



MICHELE KEITH

DESIGNERS HERE AND THERE

INSIDE THE CITY AND COUNTRY HOMES OF AMERICA'S TOP DECORATORS

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CHARLESTON A HISTORICAL UPDATE

"I sleep in different rooms depending upon the mood I'm in."

Through the Holland Tunnel, down the Jersey Turnpike, a sharp left, and I'm home," says Cohler. He goes to Charleston about every six weeks for grits and biscuits, golf and tennis, music, and the slower pace of life, although he says, "There's so much to do, I can't sit still."

The designer was not looking to buy when he drove to the area to visit friends in 2006. Within days, however, Cohler became enamored with the house they were renting while their own was undergoing renovation, especially its finely detailed millwork and the fact that it was in estate condition, simply musty and dusty. There was also another factor that caught his attention: a friendly ghost. "Except for rattling the windows and making my dog Sebastian whine," he recalls, "she seemed delightful."

The landmark, Federal-era Single House, as the style is called, is located in the historic Ansonborough neighborhood that edges Charleston Harbor. Its twelve rooms on five floors are reached via an original Cuban mahogany staircase and arranged less formally

than his New York home. "I torqued each room until it was finely tuned, then added quirky items so it's left of center," he explains. "It's the surprises that make a place homey and personal." Why else would he juxtapose a hologram of Queen Elizabeth II and a framed square of three-dollar wrapping paper on the period fireplace mantel in the drawing room? Position Andy Warhol's *Marilyn Monroe* silk screens in the dining room to watch over the antique, Chinese scholar's table? Or top an intricately carved, late nineteenth-century console with an ultra-contemporary painting? A good eye, of course, but sometimes it's simply because he can.

In line with the carefree lifestyle the designer savors here, which includes working on his novel and entertaining friends, there's neither too much nor too little in the way of furnishings. What is there, however, is signature Cohler: a mix of shapes, fabrics and textures, neutral tones punctuated with color, and always something to trigger curiosity. The man from up north has found his roots. "I'll be here 'til the wind









