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# THE RADAR REALTY

BY AMANDA LESTER TREVILINO  
PHOTOGRAPHY BY ROBIN DAVIS



The Treehouse Spa on Hampton Island includes a copper-and-wood Japanese soaking tub for two

## MEMBERS ONLY!

*An island south of Savannah is becoming the most exclusive, millionaire getaway around*

We've all played the game: If you were stranded on a deserted island, what three things would you want to have with you?

Buckhead developer E. Wade Shealy Jr. gave the question greater consideration than most when introduced to Hampton Island, one of the last undeveloped islands along the South Atlantic coast. "When I discovered the island in 2002, it had only three houses and a sandy limestone road that snaked along the river," Shealy says. "My first reaction was to buy it and save it from typical developers who would destroy the 300-year-old live oaks and the 12 miles of waterfront."

So, with partner Bill Cole Jr., \$16 million and a mission to maintain the environment, Shealy became managing partner of solitary Hampton Island, 35 miles south of Savannah. Now, what three things would go with him? The answer was three premier Atlanta architects: Keith Summerour of Summerour and Associates, Jim Strickland of Historical Concepts and Bill Foley of Foley Design Associates.

Together, these visionaries are engaged in "intelligent development," Shealy's term for transforming the 4,000 acres into a low-density, high-end destination while prioritizing preservation. "From the start we realized we had a unique opportunity to create a getaway that takes us back to nature and back in time," says Foley, who owns a home site on the island. "Everything has been done with a focus on authenticity, the way it would have been 100 years ago. Imagine combining the best of Millionaires Row on Jekyll Island with the environmental attempt at

Cumberland Island and the hospitality of a Ritz resort in a perfect setting."

Imagination is as close as most will get to Hampton Island. A private club in the truest sense, it is limited to a small number of members of the Hampton Island Preserve Owners Association. Members have two options: they can become "stewards" and pay a one-time fee of \$250,000 in exchange for full access to the island, its amenities and the guest houses where they can stay; or they can become "conservators" and pay the one-time \$250,000 fee and purchase one of 163 home sites, which range from \$750,000 to more to \$2 million. Either way, members pay annual dues of \$17,500 and both memberships can be passed down from generation to generation. At presstime, only 53 members were selected.

Physical access to this secluded section of the deep South is daunting. The best bet is via one of two members-only amphibious seaplanes that land on the only lake in the continental United States with an underwater lighted runway. Once there, transportation is generally restricted to an electric car or a horse-drawn surrey that rolls along shell roads.

The East Coast retreat has attracted a handful of celebrities, including actor Ben Affleck. He and wife Jennifer Garner claimed the two earliest stately homes on an 83-acre compound designed by Strickland. The couple is likely to cross paths with jazz legend George Benson or Napa Valley's Robert Mondavi Jr., who brings in vintners from across the globe. Mondavi is designing an extensive, 4,500-square-foot wine cellar for Foley's current development, Hampton



Outdoor dining beside the marsh near Payne Creek



Hampton Island's seaplane house



Settler's Rest

House, a 17,500-square-foot guest house overlooking the Newport river. Flooring in the tasting room and cellar will be created using Cabernet- and Merlot-stained French oak barrel staves (the wooden slats that make up the actual barrel) that have been steamed and straightened.

Mondavi's wife, Lydia Abernathy Mondavi, a spa designer and fifth-generation Atlantan, divides her time between Napa, Atlanta and Hampton Island, where she has helped create the island's spa sanctuaries. Treehouse Spa, a screened-in structure built by Foley, hovers above the marsh and offers daylong massage services. Farmhouse Spa provides custom body treatments using freshly harvested herbs and honey from the surrounding 16-acre organic farm. The Harvesting Barn and other sites are built of period pine and reclaimed timbers acquired by fellow member, former Georgia Bulldogs football coach Ray Goff.

"It's amazing how much progress has been made," says Lydia Mondavi, who is visiting to put finishing touches on Farmhouse Spa before construction begins on Rice House Spa, the Retreat Marsh Spa and the Spa Camp at the Grist Mill. As she runs through an inventory of indigenous indulgences—sugar cane and salt scrubs, rice powder masques, detoxifying mud, warm milk soaks—she points out the

authentic, stable-like setting. Her thoughts then turn to the planned equestrian center, where Foley is completing a heavy timber stable. A second planned stable is being designed by Summerour, and soon work will begin on an 83-acre cross-country course.

Meanwhile, Shealy's architects are hard at work on numerous projects. "We're building 17 guest houses that range from a small, 2,000-square-foot cabin on a lake to a 31,000-square-foot house with 15 bedrooms," Shealy says. Nearby, Summerour is developing Rice House and a series of golf cottages, to complement Ricefields, a historic, 18-hole, environmentally sensitive course through former rice plantations. It is designed by member and golf great Davis Love III.

But Summerour's primary project is a 2006 *Southern Accents* show house, scheduled for completion in July. Named "Reflections," the home is suspended over Little Black Gum Lake with a boathouse beneath and interior design by New York's Elaine Griffin.

Boating and catch-and-release fishing are big at this coastal community where 200 acres of freshwater lakes have been constructed. Diehard fishermen have even used the plane to travel to a boat 80 miles out in the Gulf Stream, to experience the thrill of deep-sea tarpon fishing. "The tarpon stand out of the water on their tails," Shealy says. "They're amazing fish that live for 50 or 60 years and we've caught about 150 that are more than 100 pounds. Now that's the way to go fishing!"

It helps, as they say, to use the right bait. Shealy's architects have transformed his deserted island into a paradise sure to lure future members, though at least 80 percent of the land will remain untouched. "We could have developed a 2,500-unit subdivision here, but we chose to minimize the impact," Foley says. "Wade has had a vision from the beginning, and it hasn't wavered."

Or, as Lydia Mondavi puts it, "This place is like a playground for children and adults. You just wander the island and discover it. It's breathtaking." **A**

For information on Hampton Island, call 912.880.8800 or visit [www.hamptonisland.com](http://www.hamptonisland.com).