

TALLAHASSEE



FSU President's House



Project Director: Virginia "Ginger" Wetherell
Architect: Historical Concepts
Builder: Skip Sheffield, Sheffield Construction, Inc.

custom cabinetry by

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Above: The family kitchen features cabinetry with custom inset styling and multiple accessories all meticulously crafted by Cabinet Resources.

Right: The Event Room bar is designed for entertaining large groups.



IT HAS TAKEN two years of planning and construction and more than \$4 million in donations, but, finally, Florida State University has a President's Home that is true to its Southern heritage and appropriate for its stature as a major national research university.

FSU's imposing black-shuttered, white-frame Greek Revival house stands on its familiar West Tennessee Street campus site as a visual and virtual asset to the 14-acre Alumni Association complex. It is filled with antiques donated by alumni and treasures from the university's Museum of Fine Arts, as well as 17 paintings on loan from the John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art in Sarasota. It is furnished in the traditional garnet and gold school colors with subtle fabrics and hues.

Elegant and refined, the new President's Home stands in classic dignity as a timeless campus landmark. A newcomer might believe it always was there. Ginger Wetherell, named project manager by the FSU Board of Trustees, planned it that way. She chose the Greek Revival architecture because it is her favorite (the couple built their own Greek Revival home 10 years ago) and found a prestigious architectural firm in Georgia that specializes in the style. There is an added historic significance. It is believed that the new President's Home repeats the architectural style of the main building of FSU forerunner West Florida Seminary. That all-male academy's structure was built around 1880 on the site where FSU's Westcott Building now stands, making it the oldest site of higher education in Florida.

"I wanted this house to feel like it has always been here, to feel like it was here before the university started, and the university grew up around it," Ginger Wetherell said.

Right: The catering kitchen displays china in the FSU colors, garnet and gold.

John Thrasher, a former House speaker who holds baccalaureate and law degrees from Florida State and was the first chairman of the Board of Trustees when it was created in 2001, said his travels around the state as a legislator convinced him that FSU needed a new and distinguished President's Home. It was decided that no public funds would be used. When plans for the new President's Home were announced, there was a generous outpouring of donations from alumni and supporters.

Ginger Wetherell was perfect for the formidable task. An Alabama native, she was the first woman elected to Florida's House of Representatives from Pensacola and the first woman to lead Florida's Department of Natural Resources and its successor agency, the Department of Environmental Protection.



She now has her own consulting and lobbying firm, and she has held top positions in the private sector as well as public.

Ginger Wetherell likes to entertain, and she understands what is needed for small and large events. Knowledgeable about architecture, home furnishings and art, she devoted her time to researching and planning an outstanding home for FSU's first family – now and for the future. She developed a passion for the job, which, as she says, “consumed” her for two years. She and President Wetherell visited presidents' homes in the Atlantic Coast Conference and many in the Southeastern Conference. Ginger Wetherell particularly admired the University of Georgia's in Athens because “it's the real thing,” as well as the outstanding homes at the University of Maryland and the University of Virginia.

“We learned that the most successful homes not only were elegant and efficient for entertaining large crowds, they were comfortable and gave the family a sense of privacy and the feeling of being home,” she said.

Ginger Wetherell has seen to it, for example, that if the next president's family enjoys cooking, it will have the dream kitchen for it. All appliances are by Viking. The kitchen isn't huge – 14½ feet wide and 21 feet long – though it has plenty of counter space and shelves. It is bright and airy, and there is a breakfast alcove for dining in, with a glorious view of the grounds.

A small kitchen and sitting room are provided on the third floor – the family quarters – for privacy. Youngsters could hang out there, for instance, if there is a formal dinner downstairs, or if the president has guests.

Cabinet Resources provided custom cabinetry throughout the FSU President's Home including the family kitchen, caterer's kitchen, butler's pantry, service room, event room bar, billiards room bookcases, laundry room, mud room, master bedroom custom closet and the resident & guest bathroom vanities.

“Our biggest challenge was to make it comfortable for two people and also make it accommodate 200 people,” said Aaron Dailey, a partner in the Atlanta Historical Concepts firm and main architect for the President’s Home.

“It’s the opportunity of a lifetime for our company,” said contractor Skip Sheffield. “Architecture is my passion. I’m proud of this home, and it will be handed down for generations. Who could ask for anything more?”

The catering kitchen gleams with stainless steel appliances and a dumb-waiter that goes up to the main floor and family quarters.

There is a 200-piece place setting of garnet and gold Homer Laughlin china (donated by Aramark, the food and service vendor on campus) and a 24-place setting called “Tassel,” also in garnet and gold, by the Mottahedeh company. There also is a Spode pattern with an American eagle that the president selected. Shelves are lined with water glasses and various wines.

The Event Room is comfortable, with a relaxed feeling for fun – complete with an enlarged photograph of Lane Fenner’s foot inside the goal line in the controversial FSU-Florida football game of 1966. FSU’s president was a wide receiver on that team with other such stars as Ron Sellers and Fred Biletnikoff.

The floor in the Event Room is heart pine that came from Montgomery Gym. FSU alumnus Jerry Gluesencamp installed the flooring from the cut wood with an unusual pattern that required 20 sandings.

There is an elevator for convenience, but the stairways and random-planked floors are beautiful and crafted from heart pine salvaged from Northern industrial companies.

The main floor, designed for formal entertaining, has three fireplaces and handsome antiques mixed with good reproduction pieces found by Ginger Wetherell. Benefactor Ada Belle Winthrop-King donated the courting chair in the cypress-paneled library, the dining chairs, a 12-piece service of Gorham Buttercup silverware that is used daily, and the lyre-



backed chairs in the breakfast nook. The butler’s pantry also holds a 12-place setting of Havilland china contributed by FSU alumna Rebecca Hood. Bronze sculptures by Frederic Remington, donated by FSU alumnus James E. Kirk Jr. of Ocala, are accents in the library and master sitting room on the top floor.

An enchanting feature of the living room is a traditional design detail of Greek Revival architecture: the windows from the floor almost to the ceiling leading onto the back porch. A 6-foot, 2-inch man can stand in the open windows.

With time, the Wetherells and the university’s trustees hope to complete the President’s Home complex with a three-car garage designed to look like a carriage house, a summer kitchen or covered terrace for outdoor entertaining, and a guest cottage. Those will be built as funds allow.

For now, one thing is certain: Ginger Wetherell has the mindset of running a proper house, even though it is for an institution. ■

Cabinet Resources was selected by FSU first lady Ginger Wetherell and Sheffield Construction Company president, Skip Sheffield to provide custom cabinetry to compliment the Greek Revival architecture.

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