



the root of happiness

After Hurricane Katrina destroyed their house on the Mississippi coast, the Wagoners built a new kind of coastal cottage.

when Hurricane Katrina wiped the slate clean for Marty and Lisa Wagoner in Ocean Springs, Mississippi, they learned what “home” really means. It’s the joy of hearing shouts from their 7-year-old son, Cole, when he spots dolphins from their beachfront porch. It’s the sight of Cole’s twin, Slay,



pre-katrina

The Wagoners' 1970s home (left), which had been updated by Ocean Springs architect Bruce Tolar, fell victim to Hurricane Katrina. Built beneath the same trees that sheltered the original home, the Katrina Cottage (above) will function as the family's full-time residence until a larger, permanent house can be built nearby. Then it will become the Wagoners' guest cottage.

TEXT AND STYLING BY DENISE GEE | PHOTOGRAPHY BY JEAN ALLSOPP

Wood, brick,
concrete, glass.
They make up the
bones of a house,
but not its soul.

throwing a perfect fishing-net cast off their pier on Biloxi Bay. Or Marty's pride in seeing his sons catching blue crabs where he did as a boy. "Home is a state of mind," Marty says. "It's something that can't be taken from you."

Unfortunately, walls and roofs *can* be taken away. The hurricanes of 2005 devastated this part



Lisa follows Cole and Slay on her Mother's Day gift—a colorful Electra Daisy bike. They often ride together along Ocean Springs' Beach Drive.

of the Gulf Coast, and though the Wagoners were safe, they lost their 2,100-square-foot residence and a small guest cottage. Marty's voice still quavers when discussing Katrina's aftermath. Little remained but

shredded clothing, he says, "strewn in the trees like rags." Fence posts had "snapped like matchsticks," and almost everything else was unidentifiable.

Despite the destruction, Marty and Lisa knew they

would rebuild. For almost 18 months, they returned from their rental apartment every evening to clean up debris and plant flowers.

Last December, the Wagoners moved into a new, 768-square-foot



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Katrina Cottage (see “Conscientious Cottages” on page 60). Conceived as “seed” homes, these cottages easily expand upward or outward as funds allow. They provide convenient temporary housing for families who’ve lost their homes, and can be used later as guest quarters, art studios, or home offices.

“Living in a [Katrina] cottage just makes sense,” Marty says. “We can take our time, make better decisions as insurance money comes in.” It’s also preferable to a tiny FEMA trailer. “There was something unsettling about being cramped in a metal structure that is considered disposable after its 18-month tenure,” Marty adds. “This is a more sustainable option, both in terms of building materials and really taking care of human beings.”

Some might ask why the Wagoners wanted to rebuild in this vulnerable coastal region. “I tell them that this is our home and always has been,” Marty says. “We don’t live our lives in fear. We will simply rebuild in the future if we have to.”

Ocean Springs is a special place that nurtures family and community, Lisa says, and that’s what keeps them deeply rooted there. “Only the people who live here can really

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lifestyle

understand what we're talking about."

Even their young boys do. "They never fret over our loss," she says, remembering with pride how they would find pieces of muddied clothing or toys, and then cast them aside, realizing what they really wanted to do was fish. "That's when we realized everything would be OK. If they, at age 5, could be strong, we certainly could be."

Especially when petunias and sunflowers began to pop up amid the debris. "Out of season, even, and in places we never would have expected them to be, after hundreds of waves carried the ground away," Lisa marvels. "Now, we appreciate and cultivate every little flower. And in the future," she continues, "we look forward to watching everything, and everyone, grow." ♣

More info: page 179



conscientious cottages

The Wagoners' cottage was built from one of the 20 "seed" plans to be showcased and sold at Cottage Square, a 2-acre site in Ocean Springs, Mississippi. Designed by some of the Gulf Coast's leading architects, the collection of cottages will be completed around summer 2008, says one of the concept champions, architect Bruce Tolar. Cottages will range from 400 to 1,500 square feet, and cost about \$125 per square foot, exclusive of site preparation and land. Four construction methods offered include modular, panelized, system-built, and stick-built. Plan costs vary depending on design; the Wagoners' cottage plan costs \$1,000. For more information about Katrina Cottages, visit katrinacottagehousing.org.