

# FROM THE PORCH

SPECIAL  
SERIES

*of John & Lisa Harrison*



## Situated on the banks

of a rare coastal dune lake surrounded by towering pines live John and Lisa Harrison, avid outdoor enthusiasts and empty nesters, who decided a few years ago to start the next chapter of their lives in the private community of The Retreat, a place they happily now call home.

And what a home it is.

Mixing old world architecture with a little modern flair, this secluded lakefront property designed by renowned architect Jeff Dungan maximizes every advantage this one-of-a-kind lot provides.

“It’s like living on vacation,” says Lisa. John agrees. “We have always loved the coastal dune lakes, and being tucked away just off the gulf is great. We can always paddle on the lake, yet not always on the gulf, which can flare up. The lake never gets angry.”



the other in Washington, D.C, and like so many other empty nesters, the couple wanted their future home to be a place where new traditions and memories could be made.

Searching for that perfect site, one that would combine their passion for the outdoors with their active lifestyle, yet offered privacy, took some time. “We looked everywhere,” Lisa admits.

While John and Lisa considered other areas to build, like WaterSound Beach and Little Redfish, they discovered the ideal waterfront lot in the gated community of The Retreat, well known for its peaceful, scenic environment away from the hustle and bustle along 30A.

“Driving into The Retreat, especially at night with the gor-

-geous lighting, is just beautiful, and the amenities are wonderful. Going down the private road sets the tone for the whole community. It just felt right.” says Lisa.

John adds, “We liked the fact we have over half a mile of private beach dedicated to The Retreat, which is very open with hardly anybody on it. Also, this is the only neighborhood that has a gulf-front pool and club. It’s a very pristine coastal setting.”

After finding the perfect lakefront lot it was time to select the architect. Reviewing The Retreat’s list of approved architects, John and Lisa discovered Jeff Dungan, an award-winning architect from Birmingham, Alabama. Long recognized for his clean and modern approach, and creating homes that are light and bright inside, his style was a clear departure from their 1905 farmhouse back in Fairhope.

The Harrison’s attraction to South Walton began over 25 years ago when John managed the real estate department for AmSouth Bank in Pensacola. He oversaw many of the projects developed along the Gulf Coast and immediately understood its appeal, prime location, and potential. Later, in 2000 when he and a partner started their own development firm, they built ten gulf-front condominium projects primarily in Navarre, Ft. Walton Beach, and Destin.

“We would always keep one condo for personal use, and I would initially serve as the association president which helped me anticipate potential problems and correct them before they became a real issue,” John says. While vacationing here as a family, they loved watching their daughters playing in the outflows of the coastal dune lakes and they were enthusiastic about the overall lifestyle that perfectly matched their own.

With this in mind, building a home on 30A became a priority. But where? Moving here from their renovated turn of the century farmhouse on the water in Fairhope, Alabama—a charming city along the Eastern Shore of Mobile Bay—the Harrisons knew they wanted to stay on the water.

“We could have remained in a condo, but we wanted a traditional house,” says John. “We have always really loved the dune lakes. They are so unique to this area as only a few other places in the world have them. I have developed a lot on the gulf-front, but we were looking for a place that was more secluded.”

“It was also important that we have a place where our daughters would want to come and visit us,” says Lisa. “Especially when they get married and have families of their own.” One daughter now lives in Austin and



“He really captured where we are in our lives right now,” says John. “We realized we had too much stuff, and we wanted a more simple, paired down lifestyle, which he was able to create.”

Dungan immediately knew how to maximize the lot’s benefits in ways John and Lisa never considered and angled the residence to capture views from almost every room. The end result is a Bermuda-influenced contemporary with minimalist style, spacious interiors, classic finishes, modern comforts, and a relaxed outdoor living space. While the overall building experience was smooth, one major change the Harrisons made during framing was to move the master bedroom which was originally set on the third floor. John and Lisa realized they would likely spend most of their time on the second floor of their home, which includes the kitchen and living area. They ended up creating a master suite over the garage where they now wake up to gorgeous views.

Another highlight of partnering with Jeff Dungan is his collaborations with highly sought interior designers. This was how John and Lisa met Betsy Brown, regarded as one of the top designers in the industry. The goal, Lisa says, was to create a comfortable home, while combining the couple’s different styles and tastes.

“John is pretty traditional and conservative. I’m hippyish, so we do clash on design. Betsy was our mediator so to speak,” Lisa says. “So now we have a home that is a good combination of both of us. You can walk around and see where I have had more influence, and where he has, but overall it works.”

