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CONSERVATION
ISSUE

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HAMPTON ISLAND PRESERVE

BY SCOTT KAUFFMAN/PHOTOS BY KARIM SHAMSI-BAHSA

Southern coastal living should conjure thoughts of hammocks slowly swaying under live oaks draped with Spanish moss, the scent of the sea breeze permeating every fiber, and shrimp boils bringing together the culture of the Low Country and laughter-filled afternoons with family and friends. For most of the South's bustling coastline though—destinations such as Hilton Head, Myrtle Beach, the Outer Banks, and just about anywhere in Florida—you get crowded beaches with condominiums and tourists instead.

Yet along Georgia's 100-mile shoreline, which includes 14 main barrier islands, you'll find a starkly different pace and place. Unlike the majority of America's coastal points, where development is consuming beaches and barrier islands, many of Georgia's major islands—from Tybee Island in the far north to Cumberland Island in the far south—still retain much of their native wilderness.

In all, approximately two-thirds of Georgia's 17 total barrier islands remain preserved in relative anonymity as state and national parks, wildlife refuges, research reserves, or heritage preserves—making it one of the largest undeveloped coastlines on the Eastern seaboard. Actually the public owns 10 of the islands, and the 4 most famous—Tybee, St. Simons, Sea, and Jekyll Islands—are the only developed ones connected to the mainland by causeways. The remaining mostly untouched islands provide some



700,000 acres of serene, picturesque, wild and natural coastal marshlands.

The main stimulus behind this rare richness of natural resources is Georgia's Coastal Marshlands Protection Act. The Georgia Department of Natural Resources reports that this forward-thinking legislation, which was signed into law by Governor Lester Maddox in 1970 and amended in 1992, protects coastal marshlands as a "vital natural resource system" and regulates development of any kind in the state's vast, fragile estuary and salt marsh system. The law prohibits any person from removing, filling, dredging, draining, or otherwise altering any marshland in Georgia without first obtaining a permit from the newly created Coastal Marshlands Protection Agency.

Perhaps the most influential person behind Georgia's eco-consciousness is the late Eugene Odom, Ph.D., a noted University of Georgia instructor from 1940 until his retirement in 1984 and author of the pioneering book *Fundamentals of Ecology*. Often described as the "father of modern ecology," Odom helped draft the Marshlands Protection Act, notes Frank McIntosh, a conservation planner with the Georgia Land Trust's coastal office in Savannah.

"If you take a ride through South Carolina's intracoastal waterway and then ride Georgia's intracoastal and look at the marshscape, it's quite distinguishable," McIntosh points out. "There's a great shot at


night when you're flying off the [Southeast] coast. Once you get to Georgia it's like one big dark patch."

As dark as this coastline may appear at night, Georgia is definitely not in the dark when it comes to conservation and preservation. One person certainly enlightened about the environment is Wade Shealy Jr., who developed Hampton Island Preserve, a 4,000-acre private retreat about 35 minutes south of Savannah in the remote town of Riceboro west of Ossabaw Island.

AS MUCH AS ANY DEVELOPMENT IN Georgia, Hampton Island Preserve personifies the spirit of Odom and so many others strongly committed to the preservation of the state's precious coastal areas. The pristine salt marsh topography of this private inland island still imparts its pre-Civil War roots—highlighted by a blend of maritime forest, marsh and pasture, lakes and tidal creeks, and winding limestone roadways surrounded by 12-plus linear miles of waterfront property. Take a trip to Hampton Island, which is connected by one lone bridge to the mainland, and you will see that the so-called "steward" and "conservator" members of this low-density luxury development "get it."

What they "get" is that this rare property—Georgia's first heritage preserve now under management by the Georgia Department of Natural Resources, and St. Catherines Island, a registered National Historic Landmark privately owned by the St. Catherines Island Foundation—must be celebrated and preserved by its exclusive members for generations to come. And there is no compromising that philosophy, which explains why Shealy and his partners are developing just 20 percent of the island and offering only 393 memberships and 163 homesites ranging in size from





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— Wade Shealy Jr.



Want to see the secret seashore?
Take a seaplane from
Hampton Island Preserve.

