



**HUB OF THE HOUSE:** Kelly Spiva (above) enjoys preparing food for family and friends in her gourmet kitchen that overlooks a marble-accented dining nook. **OPPOSITE PAGE:** (From left) The painted tin ceiling and ornate chandelier are dining room highlights. A two-story screened-in porch overlooks Hoover Creek and the Forest River. Expansive wraparound porches feature no-maintenance decking and stainless-steel handrails.



# PARADISE ISLAND



BY **POLLY POWERS STRAMM**  
PHOTOGRAPHY BY **KELLI BAXENDALE**

WHEN HOWARD SPIVA talks about the magnificent waterfront home that he shares with wife, Kelly, he doesn't refer to it as a castle. Instead, he describes it as a palace because, as he sees it, his wife is a queen.

Palatial is definitely the appropriate adjective to describe the 9,000-square-foot home, complete with drop-dead gorgeous marsh views, swimming pool, hot tub, home theater, dock house with fireplace and most every amenity imaginable. Additionally, the seven-acre property is on its own island, a pristine tract facing Hoover Creek and the Forest River.

Spiva, who is an attorney and a real estate broker, attempted to buy the piece of paradise for more than a decade and continued to keep his eye on it a couple of years ago when a house started going up on the property. Finally, when taxes climbed sky high, the previous owner approached him and said, "I built your house, now come and get it." When he toured the house, Howard jokingly "made the mistake" of bringing along Kelly, who took a quick glimpse of the fabulous kitchen before making the purchase a done deal.

**NOW SHOWING:** Eleven reclining seats, a 107-inch movie screen and THX Sound System provide an amazing, in-home movie-viewing experience.



Both Howard and Kelly fell in love with the compound they named “Paradise Island.” They even purchased several pieces of furniture from the former owner, who built the home with all the bells and whistles necessary to withstand hurricanes and to be practically maintenance-free and energy-efficient.

“He cut no corners,” said Howard, listing such other extras as 130 rock-solid pilings, super sturdy insulation, a convenient built-in vacuum system, deluxe elevator and custom lighting, including such bonuses as automatic illumination above the thermostat and exterior lighting.

Despite owning a luxurious home, Howard and Kelly insist that they are everyday, down-to-earth people. “I know what it’s like to split a can of tuna with my dog,” Howard said. The secret of his success, he added, is working hard and being surrounded by good, reliable employees, many of whom are family members.

“It’s a family business, and we’re all a team. In fact, we call it a team,” Howard said of the folks who work with him at his law and real estate offices located

nearby in the former O.C. Welch Collection complex on Abercorn Street Extension.

Just minutes away from Howard’s office is the home that visitors enter through a secured gate. While approaching the house, they travel along a driveway and pass a caged blue and gold macaw named Rocky. The unique front door is glass from top to bottom with a metallic egret as a handle. The ground floor has five garages (one doubles as an exercise room), storage aplenty — including a walk-in cedar closet — and a spacious Mardi Gras room.

For years, the Spivas have been traveling to New Orleans during Mardi Gras for meetings of the Southern Trial Lawyers Association, of which Howard is immediate past president. The room pays homage to “fun stuff,” such as baskets of colorful Mardi Gras beads, masks, photographs of the couple in costume and other memorabilia. Although the antique pool table is the focal point of the room, there’s also a pinball machine, a slot machine and a television. (Only the home’s dining room and great room are without TVs.) The Mardi Gras room



**OPPOSITE PAGE:** The spacious master suite (top) is a quiet escape for viewing a morning sunrise or an evening sunset. Just steps from their master bedroom, the Spivas recently constructed a free-form, in-ground pool (bottom left). The garden tub (bottom right) is framed by etched glass reminiscent of the nearby marsh wildlife.





**GREAT ROOM GATHERING:** The third-floor balcony overlooks the main room of the house where family and friends enjoy early-evening refreshments.

**ABOVE:** Tucked away behind the dining room is an elegant guest bath.

also has a shelf full of trophies that Howard collected for expertise in karate and boxing.

The full bath is decorated in leather and wood, and it includes a framed photograph of Howard's private airplane.

The egret theme is repeated in etched glass panels going up the stairway to the second floor, where an egret water feature offers guests a soothing welcome.

The open floor plan is emphasized in the spectacular great room, where ceilings are 30 feet high with more than a half-dozen tropical-looking suspended ceiling fans. Huge windows (sans treatments) provide a breathtaking view of the marsh, tidal creeks and river beyond.

Sometimes Howard says he looks around and has to pinch himself, but he knows "we've worked hard for what we've got."

The state-of-the-art kitchen off the great room, the nearby dining room, a screened porch and balconies make the home ideal for entertaining.

