A seating area defined by a very large fixed in place canopy creates a shaded "room" making even the warmest days suitable for enjoying the courtyard.

Large glass sliding window walls connect both the first level primary living areas and the kitchen directly to the courtyard creating a seamless indoor / outdoor experience. North and east facing full height glass brings the courtyard views and daylight into the home without taking on the sun's heat.

The lessons learned from notable, 19th century southern urban homes has been considered and employed in the design of this 21st century home adding to its pleasure, efficiency, beauty and timelessness.