

Old, New, and India Too!

An American Dream South of Broad

By
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Down East Bay Street in Charleston, just past Broad Street, is a little warren of brick houses. These homes, like everything else in this uber-historic section of a historic city, look like they have been there for at least 200 years; however, looks sometimes are deceiving. The houses were built in the 1970s using Old English brick that gives them a weathered yet stately appearance. Bhavna Vasudeva, a

realtor based in Columbia, discovered one of the plain cottages on Exchange Street and knew she could turn it into something special.

"It was crying to be lived in," Bhavna says. "It was steeped in history on the outside yet in need of an update on the inside. It has great bones." The home's proximity to the water appealed to Bhavna. She loves that she can see Charleston Harbor from her living room. "And then Rainbow

Row is behind me, so I must be the Indian-American version of Dorothy from *The Wiz!*"

Bhavna's enthusiasm for the new vacation home she shares with her husband, Rajeev, is infectious. Bhavna, Rajeev, and their two sons, Armaan, 29, and Ishaan, 25, first visited Charleston when the boys were young. They fell in love with the city and owned a home on Seabrook Island that doubled as vacation and rental property. When the pandemic hit and real estate values soared, the Vasudevas sold the Seabrook property. Still, they wanted to maintain a home in or near Charleston where they could visit friends and the city's museums and historic areas and walk to world class dining.

Bhavna recently found a photograph from that first Charleston visit and noted it was taken close to the home on Exchange Street. She knew the home was meant to be theirs. Purchased in June 2021, Bhavna's goal was to have the home ready for long term rentals by fall. Bhavna hopes visiting executives will enjoy living, temporarily, as a Charleston local.

To transform the three-bedroom, two-bathroom house into a home that reflects Bhavna's unique sense of style, she called in a trusted partner, Guy Sullivan of Avanti Interiors in West Columbia, with whom she worked on her Columbia home. "He's so good with scale," she says of Guy. "He maps everything out for me. He has clients in Charleston so working on

a historic home was no problem for him." As one can imagine, renovations to Charleston's historic homes must be done to exacting standards. "We even put window boxes up in the middle of the night," says Bhavna with a laugh. Dripping with colorful plants, the boxes look as though they have adorned the home forever. Pandemic-driven furniture shortages required that she furnish the home with what she could find in stock. She found most of it through Marty Rae's and Dan-Rich furniture stores and bought accessories at Stroblor Home Furnishings.

Walking up the small curved staircase to the front door, one cannot miss the first sign of Bhavna's personality. A collection of vibrantly painted Mexican balls informs the visitor that fun awaits inside. A gas-lit lantern flickers brightly at the door opposite a tall, thin cypress. Through the small foyer, the ease with which Bhavna mixes traditional and contemporary, along with touches of her native India, is obvious. To the left is the dining room where antique chairs and a contemporary table sit under a stunning crystal chandelier.

In the living room, cream arm chairs flank the fireplace opposite a round, gold-rimmed glass and marble coffee table and a large cream sofa. On the walls to each side of the fireplace hang matching gilt-accented mirrors that bring to mind Bhavna's native New Delhi. The room's chandelier is an artsy golden lotus flower. Rajeev's name means lotus, a special symbol



to the Vasudevas. The large kitchen boasts mahogany cabinetry, stainless steel appliances, and black granite countertops. Bhavna kept colorful Spoleto prints left by the previous owner and secured more Charleston art from stores nearby, including a crop of pineapples that she scattered in each room.

Three bedrooms are located upstairs, including a large master bedroom where Bhavna created two large, mahogany-doored closets along one wall. One stays locked and stores the Vasudevas' clothing for their visits. The beds

are all four-poster Theodore Alexander, with their India Silk bed in the master bedroom. The furniture group, like Bhavna, mixes traditional with a hint of the contemporary, with gilt touches and, as in one room, acrylic bedposts. Bhavna also used acrylic ceiling fans, modern art, and fun pillows to blend old with new. She calls her style "a blend of Charleston plus a little smack of Indian culture with a 2021 contemporary coastal flair."

The most playful part of the house is the walled patio. At one end, a rounded door with a round cut-out "window" gives tourists a glimpse into South of Broad living. Using an existing wall fountain as a focal point, Bhavna surrounded it with comfortable seating, plants, and cheerful blue wall lanterns. It is not uncommon for Bhavna and Rajeev to see tourists looking in at them and even taking photographs. But, to them, it is part of the charm of living in Charleston. "When I'm there, I can be lost in the past, with the church spires and historic architecture of Broad Street and the Battery next to me," says Bhavna. "I pinch myself to wake up, but I am awake and living the American dream in Charleston."

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The Theodore Alexander four-poster beds reflect Bhavna's style of mixing traditional contemporary with gilt touches, as in this India Silk bed (above) and the Suite Dreams bed with acrylic posts (opposite page).

