

# Modern History

Local art enthusiasts Michele and Mike Seekings team up with muralist Karl Beckwith Smith to update a grand 1850s single —written by ELLEN MCGAULEY // photographs by PETER FRANK EDWARDS

Michele and Mike Seekings scoured the Charleston real estate market for three years for the right house. Living in a petite single on Pinckney he'd renovated before the two met, they poked in and out of downtown listings. But nothing was quite right.

Then came something interesting in quiet Harleston Village, a commanding three-bay, side-hall single house—an historic brick number made more striking, perhaps, by its elevated façade and stout Victorian entrance. The Seekings walked in, looked around, and said, “We’ll take it.”

Just like that, more or less. Ask them why—what it was about *this* one, of all the dapper dwellings they’d tried on for size—and you’ll



**KITCHEN GARDEN:** The rear courtyard and newly restored kitchen house of the brick manse

**COOL BREEZE:** The Seekings on the elevated first-floor piazza—with paneled ceiling and six-over-nine windows—of their Harleston Village single house. Painting on the privacy shutters by Karl Beckwith Smith.







**WARM WELCOME:** An iron chandelier by Sean Ahern and a painting by Tim Hussey hang in the double parlor. (top) The checkerboard wall pattern and abstract painting are by Karl Beckwith Smith. The antiqued mirror is by Robert Hines.

likely hear something simple and sure, like, "Well, it just fit."

For his part, Mike—City Council representative for District Eight, the same in which this house sits—credits good proportions for being able to walk into a big house like this (more than 6,000 square feet) without feeling like it

swallows you whole: "This never felt like an oversized house," he says. "It felt like home." Michele saw a residence with rooms that flow well one into the next—the double parlor into the library, the library into the modernized kitchen, kitchen into lounge sitting room, and so forth.

This manse—with its romantic piazzas that sagged like Spanish moss and soaring entryway with double vestibule doors—made sense to them. And so did snagging a house that comes with a long and colorful Charleston history.

Shortly before the Civil War, local merchant Ettzel Adams (for whom the house is named) crafted the three-story residence with a slate-roofed kitchen house in back. It changed hands quickly to a pair of sisters who lived in it through the war, then sold for \$7,500 to a family who retrofitted the dwelling as a tenement. Later, it became a parsonage for the Citadel Square Baptist Church, changed hands a few more times—mainly used as apartments in the middle part of the 20th century—then was eventually

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## GUESTS WELCOME

*The Seekings turn a disconnected, dirt-floor room under their kitchen into modern guest quarters and a chic wine cellar*

**The Problem** The ground-floor room of the kitchen house wasn't connected to the residence. It had dirt floors and, after years of neglect, the walls were falling in.

**The Solution** Dufford Young Architects teamed up with the Seekings to design a reinforced brick block and stucco addition off the rear of the house, containing a stairwell with hand-wrought railings by Sean Ahern.

**The Guest Quarters** Together with Dow Construction, they spent a year taking the ground-floor of the kitchen house back to the original brick walls. They repointed the

brick; preserved the two fireplaces; and added steel reinforcements, beams, and heart pine floors. "A primary part of the restoration of this room was keeping it as original as possible," says Mike.

**The Wine Cellar** Mike noted that the small hyphen space (added well prior) had the natural framework for a wine cellar. They water-proofed the small space and added plumbing, HVAC, and electrical, plus wood and slate surfaces and a contemporary glass door to carve out a wine storage room.



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