

Road Trip in Search of Springtime Flowers

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It is possible to develop a community and save the natural beauty around it. Just look at Spring Island, South Carolina.



Neighbors with Nature

BY ROBERT MARTIN / PHOTOGRAPHY VAN CHAPLIN

Dappled light sneaks through gossamer strands of Spanish moss, which cloak the gnarled branches of huddled ancient oaks. As tidewaters nourish waves of golden marsh grass, tiny crabs scamper to and fro. If you're under the impression that these images are from some far-flung Eden that man has yet to discover, think again. These natural wonders are all daily events savored by homeowners on Spring Island, South Carolina.



Residents soak in the surrounding beauty by taking advantage of the island's 35 miles of trails and paths. While homeowners have flexibility in landscaping the area immediately adjacent to their homes, they are required to maintain natural vegetation on their lots to screen houses from view and to provide coverage for wildlife.

Lasting Beauty

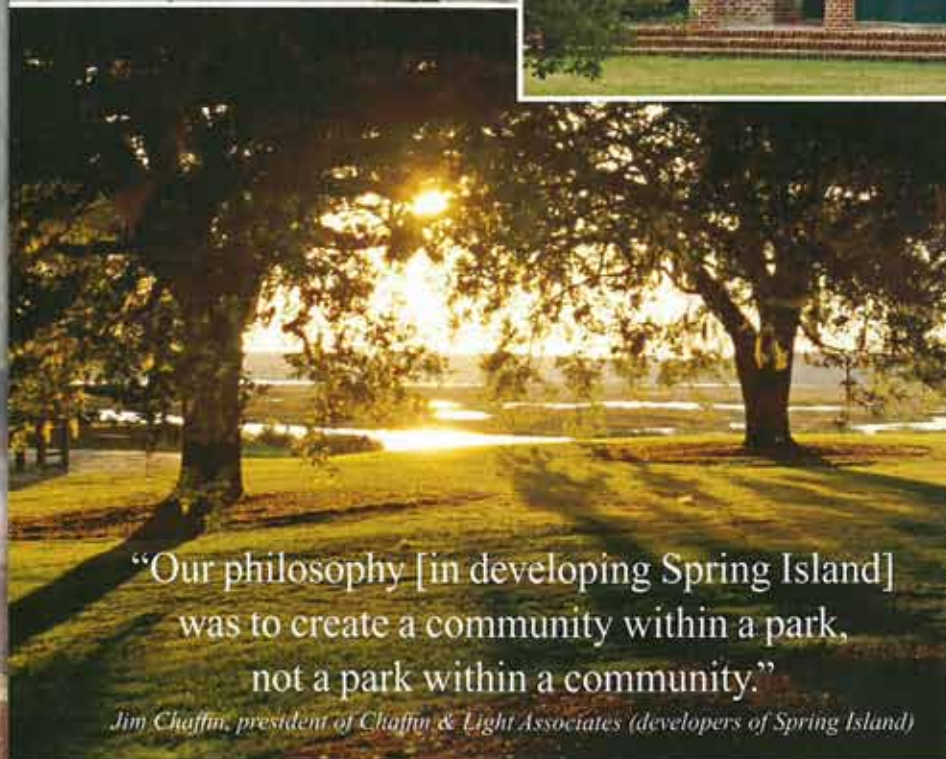
Quietly tucked midway between Hilton Head Island and the historic town of Beaufort, Spring Island allows residents to slow down and soak up all of its postcard-worthy scenery. Connected to civilization by a single bridge, the island is worlds away from big-city hustle. Here, life is conducted not by the clock, but by an impromptu horseback ride or a picnic in a pavilion overlooking the marshes.

The island's jungle-like thickets and open meadows are pristinely maintained; nearly half of the area's 3,000 acres have been set aside as a permanent nature preserve. "After searching all along the Gulf and East Coasts, my husband, Jim, and I knew immediately that Spring Island was *the* place upon seeing it for the first time," says local resident Sharon Edwards. "It's so beautiful and unique."

Saved From the Predictable

At one time, a jam-packed master plan of 5,500 homes and two golf courses were slated to overtake this marshy oasis. Luckily, in 1991, the development firm of Chaffin & Light Associates stepped in and immediately reduced the scope and impact of proposed construction. Headed by Jim Chaffin, this firm understood the island's unique opportunities. "Our philosophy was to create a community within a park, not a park within a community," says Jim. "We also established the Spring Island Trust for conserving and maintaining the preserve."

Families who call Spring Island their home aren't just treated to the sights and sounds of the marshlands. Along with tennis, golf, fishing, and boating, an established artist-in-residence program keeps them entertained.



“Our philosophy [in developing Spring Island] was to create a community within a park, not a park within a community.”

Jim Chaffin, president of Chaffin & Light Associates (developers of Spring Island)



Award-winning Homes

Apart from the island's abundant wildlife, its well-crafted homes have consistently garnered awards in our annual Southern Home Awards program. One reason for this: distinct architectural guidelines that encourage dwellings to complement—not compete with—their surroundings. Spring Island's residential and community facilities are built with natural and durable materials. Many houses boast ample porches and broad roof overhangs for shade and shedding rainwater. “The great thing about designing for Spring Island is that there is no predefined norm,” says design principal Jim Strickland, whose firm, Historical Concepts, has created several projects here. “The emphasis is on nature—the views, the orientation, the surroundings.”

Picturesque scenery and beautiful homes aside, it's the residents who give a place its sense of welcome. “We have a special community here, and the people are close,” says Sharon. “It's a perfect spot to share with family and friends; many of them consider it Camp Spring Island.”

A COMMITMENT WORTH PRESERVING

Because conservation is an ongoing endeavor, the Spring Island Trust enables homeowners to have a direct, hands-on involvement. Headquartered on the island, the trust employs full-time naturalists who educate residents by leading tours, sponsoring lectures, and conducting various other workshops.

With a preserve consisting of live oak forests, marshlands, ponds, and interweaving habitats for a variety of animals, there's a lot to keep track of here. “Spring Island residents have the benefit of living in harmony with beautiful surroundings,” stresses developer Jim Chaffin. “And they have the satisfying fulfillment of assuming the ongoing stewardship of that natural environment.” As an example, the island's new homeowners are required to attend three days of seminars led by the trust before breaking ground. Also, a transfer fee is assessed on every property sale for supporting the trust.