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### Portrait HILTON HEAD ISLAND

Bluffton boasts of May River oysters, artsy enclaves and smart growth.

by **Marie McAden**

# Small Town, Big Heart



MARK STAFF PHOTO



Bluffton's funky Historic District includes galleries and shops along Calhoun Street, home to artists such as potter Jacob Preston (center)



The Church of the Cross, built in 1854, survived the burning of Bluffton by Union troops.

MARK STAFF PHOTO

**Q**uirky. Free-spirited. Proudly unconventional. Bluffton is as much a state of mind as a destination.

This historic small town on the banks of the May River is nothing like its upscale island neighbor to the east.

“We’re very casual about things around here,” says Babbie Guscio, who runs an antique accessories shop out of an old country store with wooden floors so worn, visitors have been known to get their heels stuck between the boards.

Down the block and around the corner, in the old Bluffton Tabernacle Church, you’ll find Bluffton’s tallest potter, Jacob Preston, at work in his studio chatting it up with anyone who happens by. If he steps out for lunch, Preston leaves the door unlocked for visitors to browse through his shop. A handwritten sign on the counter that

requests that patrons leave a check in exchange for goods.

“Bluffton is just a great place to live,” says the six-foot five Preston, who describes himself as “a jock who can do art stuff.” “In Bluffton, folks are accepted for who they really are.”

Nowhere is that more apparent than at the town’s annual Christmas Day parade, an anything-goes event featuring crowd favorites such as the power-tool-toting Bluffton Ladies Drill team and the Dancing Bubbas. Even pets are celebrated for their individuality at the annual ugly dog contest held each May during the Bluffton Village Festival.

The town’s live-and-let-live reputation has attracted a mishmash of wayward artists, many of whom have set up shop on Calhoun Street. Among them is Louanne LaRoche, who ran a highly successful art gallery on Hilton Head Island for 15 years.

“The thing I love about this place

is that around every corner there is something that delights the eye,” LaRoche says. “If you really want to experience Bluffton, you have to park your car and walk. And you can’t be in a hurry.”

Visitors should make their first stop at the Heyward House, Bluffton’s Official Welcome Center, to pick up a walking tour map of the National Register Historic District. The simple timber-framed home, constructed circa 1840 near the bluffs overlooking the May River, is one of a few antebellum buildings that escaped the torching by Union troops during the Civil War. Another survivor: the much-photographed Church of the Cross on Calhoun Street.

Within a short walk you’ll find three offbeat eateries popular with the locals: Pepper’s Porch, Sippin’ Cow Café and Squat & Gobble.

Preserving the funky flavor of the one-square-mile section of old

Bluffton has become the town’s second-most important priority, just behind protecting the river, one of the cleanest waterways in the state.

Over the last 10 years, the town has annexed some 38,000 acres to ensure it has a say in the development of what has become one of the fastest-growing regions in South Carolina.

At the center of the boom is Buckwalter Parkway, a bustling corridor of commercial, residential and recreational facilities that will serve as Bluffton’s second town center. This past fall, radiology business management company CareCore National opened a 45,000-square-foot building in the new Technology Park at Buckwalter Place. CareCore will employ 150 people initially and 300 within two years.

As the affable Mayor Hank Johnston likes to tell people, Bluffton’s future is so bright “you need sunglasses.”

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Meet Mallery Rice, a senior at USCB. An Ohio native, Mallery came to visit and fell in love with the Hilton Head area lifestyle. As a senior majoring in Spanish and Business and working part time, she has found that living on campus is the perfect fit for her busy schedule. With an apartment in Palmetto Village, Mallery is a five minute walk from classes and only eight miles from the beach.

Mallery’s parents are happy that she is living on campus because it’s **safe, convenient** and **affordable**. They can relax knowing Mallery is enjoying her Palmetto Village apartment.



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## Changing the Face of Historic Home Design



Oysterman's Cottage in Bluffton

Joe Hall and Rob Hull have enjoyed more than 20 years of success in high-end architecture in the Lowcountry, including the design of multimillion-dollar homes on Hilton Head Island.

Over the past decade, the two architects grew increasingly frustrated with how homes are built because of how time, materials and costs are often wasted. "With traditional construction, half the house (mostly discarded drywall) goes in the Dumpster," says Hull.

A job in 2000 on Daufuskie Island required the architects to ship all building materials by boat and to build the home around a few prominent oak trees. So Hall and Hull turned to modular construction—the process of building a house in a factory and

assembling it on site, usually in one or two days.