"We've had fund-raisers and engagement parties where people spill out onto the decks and porches," Howard said. A

grandchild's birthday party staged in the home theater was a roaring success, Kelly said.

Parking is not a problem because there is an abundance of room around the house for vehicles to get in and out. However, if the crowd is such that all places are taken, cars are parked on Apache Avenue, and a golf cart is used to transport guests to and from the street.

The great room is furnished with a couple of groupings of leather sofas and chairs that provide the room with a comfortable, homey feel. A dramatic vertical painting of palm fronds and trees over the fireplace was created by a student from the Savannah College of Art and Design who also decorated the elevator ceiling. Another eye-catcher is an easel holding a framed black-and-white photograph of granddaughter Aislinn dancing at a family wedding.

The dining room has an imposing chandelier and a terra-cotta-colored tin ceiling that camouflages stereo speakers, which are wired into every room of the house. The former owner's furniture fit

the room so well that the Spivas decided to keep it.

Beyond the dining room is a guest bath and bedroom decorated with furniture made of a light turquoise-colored glass that also came from the former owner. Back in the hall, visitors can't help but notice a shadowbox containing a Coca-Cola work shirt and other items. The shirt belonged to Howard's father, who was murdered when Howard was 6, a tragic event that may have led him to become an advocate for children. (He started working at age 11, pumping gas and helping his mother in a laundromat. He's also certified in auto mechanics and jewelry repair.)

Every outside door in the house leads to a porch. One in the great room empties onto a screened porch where there are stainless steel handrails, no-maintenance decking and cement board siding.

"This house is zero-maintenance," Howard reiterated. "See those rocks (down below)? That's our grass. All we need is a blower and a pressure washer."

Back through the great room and into the kitchen and adjoining built-in dining nook, Kelly marvels at all the equipment with which she has to prepare meals. "When I'm cooking, everybody huddles in here," she said. "I just love it."

Among other features, the kitchen is equipped with a built-in pasta maker, a sub-zero refrigerator and freezer, refrigerated drawers, a commercial-sized stove, two convection ovens, gas grill top, two dishwashers, two sinks and loads of custom cabinets.

Through the kitchen is a butler's pantry with stainless steel shelving and pocket doors to the laundry room. A door leads to a balcony where barbecue grills stand ready to be used.

A nearby hall includes a collection of local artwork, a stairway leading to the third floor and Kelly's assortment of houseplants. Past the grandfather clock is the entrance to the unbelievable 3,000-square-foot master suite, where windows on either side afford the couple views of both the sunrise and sunset.

A computer station and desk area in the front of the room belongs to Kelly. Across from that is the large master bath with his-and-her walk-in closets, built-in drawers and shelves, two vessel sinks, a garden tub, a shower and a flat-screen TV situated near the ceiling. Telephone stations are in every bathroom.



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## home ■ scape

Back out into the room is a wet bar area covered with a beautiful granite countertop. The bedroom has a built-in stereo system, a plasma TV and a sitting area under a double pan ceiling lined with mood lighting. A screened porch off the bedroom overlooks a pool and hot tub that the Spivas had put in.

Howard often likes to take guests up to the third floor in the elevator, which cost more than his first house, he said. When the elevator doors open, the marsh view through the great room windows is stunningly up close and personal. The balcony-type hall above the great room leads to a bedroom that has been converted to an office for Howard at one end of the house and a theater at the opposite end.

His office, with adjoining bathroom, is tastefully decorated in a red, white and blue nautical/lighthouse theme.

What may be the most impressive room in the house is the movie theater, just down the hall. First to catch the eye are framed movie posters and theme carpeting decorated with popcorn boxes, ticket stubs and movie reels. Next is the concession stand with theater-sized boxes of Junior Mints, Dots and dozens of other brands of candy. Tubs of popcorn are available from a counter equipped with soda fountain-type stools.

As if there might be a line of moviegoers in the house, the theater "lobby" even has a couple of waist-high metal poles attached to each other with velvet ropes. Through the thick doors is a dead ringer for a theater, minus sticky floors. Eleven red leather La-Z-Boy recliners on lighted, tiered levels are situated in front of a 107-inch movie screen. Velvet curtains cover both the screen as well as glass bricks on the walls.

Howard and Kelly are fully aware of how fortunate they are to have such an exceptional home. In fact, Howard gladly shares a few of the secrets of his success with the public every Saturday when he hosts a talk radio show called "Never Settle For Less" from 10 a.m. until noon on WTKS, 630 AM. He often gives pointers on how to be healthier, wealthier and wiser.

"We know how lucky we are," Howard said, looking around his incredible home. "We used to do a lot of traveling, but we're living in the Hyatt now." ■

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