Millions who regularly travel I-95 through the pinelands of Georgia's Coastal Plain probably have no idea that just 10 miles to the east lie some of the world's most pristine barrier islands. Getting to them though is another story. That's because you can reach only 4 of Georgia's 17 barrier islands—Tybee, St. Simons, Sea, and Jekyll Islands—by road from the mainland.

All it takes though is a hop, skip, and jump in a seaplane from Hampton Island Preserve, south of Savannah just off I-95 in the town of Riceboro, to tour Georgia's 700,000 acres of picturesque coastal marshlands. The club's two seaplanes have exclusive access to a unique 2,300-foot-long illuminated waterway. "With our two seaplanes you can go deep-sea fishing 80 miles out in 30 minutes," notes Hampton Island visionary and managing member Wade Shealy Jr. "That would take two and a half to three hours by boat." Instead Hampton Island members simply sit back with a cup of coffee and *The Wall Street Journal*, and within minutes they're deep-sea fishing.

Licensed pilot and Hampton Island member Rob Mondavi has had several enjoyable experiences flying the club's seaplanes. "What I really like is the romance and sense of being on water as you enter the airport and the smoothness and how quiet it is on the water," he explains. "There's a slight hiss when you have the friction of the plane and water, [but] I've never experienced a smoother landing and takeoff. To fly the marsh at such close and intimate altitudes and sit anywhere you want—that entire combination is like an era gone by. It's not like your local FBO and these G-4s."

1 to 100 acres with 230 additional memberships available to non-property owners.

"From the moment I saw Hampton Island I knew I had to protect this magnificent piece of history, this sanctuary, from typical development," says Shealy, who discovered the property several years ago while scouting land for his former employer, Intrawest. "Hampton Island is a collection of private coastal Georgia islands dedicated to the preservation of the environment and reserved for a limited number of individuals who are dedicated to the life, land, and history of Hampton Island Preserve."

One of the island's homeowners sold on that image is actor Ben Affleck. He owns an 83-acre property comprising three homes, including "The Big House," a graceful 12,000-square-foot home that captures the splendor of Southern plantation life while preserving the natural integrity of the surrounding landscape.

Rob Mondavi, grandson of the famed Napa Valley winemaker Robert Mondavi, and his wife, Lydia, have also staked a claim in Hampton Island Preserve. Shealy and his partners brought in Lydia, a well-known spa consultant, to organize and design Hampton Island's collection of spas, and Mondavi, a top executive with Napa, California-based Folio Fine Wine Partners, is designing an exclusive wine cellar and program tailored to Hampton Island's global membership. Rob, who is an avid pilot, recalls that he and Lydia "were hooked" and became members themselves after visiting the island early on and "discovering" Shealy and partner Bill Cole's philosophy on the project. "We're looking to acquire a parcel in the near future to give us some roots," Rob adds.

So how does a Northern Californian get hooked on coastal Georgia? After living in

Atlanta for four years, Rob says it wasn't hard for him and Lydia to become smitten with Hampton Island's special Southern hospitality. "When we lived in Atlanta, we really enjoyed the South," he explains. "Whether it's incredible quail hunting or just the lifestyle in general, the relaxing nature of being in the Low-Country areas is unlike anything else. Then, combined with incredible golf, the other amenities, and all the intriguing people, Hampton Island really starts to get exciting. There's a real sense of community, and everyone invited has been great and contributes on a social and educational level. It's almost a Bohemian type of community, if Bohemian is the right word. Everyone is enjoying and learning."

WHILE DECIDEDLY UNDERDEVELOPED WITH nearly 80 percent of its acreage being set aside as conservation easements, Hampton Island Preserve certainly doesn't lack in luxurious amenities and refined services. For example, homeowners have access to horses, hunting, and deep-sea fishing courtesy of the club's two private seaplanes. When construction is complete next year, they'll also be able to play a round of golf on the Davis Love III-designed course, which sits on 200-year-old rice fields, followed up with a nice drink and cigar at the eight-bedroom Hampton House that doubles as the community clubhouse. Or they can lavish themselves with unique massages at the Treehouse Spa, which overlooks the marsh, or Farm House Spa, which overlooks the club's Barn and Harvest Lake Farm on a bucolic 17-acre island. Then, for good measure, members can enjoy a gourmet meal with fresh herbs, spices, and vegetables picked from the Preserve's 7-acre organic garden next to the barn and have a special bottle of wine from the 5,000-square-foot wine cellar that features oak flooring made in France from wood originally used for wine barrels and still stained with cabernet and merlot.