In 2001, the partners relocated their office to Bluffton, a fortuitous move. Henry "Hank" Johnston, Bluffton's mayor, was looking for architects who knew something about modular construction so that affordable, historically correct houses could be built on Calhoun Street, in the town's historic district, as alternatives to trailer homes that sprinkled the street. The result: three small cottages (including Oysterman's Cottage, above) that look like renovated older homes but were assembled on site in one day, complete with all modern conveniences inside. The Municipal Association of South Carolina awarded Bluffton a 2003 Achievement Award for its Historic

Small House Program, citing the exemplary partnership of public and private agencies to ensure affordable, historically correct housing.

Since then, as Architectural Building Systems, Hall and Hull have designed more than 50 modular homes in architecturally controlled communities, including Beaufort and Tybee Island, Georgia. Construction in a climate-controlled factory not only lowers home prices substantially, they say, it's also "green" in its efficiencies of time, materials and impact on the environment—no months of trucks driving over the building site, for starters.

"Twenty years from now, people will be wondering why they ever built houses on site," Hull says. —*Lisa Watts*



Take a day trip to explore Daufuskie's history and charm, or indulge in a stay at the island's exclusive resort and spa.

by **Marie McAden**

# Island in Time



No bridge and few cars keep things quiet on Daufuskie. Silver Dew Winery (top right), begun in 1953 by "Papy" Burn, the island's lighthouse keeper, has been revived.

**A**nautical mile from Harbour Town Lighthouse, across the quiet waters of Calibogue Sound, lies Daufuskie Island, a secluded South Carolina sea island clinging to the uncomplicated lifestyle of its native Gullah people.

Accessible only by boat, the island has retained its rural feel, recalling the days when plantations flourished with indigo, rice and cotton. Rustic oyster houses, an old one-room school house and a Baptist church stand as they did a hundred years ago, shaded by magnificent centuries-old "field-

hand trees" that once offered slaves refuge from the hot summer sun.

Sandy roads connect the scattering of homes and businesses tucked among the lush indigenous landscape, marked by few cars and no traffic lights. Most of the island's 400 full-time residents walk or use golf carts to get around. On Daufuskie, locals like to say time stands still.

Or so it is on the western side of the six-mile island.

The other half of Daufuskie—the side overlooking the Atlantic Ocean—has seen the development of the exclusive Daufuskie Island Resort & Breathe Spa and three upscale



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plantation communities including Haig Point, a private community of more than 700 homes, golf course, club house and other recreational facilities.

But even here, life moves at a slower pace. Visitors to the resort spend the day lounging at the pool or on three miles of private beaches. They may choose to play golf on one of two championship golf courses—Bloody Point and Melrose—or indulge in a massage at the full-service spa.

Accommodations include luxurious villas, charming seaside cottages, four- and five-bedroom privately owned oceanfront homes and the 52-room, antebellum-style Inn at Melrose, built on the site of John and Mary Stoddard's grand Melrose Plantation.

If you're not staying at the resort, you can take a ferry to the island and make a day of exploring the Historic District. Calibogue Cruises, operating

from Broad Creek Marina, charges \$20 per person for the 45-minute ride.

Rent a four-man golf cart for \$50 to tool around the island on your own. You'll be given a laminated map with brief descriptions of a dozen historical points of interest, including the Bloody Point Lighthouse, Cooper River Cemetery and Mary Fields Elementary School, where author Pat Conroy taught island children in the 1960s. Conroy chronicled his experiences in the best-selling novel, *The Water Is Wide*.

You'll also get directions to a small artist community here. Be sure to visit Lancy and Emily Burn's Silver Dew Pottery studio. Along with their functional artwork, they display Indian stone tools and ancient pottery shards found on the island over the years. Lancy Burn's history on Daufuskie dates back to his grandfather, who served as lighthouse keeper in the early 1900s and later

owned and operated the Silver Dew Winery, where he made high-octane "sipping wine" from local fruits.

A trip to the island isn't complete without a visit to Marshside Mama's Cafe. Enjoy gumbo and live music at this informal eatery.

History buffs may opt for the two-hour bus tour led by a Daufuskie Island Historical Foundation guide. You'll hear colorful tales of the Gullah people, descendants of freed slaves who farmed the land and lived off crabs and oysters harvested from the sound.

Today, less than 10 native Gullah islanders remain on the island. Among them is Ella Mae Stevens, who's still making Daufuskie "Deviled Crab" using her family's original recipe. Sample Stevens' handiwork at the Old Daufuskie Crab Company at Freeport Marina, then stop by her house on Haig Point Road to give your regards.

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