

WHITEHALL: A HOUSE HISTORY

A GRAND RESIDENCE CONTINUES TO PLAY A ROLE IN THE NARRATIVE OF ATLANTA

by Susannah M. Wilson



ATTLANTANS HAVE CHERISHED Whitehall for almost two decades. Even to out-of-towners, this home seems to embody the myth of the Old South. The house stands on a hill high above Harris Trail in north Atlanta, separate and apart. Twenty-eight Doric columns lend strength and dignity to the exterior. Wide verandas feature triple-hung windows, heavy shutters and French doors. Magnolias, azaleas and crape myrtle dot the hillside.

The family who built this home was inspired by Oak Alley, a columned, 1840's sugar plantation in Louisiana. In 1986, Atlanta architect Kenneth Lynch, AIA, was engaged to design a house that reflected many of Oak Alley's qualities. The top of a prominent hill was leveled for the site, and the late Charles Gunter was selected to oversee construction. Floors were fashioned from 2 1/2-inch-thick heart pine rescued from waterfront warehouses in New Orleans. Nine-foot stained mahogany paneled doors were outfitted with polished brass hardware. The doors, cabinets and paneling were crafted by Sommer Reproducers of Bath, England. Artisans Clive Ellick and Dave Duffy worked on the site for three months installing this millwork.

The interior has a wealth of period trim. All three arches in the foyer exhibit three different beading patterns, a leaf keystone and flanking pilasters. "Southern plantation house architecture was not always pure," Kenneth Lynch explains. "Southern people were not driven by a clear-cut aesthetic. They adapted features from different architectural styles. There was Victorian influence; there was classical Greek and Roman influence. Those arches have somewhat of a Victorian influence."

The residence was completed in 1988. A wrought-iron fence and gates were added a few years later. The late landscape architect Dan Franklin, ASLA, designed gardens that complemented the house and its surrounding five-and-a-half acres.

The antebellum South influenced much of the décor. The owners furnished their home with ornate pieces, fine old portraits, grand gold-leaf mirrors and canopied beds. One prized piece was a rosewood Erard piano, circa 1820. Draperies were long and luxurious, reflecting an era marked by excess. (Think Scarlett O'Hara as she sets out to charm Rhett in a dress fashioned from Tara's parlor curtains.)

The dining room was transformed into a fantasy setting, with royal blue silk on the walls and antique silk curtains embellished with gold fringe. A crystal chandelier's swags and pendants sparkled above a Georgian dining table that seated 12. Here guests in ball gowns and black tie enjoyed many a formal dinner. Visitors surely marveled that every window frames a view of the home's lush grounds and manicured gardens. The family dining room off the kitchen overlooks the brick terraces and pool. The second floor master suite is surrounded on three sides by a veranda.

Behind the house, the multi-sided pool reflects a shimmering, upside-down version of a Southern castle. The centerpiece of the formal garden is a bronze fountain sculpture, fashioned by Dallas artist Barvo and weathered to a greenish gray. In it, figures of the family's three young daughters join hands, facing forward as they run. Flying pigtailed and other details lend charm to the work.

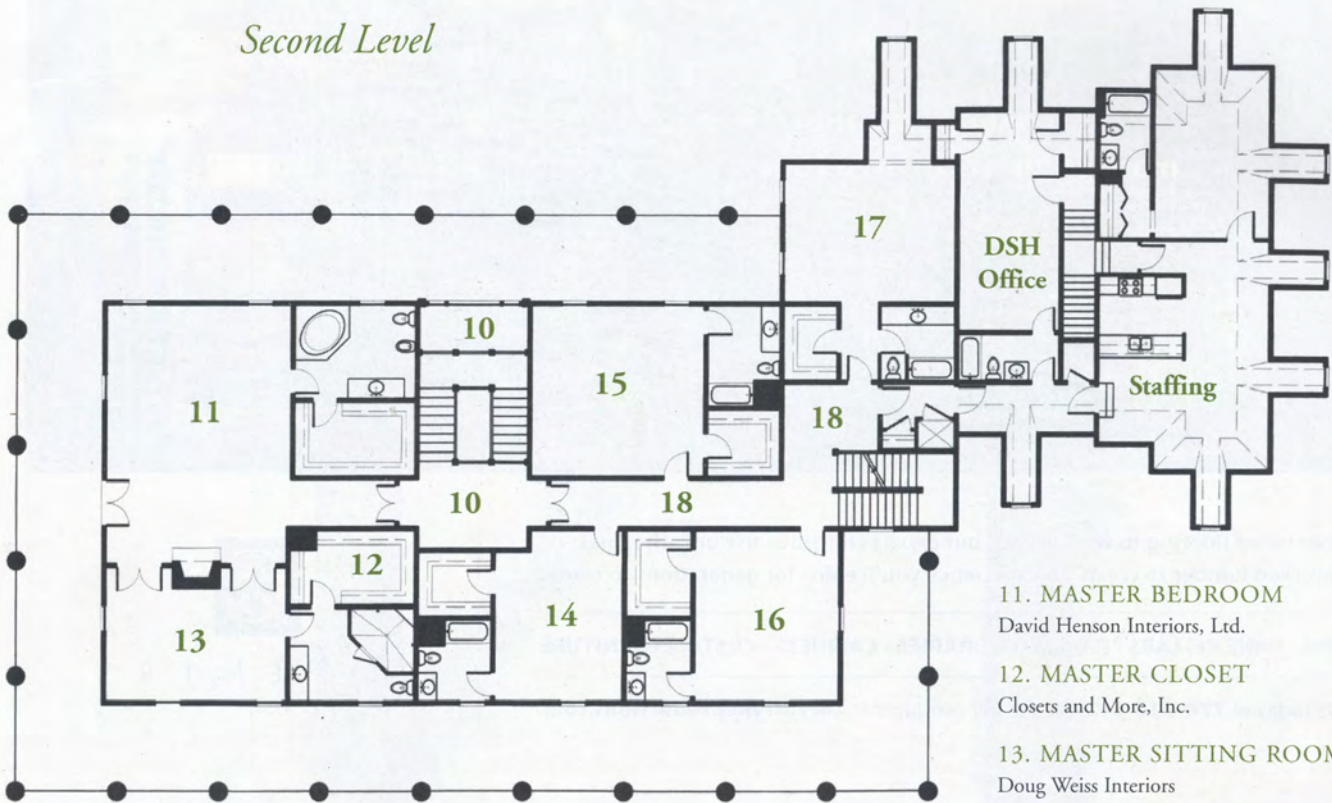
Whitehall's large rooms and beckoning gardens were tailor-made for the parties and fundraisers the owners enjoyed hosting. Picture a jazz band sending out cool notes over a sea of dancers from the second-story veranda.