But don't let all these finer touches of life fool you. The fundamental nature of Hampton Island is still, well, its nature. In fact, Shealy, a Georgia native, emphasizes that he spent his first 12 months on Hampton Island "allowing the land to help define and master plan the development." His goal was to simply create a minimal-impact development that appeared as if it always belonged to the land and allowed people to be both entertained and educated. "We're dedicated to providing a private retreat that blends the luxury of unparalleled service and amenities for conservation-minded members," explains Shealy, who serves as a member of the Governor's Land Conservation Council and several other organizations (continued on page 122)



MIND, BODY, AND SPIRITS: (Pictured left) Lydia and Rob Mondavi have been working with conservation visionary Wade Shealy to offer organic spas and a custom-designed wine cellar, two of the many incredible amenities available for Hampton Island Preserve's residents and guests; (this page) boating, kayaking, fishing, equestrian sports, and a Davis Love III-designed golf course on the way are only a few of the activities members will be able to participate in while on the island.



Secret Seacoast

(Continued from page 81)

committed to the notion of sustainable communities. "At the same time we're enabling members and their families to reconnect and create memories for a lifetime."

DARON JOFFE, OR "FARMER D" as the Hampton Island members and staffers call him, plays a key role in fulfilling Shealy's vision. This longtime "bio-dynamic" farmer and environmental educator oversees Harvest Lake Farm, a Community Supported Agriculture farm that features a massive two-story barn built with reclaimed rustic wood and a brick-laden courtyard with rows of "100 percent" organically grown vegetables along with culinary and medicinal herbs and spices.

Hampton Island's gourmet chef Matthew Roher gets all of his fresh produce, herbs, and flowers from the farm, and members and guests retreat there for education, recreation, and therapy. Shealy and Joffe emphasize that Harvest Lake Farm is more than just a place to grow crops and raise animals. The very essence of the farm is one of "interaction and education," where children can learn how to milk cows or get cheese from goats and

members and guests can experience a Farm House Spa treatment like none other.


The relaxing treatments available at the Farm House Spa, which was designed by Lydia Mondavi, use indigenous herbs and botanicals including lemon thyme, rosemary, mint, and verbena grown by Farmer D. Natural mud from the surrounding environment is also incorporated in some treatments. Imagine wandering through the spa garden with a harvesting basket on your way to the treatment room—where handpicked ingredients will be custom blended by mortar and pestle. It puts new meaning into "farmer's market."

