



The upper porch of John O. Morisano and Carol A. Sawdye's 1882 Italianate townhouse in Savannah, Georgia, which was designed by Chuck Chewning. **OPPOSITE:** The homeowners in the garden room with their Rhodesian ridgebacks, Anchovy (left) and Otter. The Living Divani sofa is topped with pillows in fabrics by Hermès and Dedar, the ClassiCon table is from Switch Modern, and the pendant is by Avrett.

BEFORE MIDNIGHT

CHUCK CHEWNING REIMAGINES ONE OF THE GRANDEST **TOWNHOUSES IN SAVANNAH** FOR ONE OF THE CITY'S TOP RESTAURATEURS.

BY DANA THOMAS PHOTOGRAPHS BY RICARDO LABOUGLE STYLED BY LILI ABIR REGEN



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SOMETIMES IT TAKES TIME TO FIND WHERE YOUR HEART should be. Just ask Savannah, Georgia, restaurateur John O. “Johno” Morisano and his wife, Carol A. Sawdye. In 2010, the New York couple took a road trip through the American South. When they arrived in Savannah, they fell so hard for the historic port city, with its grid of formal squares and centenary live oaks dripping with Spanish moss, that they bought a house and began to split their time between there and Manhattan.

Four years later, Johno and Mashama Bailey, the sous-chef of the highly regarded restaurant Prune in New York’s East Village, opened the Grey, an award-winning Southern brasserie set in the town’s long-abandoned Art Deco-era Greyhound bus depot. The Grey hit big, and not only with locals—the *New York Times* praised it as a place “that compels customers to linger willingly”—and it launched a culinary renaissance in Savannah.

Life was almost perfect. But Sawdye, who is COO of PricewaterhouseCoopers as well as a keen swimmer, longed for a pool, and their home had no place for one. The couple snooped around and found an 8,500-square-foot antebellum townhouse steps off the city’s famed Monterey Square, with a 40-foot-long lap pool in the courtyard and

owners who were considering a move. The two families quietly traded properties.

Soon after, the couple called their friend, the Savannah-based interior designer Chuck Chewning, a former creative director of Donghia and design director of Studio Rubelli in Venice, to take a look. Chewning, who had recently renovated the Gritti Palace on Venice’s Grand Canal, was aghast. From the street, the 1880s house is handsome, with a stucco-and-stone facade and airy Charleston-style porches along the side. But inside, it was dark—brown walls, brown moldings, brown doors. When asked what he thought, Chewning was blunt. “It’s dreary and depressing, like the Munsters live here,” he told Morisano. A few days later, he had a solution: paint the interior stark white, “so I could see the architecture, the light and proportions,” he recalls. “Then I could start building.”

Traditional Savannah-style decorating—heavy on Victorian, swathed in rich fabrics—did not feel right for this project. Chewning instead set out to combine the clients’ cool New York vibe with a contemporary Southern zeal. That meant midcentury-modern pieces mixed with good Continental antiques and a cheerful palette that accentuates Savannah’s warm light. Thanks to the Savannah College of



In the living room, the Vladimir Kagan sofa, in a Donghia fabric, is from Ralph Pucci, the Warren Platner chairs, in a Rubelli fabric, are from Knoll, and the custom Natasha Baradaran ottoman is from R Hughes. The window shades are in a Dedar fabric, and the walls are in Sherwin-Williams’s Passive. **OPPOSITE:** The kitchen’s custom table is by Parts and Labor Design, who designed Morisano’s restaurant the Grey. The dining chairs are by Dmitriy & Co.



In the family room, the de Sede chaises are topped with Hermès pillows, the vintage cocktail table is by T.H. Robsjohn-Gibbings, and the Italian chandelier is original to the house. The fireplace screen is by Forsyth Metal Works, the sconce is by Gentner, the custom Moroccan rug is by Stark, the walls are in Sherwin-Williams's Chrysanthemum, and the artwork is by Betsy Cain.



The dining table is by Giorgetti, the Donghia chairs are in a Jim Thompson fabric, and the custom banquette is in a Dedar fabric. The 19th-century chandelier is French, the artwork (left) is by Betsy Cain, and the ram sculpture is by Marcus Kenney.



The tub in the master bath has a surround in Calacatta marble and fittings by Kallista. The vintage chair is by George Nelson, the American Eastlake mirror and French chandelier are both antique, the sconces are by Jonathan Browning, and the vintage rug is Moroccan.



Art and Design, the city has a vibrant art scene; much of the artwork in the house was locally commissioned.

As a nod to Morisano's profession, the dining room was designed to feel like a gourmet restaurant, with a banquette-like sofa below the window and an oval table. The upstairs floor-through master suite incorporates a home office for Sawdye. "It's a world unto its own," Chewning says.

The heart of the house, however, is the sprawling kitchen-cum-den. "We can have real fun with this space," Chewning told his clients. Morisano suggested "bringing in elements of the Grey," Chewning recalls, so they hired Parts and Labor Design, the New York firm that turned the old bus depot into the gleaming restaurant, to design the dining table, barstools, and light fixture over the island. For the rest, Chewning wanted to evoke "a 1970s den—a little European, vintage, and retro," with terra-cotta walls, charcoal-gray woodwork, and Morisano's extensive collection of vinyl records. When the couple saw it, they swooned. "This is the first space that we ever felt was truly ours," Morisano says. "Everything about it is personal to us."

And it was in that big, louche lounge, during a swank reception for 200 last June, that Morisano delivered a rousing speech congratulating Bailey for winning the James Beard Award for best chef in the Southeast. "We must applaud her courage for picking up her life in New York City and moving to the Deep South—that took guts *extraordinaire*," he told the crowd. "How lucky we are that she did." And that Morisano and Sawdye did too. ■



Chaises by Richard Schultz for Knoll and 1960s benches face the 40-foot-long lap pool, which is framed on one side by cypress trees. **OPPOSITE, TOP:** In the master bedroom, the coverlet and curtains are of Dedar fabrics. The Magni chair is in a Pierre Frey fabric, and the French chaise and Italian dresser are antiques. The chandelier is by Coup Studio, and the walls are in Sherwin-Williams's Unique Gray. **OPPOSITE, BOTTOM:** In the master sitting room, the Edward Wormley chaise and sofa are in Dedar fabrics, and the artwork is by Betsy Cain. For details, see Resources.