The owner was instrumental in bringing the 1996 Olympics to Atlanta. Whitehall staged two events for Olympics officials before the city was selected to host the games. International Olympics Committee members attending one party included Juan Antonio Samaranch and Jacques Rogge, the former and current IOC presidents, respectively, and Prince Albert II of Monaco. The owners also welcomed participating Olympic teams at a "one year out" event. Over 300 dignitaries representing 176 countries attended the gala. And in spring 1990, before Atlanta welcomed the world to the games, Whitehall was featured on ABC's "Good Morning America." This national spotlight underscored what Whitehall's admirers have always known: Its exceptional setting plays an important role in the overall effect. The size of the property permits the scale of the house, notes the architect. "Whitehall gives us an example of the grand houses that suit their sites and befit the image of residential north Atlanta," he says.

Today, Whitehall awaits the next fortunate family who will cherish the home's architectural features and inspiring views. A new chapter in the already rich legacy of this house is about to unfold.

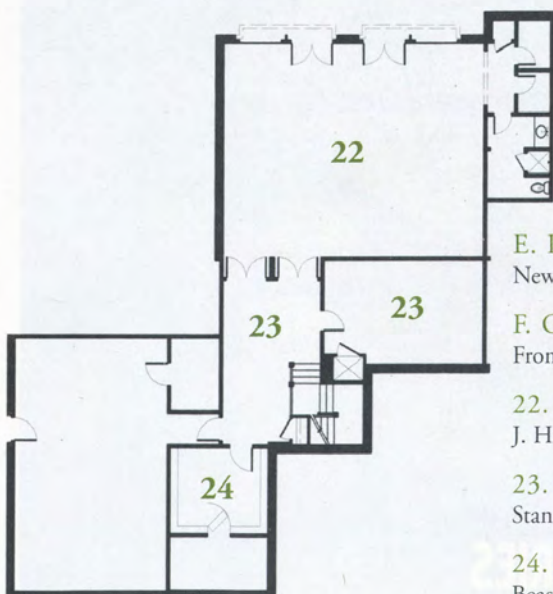
FLOOR PLANS

Second Level



- 11. MASTER BEDROOM
David Henson Interiors, Ltd.
- 12. MASTER CLOSET
Closets and More, Inc.
- 13. MASTER SITTING ROOM
Doug Weiss Interiors
- 14. LADY'S LOUNGE
Kay Douglass Interiors, South of Market
- 15. INSPIRATION ROOM
Dillard Design
- 16. MORNING ROOM
Warren Gary Gay Decorations
- 17. TEENAGER RETREAT
Park Place Interiors
- 18. UPSTAIRS HALL & BACK
STAIRWAY
McLaurin Interiors

Lower Level



- E. POOL AREA GARDEN
New Leaf Landscapes
- F. GAZEBO
Frontgate
- 22. THE GENTLEMAN'S CLUB
J. Hirsch Interior Design
- 23. CIGAR ROOM/TASTING ROOM
Stanton Home Furnishings
- 24. GRAND CRU ARCHIVE
Beasley & Henley Interior Design
- G. PARTY TENT & MAGNOLIA CAFÉ
- H. MAESTRO'S MARKET