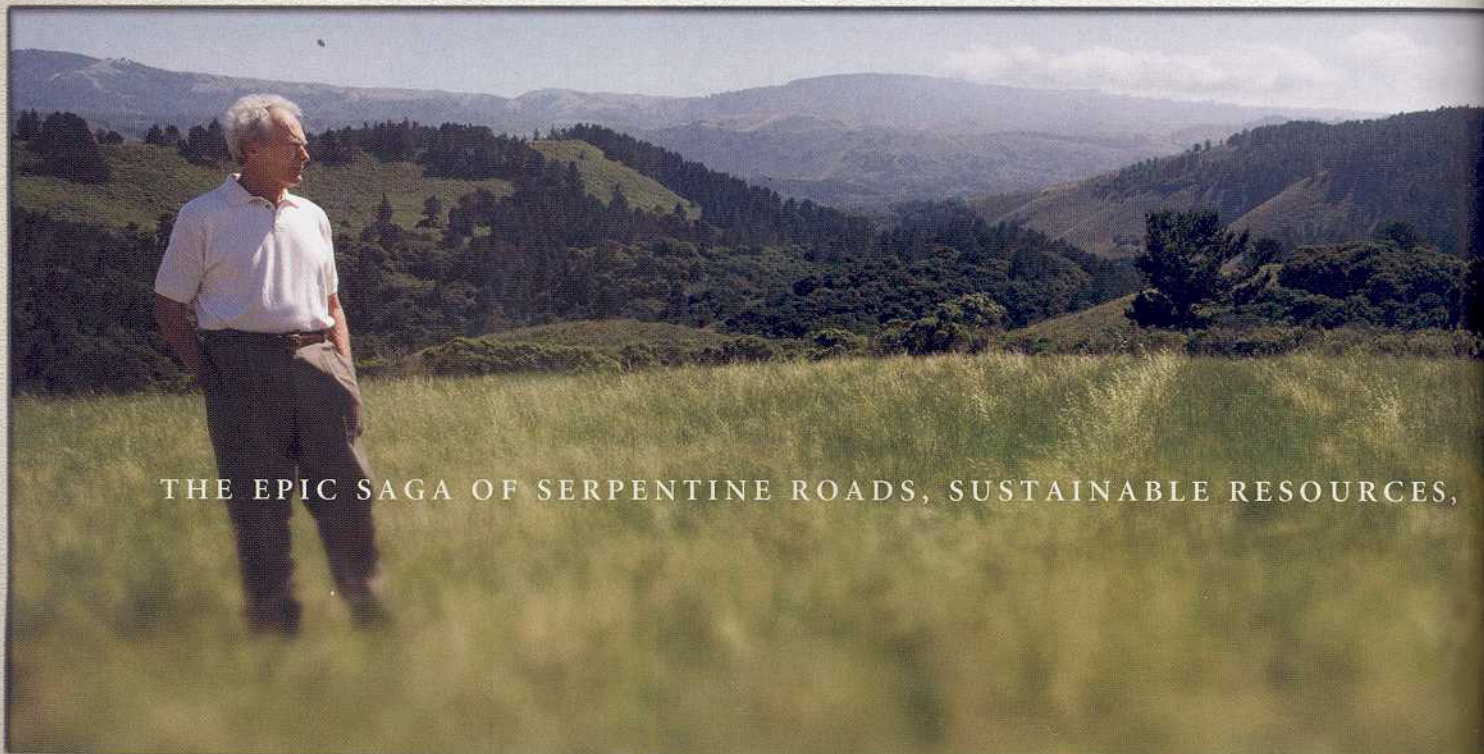
"I love the way it all comes together on Hampton Island," says Farmer D. "The horses provide manure for the farm; the farm provides food for the community. We have our own herbs and vegetables and down the road a small dairy. It's just the whole combination of the farm, fishing, hunting, and the chef," he adds. "You can go catch fresh fish out of the river, lakes, and ocean and hunt wild game down the road. Picture getting up the in the morning and going fishing. Then coming to the farm and harvesting your own vegetables, and later seeing the chef and preparing your own meal at your peaceful plantation-style home. So you have this real emotional and physical meal that you've been a

part of. It's a real cycle of sustainability."

Perhaps Lydia Mondavi puts it best when describing the vision behind her unique spa concepts such as the Treehouse Spa, which literally is a treehouse-like facility with an open-air structure that takes advantage of the natural movement of air and the soothing sounds of nature. "The philosophy behind the spa concept is based on creating an experience reflective of the cadence of the land and its magical aura," she tells her clients. "To bring the indoors out and to bring the outdoors in."

It's the epitome of Hampton Island—the coexistence of man and nature. Ecology. "We are very cautious about everything we're doing here because we want it to last," notes Shealy. "Every step we make will signify our commitment to this land. It's not good enough that our amenities are superior or well thought-out. Ecology has to be part of everything we do," he emphasizes. "If we are creating something with meaning that speaks to this region, this land and its history, the way I see it we only have one chance to do it right—and we are going to do it right." Apparently, it's the only way they know to do it in coastal Georgia.

For more information about Hampton Island Preserve visit hamptonisland.com or call 912.880.8800. 



THE EPIC SAGA OF SERPENTINE ROADS, SUSTAINABLE RESOURCES,

Obtain the property report or its equivalent, required by Federal and State law, and read it before signing anything. This shall not constitute an offer to sell in any state where prior registration is required. All plans, intentions and materials relating to the proposed in the purchase of a home site. The estimated completion date of the Tehama Fitness Center is Summer 2006. The Tehama Golf Course Clubhouse and Fitness Center are privately owned facilities and their use by lot owners is at the pleasure of the owner of