Today, the Harrisons are delighted with the finished project. Their open and airy lake home offers free flowing interiors including a wide open chef’s kitchen, dining and living space that captures the stunning views of the lake and soaring pine trees.

“Modern classic can often be sterile, but not this home. It’s more comfortable than I thought it would be,” says



Lisa. When their daughters visit with friends in tow, the house takes on a new personality. “No matter how many kids come down everybody can hang out or go off and do their own thing. It’s a very warm house and it is exactly what we hoped it would be.”

Yet more than a domestic haven, staying inside is not something the Harrisons would do when describing their perfect day. Just recently they ran the Seaside School Half Marathon which they both agreed was extremely well done. Lisa enjoys the yoga studios she has been to, and also likes to take in a spin class at Balance. John and Lisa admit that being outdoors, whether bicycling, paddleboarding, or swimming is a must. “We are very active,” says John who has competed in well over 100 triathlons. “And that’s why we love it here. It’s the best place to be outside, with a wonderful year round climate that allows us to do what we enjoy.”

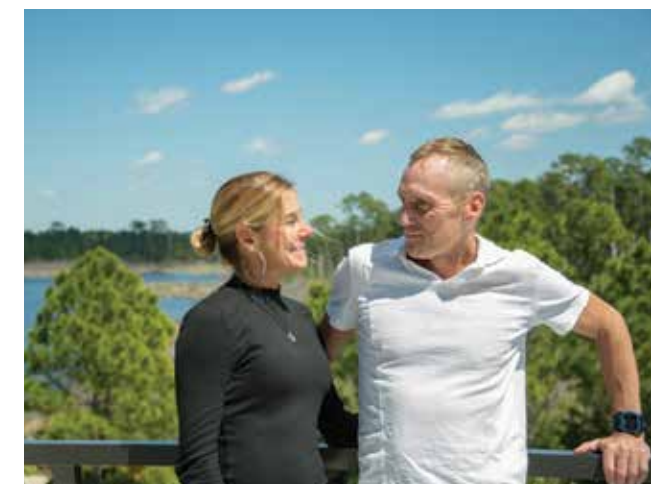
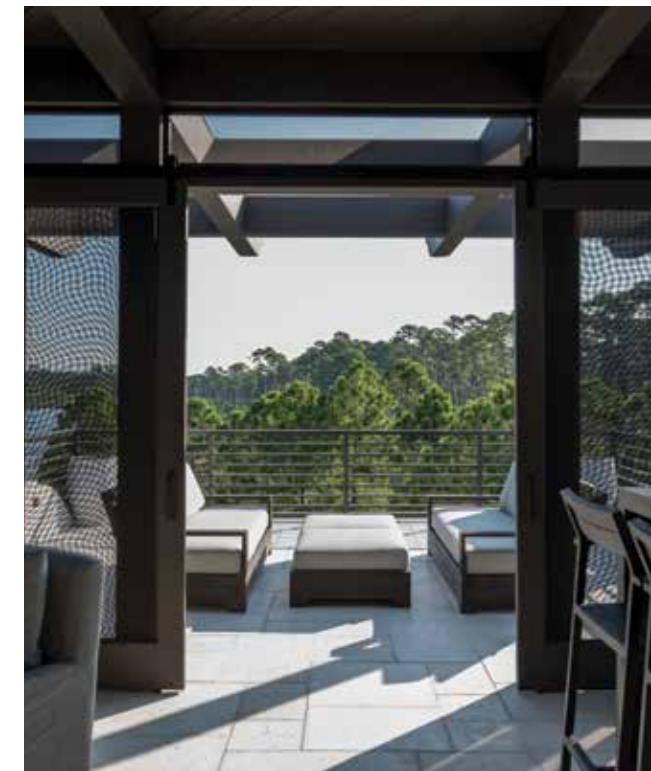
As for the perfect day?

“We’ve had plenty of those,” Lisa says.

“More than likely we would go paddleboarding after waking up, go for a long swim in the Gulf, then take a run on the beach,” John adds. “After a quick meal at home, I imagine we would hop back on the paddleboards to the beach once again.”

“We would enjoy a drink on the porch, then go out to dinner to one of the restaurants we have found and enjoy,” says Lisa. Maybe Wine Bar in WaterColor, which is one of our favorite spots to end the day.”

“We look at these views and know how grateful we are.” ■



*“From the Porch” highlights the design and building journeys of local homeowners. If you know of a story we should feature in an upcoming issue of Niche, please reach out to [marketing@scenicsir.com](mailto:marketing@scenicsir.com) and share it with us. While the Harrison’s home is not for sale, we have many incredible properties available. Our talented team of experts can assist you every step of the way as you embark on the next chapter of your life.*