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Happy Times

ON THE BAY

FAMILY, FRIENDS, AND GUESTS OF ALL AGES ENJOY THIS WATERFRONT POINT CLEAR HOME THAT HONORS THE PAST.

TEXT BY JULIE HALL BOSCHÉ
PHOTOGRAPHY BY SHERWOOD COX



Mobile Bay overflows with memories for Jack and Jamie McAleer, whose waterfront house on Point Clear is, in the most literal sense, a dream come true.

It's an aspiration that developed over a period of decades, rooted in happy times spent on the bay. In fact, Happy Times is the name of the McAleers' spacious, new-but-timeless bayfront home.

It's the culmination of a lifetime's worth of memories for Jack, in particular. The summer Jack was born, his parents bought a vacation bungalow at Mullet Point on the Eastern Shore where their large family could spend summers. The sixth of seven children, Jack remembers the crowded cottage (and even its single bathroom) fondly.

"My parents would move us down from Mobile on Memorial Day and move us back on Labor Day," Jack says. "We'd spend the whole summer skiing, fishing, playing on the beach, and swimming; it was a full summer of fun."

Jack and Jamie passed along the tradition to their own now-grown children, Lauren, Jennifer, and Alex. The family continued to spend long, happy summers in the bungalow of Jack's childhood, thereby ensuring a new generation of water-loving McAleers.

"We used to hop in the boat with our kids and drive slowly along the coast, just looking at all of our favorite homes and dreaming of one day having a house here," Jack says.



JACK AND JAMIE MCALEER OPEN THEIR POINT CLEAR HOME TO FAMILY REUNIONS AND YOUTH MINISTRY RETREATS IN THE SUMMER.



When both sets of double-wide pocket doors are open in the living room, says Jack McAleer, "Your eye is drawn toward the water through the sleeping porch." He adds, "It's a comfortable place to relax anytime of year. We even have one set of the original U.S. Army bunk beds from the cottage I grew up in."



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Despite weathering a few setbacks, they now own a vacation home that's everything they ever wanted. In 2005, after they purchased and started reconstruction on the late-1800s Brock House (the former home of railroad tycoon G. Paul Brock), their efforts were thwarted by Hurricane Katrina. The devastating storm left 3½ feet of water in the house and collapsed the structure's facade.

The McAleers salvaged what they could from the remains of the original house and began construction on a new home, bringing the structure up to the reformed FEMA codes and using as much material as possible from the Brock House.

Salvageable materials included the original pocket doors, heart pine from the substructure that was used

in the new living and kitchen area, and wood that was transformed into doors in the new house.

The efforts of architect Lea Verneuille, a partner with Walcott Adams Verneuille Architects in Fairhope, and general contractors Randy and Eric Crocker from Crocker Custom Home Builders in Daphne, paid off in spades. The result of their work is a beautiful contemporary home that stands as a testament to old Mobile Bay style. The structure's historical feel is due largely to careful design choices that reflect the architectural conventions of the past.

For example, the sleeping porch, with its bunk beds and floor-to-ceiling, water-facing windows recalls a functional feature from the days before air-conditioning.



Lea says, "The panes in the windows are restoration glass that is historic in character due to its wavy appearance. The interior walls are several combinations of lapped and horizontal butt joint wood siding built like they would have been over 100 years ago."

This classic look extends outside, where landscape designer Paul Fontenot, of Fairhope's Garden Design Solutions Inc., created a tropical oasis. "The live oaks and magnolia trees existing on the property were protected during construction and contribute significantly to the historic feel of the property," says Lea.

Jamie and Jack welcome visitors whenever possible. Their son-in-law, Dan, serves as the campus minister of McGill-Toolen, a Catholic high school in Mobile, and

often brings groups over for retreats at the McAleers' home. Both active in youth ministry, the couple has always wanted to open their home to young people. "We have plenty of room, and it's a good place where people can spend time together, growing in faith as well as enjoying the recreation this area has to offer," says Jack.

These days, as the McAleers spend time on the porch, enjoying views of the water and the bustling activity of the boardwalk that stretches in front of their home, they're often asked by passersby about the house's history. Their reply that it's only a few years old is met with surprise. The home stands as a testament to thoughtful construction that honors the aesthetics of a rich Southern past.