When Wayne and Helga Lilley married their talents as a home-builder and designer, they gave birth to a beloved Lowcountry home.

Wayne, an inventor and licensed residential builder, and Helga, a designer with a master’s degree in architecture, moved to the Lowcountry in 2007 and decided to build their own home in Oldfield in 2008 after falling in love with the Okatie community.

Before moving to the Lowcountry, they split their time between Massachusetts and the Caribbean for seven years. In the Caribbean island of Nevis, they built a Japanese-style pole house designed by Helga with an unusual construction technique styled especially for the Caribbean.

“Because of this, Wayne decided to hire local workers, train them as his crew and build the home himself,” the couple says.

“The project was challenging in many ways, including the procurement and shipping of materials that were not locally available. But the process gave us a firsthand education in...
building a home and also gave us the confidence to do it again.”

That practice came in handy when the couple decided to build here.

By then Helga was working on her master’s degree in architecture from Savannah College of Art and Design, and felt ready to take on the task of designing a home to fit their needs. They wanted a sustainable, energy-efficient home and she chose structural insulated panels as the building material of the house. After meeting with several builders, the couple decided Wayne should take on the job himself. He acquired his South Carolina Builders License and contracted with another builder who hired subcontractors for help with the building and permitting process.

They began work in January of 2008. After a brief summer break, they finished just before Christmas that year.

Helga focused her design on having bright, cheery areas that takes advantage of natural light and the surrounding views, which include a pond and golf course with the Okatie River in the distance.

“The house is a traditional Lowcountry-style home on the exterior with an open floor plan in the main living areas,” she said. “It was designed to fit our lifestyle while taking advantage of the features offered by its location. The vernacular style of the Lowcountry makes the most of natural heating and cooling, depending on the season. In keeping with that, the deep porches on the east and west sides of the house shelter interior spaces from the low angled rays of the sun during the hottest times of the year. They also provide shaded outdoor living spaces to enjoy cooling breezes from the river…”

The first floor has an open living, dining and kitchen area with several windows and French doors opening onto the porches. The dining area is on the south side of the house and has a bank of windows and enough roof overhang to keep out the hot summer sun while allowing in the warming winter sun. The master suite, which has a bathroom with a tub and a separate shower, and a walk-in closet and laundry area, is on the first floor and faces the river. There is a guest bedroom and two studies on the second floor, which give them a beautiful view while working from home.
In the hallway there is a reading nook with bookshelves and a window seat.

“Space is used very efficiently in our house,” Helga said. “Each room is actually used. We don’t have formal rooms that are only used for formal occasions. There is also no full attic.”

The “story-and-a-half” home helps keep down utility bills. The home even achieved Platinum-level EarthCraft House certification for being a residential green building that addresses the climate conditions of the Southeast by being energy- and resource-efficient. It also won the 2009 myMarving Architect’s Challenge design competition.

The couple loves their home and hopes to stay there for as long as they live, along with their dog, Zeppo – who thinks the porch is the best part of the house.

For more information about Helga’s home designs, visit www.helgalilley.com

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